

Potato Dumplings Filled with Smoked Meat and Sauerkraut

Filled potato dumplings are quite popular meal in Czech Republic, and it's very easy to prepare. The most common filling is smoked meat, which can be enriched with bacon. Interesting alternative can be pork scratching. Potatoes for dough can be boiled a day before. But once you make the dough, try to work with it immediately. In time it begins to thin and then it would tear up and be sticky.

Ingredients

- 1 kg of potatoes
- 500 g of fine wheat flour
- 2 eggs
- tbs of salt
- 500 g of smoked meat
- 1 onion for topping

Sauerkraut

- 1 kg of sauerkraut
- 1 onion
- salt, caraway
- 1 spoon of flour
- lard or oil

Directions

1. Boil whole unpeeled potatoes. Let cool off, then peel

them and grate finely. Add eggs, flour and salt and knead into dough.

2. Roll into 0,5 cm thick layer and cut to squares of 10 cm x 10 cm.
3. Put chopped smoked meat on every square. You can season them with salt and pepper. Then put the corners together and make into a round dumpling.
4. Boil in steam for 25 minutes. Pinch with skewer after boiling and butter up with lard or oil. Sauerkraut
5. Fry chopped onion on lard and add sauerkraut with pickle. Season with caraway and salt. Sauté for 15 – 20 minutes. If the sauerkraut is too sour you can sweeten it with sugar. At the end thicken with flour mixed with a little water.
6. Fry chopped onion on lard for final garnishing.

Saint Nicholas Day in Czech Republic



Saint Nicholas (Svatý Mikuláš) in Czech Republic, as well as in other Christian countries, is a popular fest day. It celebrates figure of Saint Nicholas of Myra, who was born in 280-286 in the city of Patara in Asia Minor province. Later he became a bishop, who was very popular among people for his generosity, charity and justice. During his life he took care of orphans, widows and other persecuted people. Nicholas of Myra died probably on 6th of December between 345-352. On this day people celebrates the Day of St. Nicholas.

St. Nicholas is patron of merchants, archers, lawyers, pharmacists and students. He's also the protector of bridges against floods and helps in need. He's patron of wedding and happy marriage and protector of children against sickness.

Cult of St. Nicholas began to spread about 2 centuries after his death. He was popular in Greek Church and later in Slavic countries. Traditions linked with Nicholas are very diverse and regionally and nationally different. Part of most of them is giving gifts to children. In Scandinavia he lets gifts in shoes, which kids place near fireplaces. In Croatia Nicholas is accompanied by devil Krampus. In Germany he walks with groom Ruprecht and in Russia it's Ded Moroz and Snegurochka. In Holland he's called Sinter Klaas and in UK and USA Santa Claus, who brings presents at Christmas.

St. Nicholas's handing of gifts

In Czech Rep. so called "Mikulášská nadílka" (Nicholas's presents) is celebrated. According to old folklore Nicholas came from sky to ground every year on 5th of December and together with devil and angel he came around houses and gave kids sweets or coal and potatoes depending on kid behaviour.

Part of traditions were Nicholas's markets, which took place on many places. Merchants sold bakery, marzipan, gingerbread, chocolate and little toys. Popular were little figurines of devils made from dried plums (prunes) and so called "světy", a big apple standing on three wooden sticks decorated with dried fruits. Bakers made beautiful products, the most common were Nicholas, angel and devil. And a gingerbread alphabet, which helped kids learn and after they could enjoy eating.

In many regions, parades took place. In masquerades were several Nicholas, who were accompanied by devils and angels, but also hussars, dragoons and hajduks. One of the largest parade used to be near Litomyšl to the end of 19th century.

Visits of St. Nicholas were regionally different. In poor regions, kids hanged stockings on windows or doors over night and found gifts in the morning. In richer regions Nicholas came to children in person. He was a tall figure with long white beard. He wore long white shirt with red-white cloak quilted with golden thread. He had red or white bishop's hat with golden cross in the front. In one hand he held a long crutch and in second hand he held a bag with gifts.



Devil his companion should scare bad kids. Nicholas asked parents about children's behaviour and then he tested kid if it can pray. If he was satisfied, he gave kids fruits, nuts and some sweets. But if he wasn't devil gave the poor kid some coal and potatoes. But really naughty kids were threaten to be thrown into sack and drag in hell.

This traditional conception of this fest persists to this day, mainly in the countryside. But even there changes applied. Kids are not tested from praying anymore, but they are to told some poems and rhymes and songs. Fruits and nuts were replaced by bars and chocolates. But a little of coal and potatoes is still a threat.

Weather Lore on St. Nicholas

With Nicholas, some weather lores are connected. For example:

"On St. Nicholas, the whole winter is ours alas."

