

## Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### 1 Warmer

What can you put on bread or toast?

What do you prefer to put on your bread or toast?

#### 2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

concoct      umami      culinary      foray      dripping      divisive      seasoning  
spread      baste      palatable      staple      court controversy      stock      unwittingly

- likely to cause arguments between people \_\_\_\_\_
- soft food that you put on bread and similar foods \_\_\_\_\_
- make a special effort to do something that might cause people to have strong opinions and feelings  
\_\_\_\_\_
- produce something unusual by mixing things in a new way, especially a drink or meal  
\_\_\_\_\_
- an important product, especially a food, that people eat or use regularly \_\_\_\_\_
- liquid made by boiling meat, bones or vegetables and used for making soups and sauces  
\_\_\_\_\_
- salt, pepper or other spices that you add to food to improve the taste \_\_\_\_\_
- a pleasant savoury taste that is not sweet, sour, bitter or salty \_\_\_\_\_
- cover meat with hot fat or its own juices while it cooks \_\_\_\_\_
- fat and juice that is produced by meat when it is cooked \_\_\_\_\_
- relating to food and how to cook it \_\_\_\_\_
- in a way that is not conscious or deliberate \_\_\_\_\_
- tasting good enough to eat or drink \_\_\_\_\_
- an attempt at doing something new or something that you do not usually do  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

*The divisive spread is no longer just a toast topping. Now leading chefs are adding it to everything from scallops to pasta*

Clare Finney

26 February, 2020

- 1 Dark, uncompromising and deeply divisive, if any spread captures the state of the British nation, it's Marmite. The slogan "You either love it or hate it" was conceived in the 90s, but it is a perfect fit for today's combative climate. Perhaps it is unsurprising, then, that Marmite is having a moment, taking star turns on Michelin-worthy menus and courting controversy in the supermarket aisles with such combinations as Marmite Brussels sprouts, Marmite pot noodles and Marmite crunchy peanut butter.
- 2 In January, 2020, the spread launched its latest spin-off, Marmite smooth peanut butter. "Now that Marmite smooth peanut butter has landed, it looks like crunchy has some competition," the brand tweeted, calling for the public to vote for either "Team Smooth" or "Team Crunchy". The results? A familiar 52% for crunchy, 48% for smooth.
- 3 Marmite's maker, Unilever, acknowledges its peanut butter spreads are "inspired by fanatics concocting their own yeasty peanut butter combinations and taking to social media to showcase these creations," in the words of Brand Manager Camilla Williamson. Yet Marmite's mission to get into the snacks market highlights the spread's potential beyond toast.
- 4 From being a secret staple of chefs and home cooks accustomed to sticking it in stocks and sauces, Marmite has become a headline ingredient, written loud and proud on restaurant menus up and down the country. There's the Marmite-glazed wings at Eat Vietnam in Birmingham; Monica Galletti's pumpkin agnolotti with Marmite and mushrooms at Mere, central London; and a flat-iron steak with marrowbone and Marmite at the Bank House in south-east London.
- 5 "From a chef's point of view, it's like a seasoning," says the chef Sat Bains. "Like soy sauce, it gives depth and umami – it's a great tool for layering flavours." Although Bains has been using Marmite quietly since his restaurant opened in Nottingham in 1999, "mixing it with butter and basting fish and meat in it", it was his scallops interlaced with black truffle and crisp chicken skin, served with a Marmite jus with soy and elderflower vinegar that put his use of it on the menu itself. It now features in the broth for his goat and pork belly meatballs.
- 6 Gizzi Erskine, meanwhile, has been upfront about her love for what she calls "the umami gunge" from the off. At her forthcoming Covent Garden restaurant, The Nitery, she will be offering steak tartare with bone marrow dripping on Marmite toast with cured egg yolk. "The Marmite and the dripping soak into the burned toast," she says, of the culinary recognition of her after-school snack, "and when you pop the tartare into it, it elevates the flavour to another place."
- 7 Tom Cenci of Loyal Tavern in London often turns to Marmite "for richness, saltiness, shine in stocks and sauces. And I have a couple of vegetarian and vegan dishes that rely on a Marmite stock." He's cautious about being "gimmicky", however. "Marmite has a lot of nostalgic associations for people – I grew up on Marmite crumpets and a cuppa – and to turn it into something like a cheesecake can get silly." While Bains, Erskine and Galetti are happy to shout about it, Cenci is cautious about naming Marmite on his menu for fear of "putting off people who don't like it".
- 8 As a Marmite-hater myself and a frequent restaurant-goer, I can see his point, although I now know that, in the hands of a good chef, Marmite often goes undetected. "You'd never taste Marmite in any of the vegetables I've cooked in it," says Cenci. I've probably eaten Marmite unwittingly numerous times: I've had Cenci's boulangère potatoes for one thing – a hearty mix of floury potatoes, onions and Marmite. Alex Haebe of the Fairmont St Andrews in Scotland even uses the spread in his traditional German sourdough. "During the bread production, this process can be used to increase the salt content without crushing the fresh yeast," he says. "It's the perfect base for dough production." And if I hadn't told you Bains bastes his meat in Marmite butter, you would never know.
- 9 Therein lies its strength, Bains says. "I'd never have Marmite on toast, but reducing it down into a concentrate and mixing it with butter – it's like a veal stock, really." Marmite's makers

## Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

### Level 3 • Advanced

have clocked this. “We have found that some Marmite-haters, who hate the strong umami taste of Marmite on toast, find it much more palatable when used as an ingredient in a recipe,” says Williamson. The foray into pot noodles and peanut butter might not pull in purists – “the equivalent of BBQ-flavoured crisps” is how one “lover” described Marmite spin-offs – but it could well tempt those who have knowingly or accidentally enjoyed it as an ingredient.

- 10 And there’s more to this than marketing – or even taste. “Marmite also taps into certain wider trends in the food world,” says Shokofeh Hejazi, the senior trend analyst at The Food People. These include concerns about food waste (Marmite is made from leftover brewer’s yeast; at Alchemilla in Nottingham, the chef Alex Bond makes his

own from leftover sourdough) and the rise in plant-based diets, to which the spread brings a delicious and nutritious counterpoint.

- 11 “Marmite is rich in vitamin B12 – a vitamin naturally found mostly in animal products,” Hejazi says, “and it is packed full of umami and salty flavour.” As my Marmite-fan friend Emily enthuses: “If you’re a meat-eater turned vegetarian, it should be top of your shopping list.” Used well – either by chefs or by Marmite themselves in sprouts, nut butters and noodles – “it has all the complexity of an eight-hour slow-cooked, tender prime cut of beef distilled into a caramel-textured liquor.”

© Guardian News and Media 2020

First published in *The Guardian*, 26/02/20

### 3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using the information from the article.

1. What does Marmite look and taste like?
2. What is it made from?
3. Who makes Marmite?
4. What nutritional value does it have?
5. What are the two most common ways that people eat Marmite?
6. In what ways does Marmite reflect wider trends in the food world?
7. In what ways does the author liken Marmite to Brexit?

### 4 Food

a. **Underline all the food items in the article. Look up any that you don’t know.**

b. **Talk about ...**

- which of the foods you have already tried
- which you like or dislike
- which ones you cook at home
- which ones you might order in a restaurant but wouldn’t cook at home.

Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

Level 3 • Advanced

## 5 Discussion

- Are there any similarly divisive foods or drinks in your country or region, ones that people either love or hate?
- Are there any particular foods that you loved to eat when you were a child and that you still love to eat, perhaps because they make you feel nostalgic?
- Are there any special food items that you take with you when you go on holiday because you think you might not otherwise be able to get them while you are away?
- Have you ever been asked to take or send a particular food item from your country to someone who lives abroad?
- What food staples do you always try to have at home? And what seasonings do you use most often?

## 6 Webquest

Search for Marmite recipes online. Which sound most tempting to you?

## Love it or hate it, Marmite is having a massive foodie moment

### Level 3 • Advanced

#### KEY

#### 2 Key words

1. divisive
2. spread
3. court controversy
4. concoct
5. staple
6. stock
7. seasoning
8. umami
9. baste
10. dripping
11. culinary
12. unwittingly
13. palatable
14. foray

#### 3 Comprehension check

1. It's a dark spread with a rich, salty umami taste.
2. leftover brewer's yeast
3. Unilever
4. It's rich in vitamin B12.
5. on toast (or similar bread-type products); in a sauce for flavouring
6. It is a good stock alternative and vitamin B12 source in vegan and vegetarian diets, and it makes use of food waste.
7. She calls it 'deeply divisive', says it captures the state of the British nation and talks about a 'familiar' outcome in a public vote (52%–48%, the same percentages that voted for and against Brexit).

#### 4 Food

##### a.

black truffle, bone marrow/marrowbone, bread, broth, Brussels sprouts, butter, cheesecake, chicken skin, crumpet, dripping, egg yolk, elderflower vinegar, fish, goat and pork belly meatballs, Marmite, meat, mushrooms, pasta, (crunchy/smooth) peanut butter, pot noodles, pumpkin, salt, sauce, scallops, seasoning, sourdough, soy sauce, spread, steak (tartare), stock, toast, vegetables, wings, yeast