



## Rationing

Rationing was a way of ensuring that everybody in Britain had access to a fair amount of food during World War 2. At least, that was the idea. Like many things, it was sometimes abused by people trying to get more than their fair share, but more on that later. It was first introduced in January 1940. The war had been raging for four months by then, and supplies were already growing short.

The Ministry of Food was established to oversee all of the rationing requirements for the country. They handed out ration books to every man, woman and child in the country. Each one contained tokens that could be exchanged in shops for products. At first, rationing mainly affected basic foods such as sugar, meat, bacon and cheese.

It was usually the housewives who were responsible for collecting food. They had to register with a particular shop to exchange their ration coupons. This could cause arguments if other shops had things that their shop didn't.

Some foods were rationed using points rather than coupons. This meant that their value could be changed over time. If they were in short supply, their points value went up. If items became easier to obtain, their points value went down. This kind of system was used for things like tinned goods, dried fruit, biscuits and cereals.

Food was supplied to shops in small quantities. Once it was gone, there wouldn't be any more until the next delivery. People soon grew accustomed to queuing outside of shops for hours at a time to make sure they got a place near the front. It was the only way to try to ensure they got everything that they needed.

Fruit and vegetables weren't rationed because they were seen as important to keeping the country healthy. People were encouraged to grow their own at home, which helped. Some were often hard to get, such as tomatoes. These had to be imported from other countries, and ships were often attacked on their way to Britain.



Petrol and clothes were also rationed. This wasn't as much because they were in short supply but because they were needed for the army. Petrol was essential for keeping army vehicles moving across Europe, and fabric was used to make uniforms.

As we discovered earlier, the system wasn't perfect. Rationing of an item was announced in advance, so people often flocked to shops to buy as many as they could. Criminals called "spivs" managed to get hold of items illegally. This created a black market where you could buy products that you weren't entitled to. Trade with black marketeers was often brisk because people were fed up with going without essentials.

Rationing more-or-less ended at the same time the war ended. Some items remained on ration until the early 1950s, and bread was rationed for the first time after the war had finished.

## RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. Which item wasn't rationed during the war, but was after it?
2. Name two items that were rationed with points.
3. Which type of fruit or vegetable had to be imported?
4. Which items were rationed to help the army?
5. What was the name of criminals who sold things on the black market?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**V**

Which word in the first paragraph means "making sure"?

**V**

Write another word for "obtain".

**S**

Why did people have to queue?

**I**

Why might people have been annoyed if a certain shop didn't have what they wanted?

**P**

Which rationed items do you think you would have missed the most?