

FLOUR or FLOWER?

By Walt Busch

Do mills grind grain into *flour* or *flower*? The answer really depended on the century in which a person lived. *Flour* is an old word originating around 1200 A.D. in England and is derived from the French word *fleur*. *Fleur de farine*¹ was considered the “finest part” of the meal (course unsifted powder) and so *flour* was an end product of mills until sometime between 1400 and 1500.

In the 15th century, the word *flower* was introduced into the English language and became the predominate spelling for both the fine powder we know as *flour* and also the brightly colored blooming plants growing in the fields. By 1755, Dr. Samuel Johnson’s dictionary, which quickly became the standard for the English language, did not even list the word *flour*. *Flower* had become the accepted word for both.

It wasn’t until sometime around the 1830’s that some writers felt the need to differentiate between the two words. After that, English-speaking people could once again grind meal to make *flour* instead of *flower*.

¹ A literal translation of *fleur de farine* would be the “flower of the flour.”

Sources: Bradley, Henry, *The Making of English*, New York: The MacMillan Co. 1915, pages 213-214.

Dictionary.com “fleur”