"When on St. Nicholas is raining, the winter is gonna be avenging."

"On St. Nicholas on ice, On St. Stephens on mud."

"If the bird drinks from rail on St. Nicholas, the horse won't drink from river for three months."

Roasted Goose with White and Red Cabbage and Dumplings

Once upon a time

there was a cute town

and it's people knew

how to have some fun

when st. Martin's day

finally has come.

In a town surrounded by Beskydy's mountains, in the town where I grew up we celebrate St. Martin's day every year. He's the patron of the town.

Anyway, eating roasted goose and drinking St. Martin's wine is whole republic tradition. But for us it means whole weekend ritual starting on Friday with something like outdoor alcoholic special drinks market and ending on Sunday with light headache and completely full stomach. But calm down, it's not just about drinking and eating. Mainly it's about meeting friends, spending time with family. Maybe this spirit is common for whole nation during St. Martin's day, but mostly for other people it's about eating something they don't usually eat and drinking special occasions kinds of wine.

But for us it's about meeting on the main and only square, talking to friends you haven't seen for a long time, trying to walk through the crowd and walking from stall to stall... and

drinking vařonka, hot wine and warm mead.

Vařonka is north Moravian history leftover. But it's awesome. You know – very cold winters, tough work, no money. People needed to warm up somehow. Vařonka is combination of caramel, water, spices like clove, cinnamon (it's possible to use badian (star anise) or allspice) and a shot of booze for a cup. You may use vodka, but we use režná (it's made from anise, it has about 35% of alcohol) or rum. In the end you put to the cup just a little bit of butter and perhaps slice of lemon or orange for decoration. It's very sweet. And you get drunk very fast. There is also a competition who made the best vařonka. And competitors really care about it because it is a big pride to win and they will be well known to whole town. In the end of the evening there is lot of drunk people. But they are still capable to get up early next morning so they can see their patron.

On Saturday square looks like a medieval market with different kinds of food, drink and handmade stuff.

And this day is about best roasted goose competition and St. Martin's coming. He is supposed to ride on a white horse which means snow. So he's supposed to bring snow and winter and cover the country with snowy blanket and let it rest to the spring. For the last few years it's not working. No snow. Or more likely no snow in November. Maybe we are going to be content just with movember. Tom0rrow I'm going to buy some moustache. I'll be very pretty girl.

Maybe I could compare our roasted goose and our st. Martin's celebration to thanksgiving turkey or something like that. When it's really about tradition you just want to be with your closest. This year I loved making goose (ok, it wasn't really a goose, but it wasn't a duck, it was a hybrid, something in between – gooseduck. Meat is not so dry as goose use to have and it's not so tough as duck use to have, it's tender and juicy) because it was whole family cooperation. My father made

goose, my mother made white Czech cabbage and I made savory red cabbage and awesome butter dumplings. And together – lovely tender meat, tasty moist dumplings and bittersweet combination of cabbages – together it was heaven.

So bellow it's not going to be just one of the meals recipe but recipe for the whole course.

Of course you can make roasted goose on orange and honey or plums, make savory both white and red cabbage or make red cabbage with apples and cranberries and it's going to be great. But let it be simple and you will know for 100% it's going to be the best.

Roasted Goose

Ingredients

- 1 goose without giblets
- bunch of celery leaves
- 4 sprig of fresh rosemary
- 2 onions, finely diced
- 5 garlic cloves, finely sliced
- salt, pepper, generous amount of whole caraway

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Rinse goose inside and out with cold running water, and pat it dry with paper towels.
2. With the point of the knife make carefully few cuts to the skin of the goose. Generously sprinkle the cavity with salt, pepper and caraway and insert most of the celery leaves and half of the rosemary sprigs (instead

of celery you may use parsley).

3. From both sides also sprinkle the goose with salt, pepper and caraway. Put the goose into large roast pan breast side down, pour there about a cup of water and roast it covered for about 2 or 3 hours, when it's fine and crispy.
4. Then turn around breast side up. Sprinkle goose with salt and caraway again (don't be afraid to use caraway, even a whole package for the goose, it makes the taste) and bake covered. Now it's good during the two or three hours long baking to take the goose out of the oven and pour some juice over the breast. Maybe 3 times during baking.

When the skin is brown and crispy, put to the pan chopped onion, sliced garlic and the rest of leaves and rosemary.

I know, it takes time but it definitely worth it. And you have time to do rest of it.

Cabbage

The most complicated thing is the Czech cabbage. You can cook this cabbage day ahead so it "sits" and tastes even better. I love the smell when my mother cooks it, it simply smell delicious.

