



Food and the Seasons in Haiku

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Workshop Purpose

1. Explore how food words function as kigo in haiku.
2. Explore how food words that are not inherently seasonal can nonetheless enhance the seasonal aspect of haiku.
3. Provide strategies for practice working with food imagery in your haiku.

Food as Kigo



Food as Kigo

1. Food imagery connects to the process of agriculture, grounding the reader in the seasonal nature of food.
2. Images of preparing or eating specific foods serve as a seasonal referent unto themselves.

Agriculture

Haiku can connect directly to the phases of planting, growing, and harvesting, whether for a full-scale farm or a backyard vegetable garden.



Planting

the parsnip seeds:
I was about to plant them
when the wind blew

Anna Vakar

*Haiku World: An International Poetry
Almanac*

- The parsnip being in seed form indicates that this is a spring haiku.
- Note that not all produce gets planted in the spring, so we don't want to assume that a seed inherently means a spring kigo.
- This haiku was actually classified as a spring poem because of the word "wind."
- Few food words are listed as kigo in Saijiki, meaning that even with a clear seasonal food, the kigo is often identified elsewhere in the poem.

Planting

hidden in the seed packet star songs

Stuart Barrow
bottle rockets #46

- Because this haiku features a more general “seed packet” rather than naming a specific seed, I believe this is a spring haiku, as that’s when most planting occurs.
- I think that the image of the seeds complements the more abstract “star songs,” because the humble seeds connect to something bigger.

Growing

rows of corn
stretch to the horizon—
sun on the thunderhead

Lee Gurga
Kusamakura University International
Haiku Competition, 1996

- Crops growing tall or bearing fruit is a hallmark of summer.
- In my research of contemporary haiku, I've found an abundance of haiku focused on the growing season, and less about the planting or harvesting seasons.
- That focus on the growing season might be because that stage of the agricultural year provides plenty of fodder for specific imagery.
- Unless you are a farmer or gardener, planting and harvesting might seem more abstract.

Growing

basil blossoms
a door closes
behind me

Eufemia Griffo

Seashores, November 2021

- While blossoms are normally a spring kigo, many herbs blossom toward the end of the summer, as their life cycle is coming to an end,
- Working with food in haiku invites the opportunity to observe the life cycles of the plants and animals around us.
- In part because food is less codified as kigo, and in part because agricultural seasons are different around the world, there is a risk that the reader won't always agree about your seasonal referent. . . But I think it's a risk worth taking.

Harvesting

sugar maple
pressing my tongue
against the wood

Genevieve Wynand
Kingfisher 3

- Sap from maple trees runs from late winter to early spring, outside the standard harvest season of autumn.
- In the areas where sap is harvested, winter weather lasts longer. The seasons are not so clearly defined as we'd like.
- Not to mention that the haiku and Gregorian calendars do not always line up!
- Working with food kigo allows us the opportunity to resist laziness in our images or assumptions about seasons.

Harvesting

windfall apples
in my pockets
enough for a pie

Adelaide B. Shaw
bottle rockets #46

- While apples are generally an autumn kigo, windfall apples are those that are ready to pick and eat early, sometimes as soon as mid-summer.
- Working with specific food words provides a rich opportunity to explore the subtle ways in which the world doesn't always operate according to our definition of the seasons,
- There is a risk that if a term is unfamiliar (I had to look up windfall apples), people will miss the point of the poem.

Preparing and Eating

Not only are the foods we eat seasonal, but the way we prepare food fluctuates with the season. It's more common to cook on a grill in summer, and you're more likely to bake a casserole in winter.



Preparing and Eating

Perhaps the biggest challenge for using food as kigo is that for much of the world, our food is now divorced from the seasons. If you can afford to pay a premium, most forms of fresh produce are available year-round. The ease of eating out-of-season means it can be more challenging to identify clear food kigo.



Preparing

warm start to the day
the apple's shadow before
it's peeled

Gary Hotham
*Rightsizing the Universe: Haiku
Theory*

- Working with food kigo can reinforce the ways in which all aspects of a haiku work together.
- One word or phrase does not have to do all the work of defining the season.
- I place Gary Hotham's haiku in autumn because of the presence of an apple. The opening line provides more context, suggesting early autumn rather than late.

Preparing

rhubarb leaves
how they soften
the pelting rain

Michael McClintock
Haiku Poets of Northern California
Competition, 2010

- Rhubarb is a perennial that is in season in spring.
- While only the stalks are edible, they are quite bitter and fibrous, and need to be cooked down before they can be eaten.
- Just as vegetables soften on the stove, the sound of pelting rain can be softened by landing on big leaves.
- The image also brings to mind other cruciferous vegetables that are generally best cooked.

Eating

warming up
with a bowl of clam chowder—
crunch of sand

Evan Vandermeer
Kingfisher 3

- When a food kigo could go in two different seasons, we have the opportunity to consider how definitive the seasonal referent needs to be.
- Wild clams are at their best between mid-autumn and late spring, depending on region. While I place this poem in winter, I wouldn't fault someone for placing it in autumn.
- I think that when a seasonal referent is broader, there is room for more connection with the reader.

Food that Augments the Season

Foods that Augment the Season

1. Food images paired with holiday references can create a more concrete seasonal image.
2. Food images can enhance the sense of contrast or juxtaposition in haiku.
3. Food images can be a source of comparison in relation to the season itself.

Holidays

- Many holiday foods could fit into a number of seasons, but become seasonal due to special preparation at certain times of year.
- For example, we eat cookies throughout the year, but **Christmas** cookies are often more elaborate, or have specific decorations.
- In my research so far, most of the haiku concerning holiday foods contain general food words with seasonal modifiers or additional season-specific images.

Holidays

new year's eve
the kiss
of beer froth

Agnes Eva Savich
first frost #2

- This haiku uses the image of beer to connect to two aspects of New Year's Eve festivities: the tendency toward drunken revelry, and the tradition of kissing at midnight.
- While beer is an atypical New Year's image (champagne would be expected), the froth of the bubbles connects us to the effervescent, celebratory mood.
- An unexpected image can nonetheless strengthen the sense of the holiday.

Holidays

At Thanksgiving
all the garden laid out
on the table

A l'Action de Grâce
tout le jardin étalé
sur la table

Liette Croteau
Autumn Moon 3:1

- While the word Thanksgiving might evoke some standard images, the word itself can be so general that it can border on abstraction.
- The use of food imagery can make a holiday reference more concrete and potent.
- The phrase “all the garden” evokes the abundance of the home harvest, making the general concept of Thanksgivings more precise.

Juxtaposition

first frost—
icy vines
with one red tomato

Chris Ellery

*Lifting the Sky: Southwestern Haiku
and Haiga*

- Even with a long growing season in much of the American Southwest, it's unusual to see tomatoes on the vine at frost time.
- The fact that there is a single tomato emphasizes that this is an unusual image.
- The sense of contrast or juxtaposition we're often seeking in haiku becomes more prominent through the presence of an out-of-season vegetable.

Juxtaposition

summer heat
the first blueberry
a little sour

Kristen Lindquist
Haiku Pea Podcast, S3E24

- We generally expect blueberries to be on the sweeter side, but early in the season, it can be difficult to tell when they're ready to eat.
- The sharp tartness of a blueberry contrasts with the weight of summer heat.
- There is a hint of surprise in the taste of the blueberry. We expect sweet but get its opposite, making it a juxtaposition in and of itself.

Comparison

this morning's brightness
sun on heaped snow
eggs sunny side up

Claudia Coutu Radmore
*Stratified Layers: Haiku Canada
Members' Anthology, 2022*

- In this haiku, the brightness of yolks encircled by egg whites serves as a point of comparison to sunlight shining on the white snow.
- The analog is not 1:1 (the sun on snow does not literally look like a fried egg), which keeps the image from feeling too ponderous.
- The first image is enhanced by the drones of contrast in the second.

Comparison

a severe snowfall
my cream cheese frosting
turns out very thick

Maya Daneva
Kingfisher 3

- In this haiku, the cream cheese frosting mirrors the heavy snow outside.
- There is an implied contrast in this haiku, of the warm kitchen as opposed to the cold outdoors. However, the direct images are more similar than different.
- The image of the unexpectedly thick frosting reinforces the image of deep, heavy snow, which augments the overall effect of winter.

Strategies for Practice

Strategies for Practice

- Compile a running list of seasonal foods relevant to your region and culture. Practice invoking the seasons with those words. What is the effect that connecting to specific foods has on your poems?
- Pick a commercial food that is artificially seasonal (i.e. McRib, Pumpkin Spice Latte). Experiment with writing haiku or senryu using these images. What is the effect that comes from writing a haiku with a deliberately artificial referent?
- Pick food referents that could fit into multiple seasons and write haiku with them. What is the effect of seasonal ambiguity?