Ingredients

- 1 medium head white cabbage (about 2 and half pounds), chopped
- water
- salt
- 1/2 tsp whole caraway
- 1 tbsp pork or goose fat (grease one)

- 1 big onion finely diced
- 1 not even full tbs of all purpose flour
- 1 tsp sugar
- 1 tsp white vinegar
- generous amount of fresh ground pepper

Directions

1. Put the cabbage into the pot and press it then pour in the water so the cabbage is just slightly covered and braise it so it's just "al dente".
2. It's not supposed to be completely cooked. It's hard to tell how long it takes because it depends on how fresh cabbage is. So it may take 10 minutes but also half an hour. So watch it. Then pour off half of the water of the pot but keep it aside.
3. In pan, add fat. When it's hot add onion and sauté until turned slightly brown and add flour.
4. Now stir with wooden spoon. It's something like the starter for béchamel.
5. Add the mix to the pot with cabbage. If the cabbage is too thick pour in some of cabbage broth. It depends just on you how thick you want to have it.
6. Stirring boil the cabbage for the last ten minutes so it doesn't burn. Finally add sugar and vinegar and fresh ground pepper.

Ingredients

- about 2 and half pound savory red cabbage, the best you can buy (when you buy already made it saves time)
- about a cup of goose juice from the goose roasting in

your oven or goose that finished roasting in your oven –
juice and fat, but it doesn't have to be a full cup

- 1 medium onion, finely diced
- fresh ground pepper

Directions

1. Add the juice into the pot and heat.
2. When it's hot add onion and sauté until golden brown.
3. Next add the cabbage and let it boil until almost all liquid is gone.
4. Finally add pepper.

Dumplings

And finally... the best dumplings I've ever ate. For now, of course. They are moist, with taste of butter and supper easy to make.



Ingredients

- about 14 oz white toast bread, cubed
- 3 and half oz warm butter

- 2 and half cups milk
- 4 eggs
- 5 and half oz plain whole-wheat flour
- bunch of chopped parsley
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 8 cups greased with butter
- bit pot with a lid for

Directions

1. Add the water into the pot and boil.
2. When you put all the cups to the pot water should reach an inch under the top of the cups.
3. Mix the cubed bread with all ingredients and let it absorb the liquid.
4. Then divide it into the greased cups.
5. Put cups into the pot, cover with a lid and cook for about 45 minutes.

Shopska salad

Shopska salad is originally a Bulgarian salad made from tomatoes, cucumber, onion, pepper and feta cheese. It's popular across Eastern and Central Europe. Shopska salad is easy summer salad recipe, which can be served as main course or a healthy side with meat.

Ingredients

- 2 cucumbers
- 3-5 tomatoes
- 2 peppers
- 200g of Balkan feta cheese
- 1-2 onions
- oil

Directions

1. Dice peeled cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers.
2. Chop onion and cube feta cheese.
3. Put in bowl and mix together with spoon of oil.
4. Serve with bread.

Grilled Potatoes with Garlic Dip

Potatoes are most used vegetable and side in Czech cuisine. If you were to prepare something on a grill, e.g. our recipe for skewers, you may try to make grilled potatoes in tin foil with garlic dip. It goes very well with meat and you can please your vegetarian friends as well. Of course, you don't have to necessarily grill them, but bake them in oven.

Ingredients

- potatoes
- fresh thyme, rosemary
- 250 ml of sour cream
- 4 cloves of garlic
- salt and pepper
- chives
- butter

Directions

1. Clean potatoes thoroughly, don't peel them. Cut in the middle, but not all the way through. You can pierce large potatoes with fork.
2. Fill with piece of butter and thyme and rosemary.
3. Wrap potatoes in tin foil and put on grill for 30-40 minutes and turn sometimes. (You can brush tin foil with a bit of oil.)
4. Meanwhile mince garlic and mix it with sour cream and season with salt and pepper.
5. Serve in grilled potato skin with chopped chives.

Grilled Pork Skewers

Time of weekend family barbecues is not just pleasure time in US or UK but also in Czech Republic. Although it's pretty obvious that meals on the menu are quite different. Czech grill parties or bonfires include mainly sausages and selection of meat. Fairly popular among Czechs are "špízy"

(meat on a skewers), which can be made in many different ways. Let's try one of the classic grilled pork skewers today. You can serve them with grilled potatoes and vegetables. And of course don't forget a cold beer to wash it down.

Ingredients

- 500g of pork leg
- 3 cloves of garlic
- 2 bratwursts
- 2 onions
- 2 bell peppers
- 4 potatoes
- salt and pepper
- olive oil

Directions

1. Cube the pork, pour with oil and mix with minced garlic, salt and pepper. Let in fridge for several hours.
2. Slice bratwursts, onions, peppers and potatoes. You can oil the potatoes.
3. Thread ingredients on a skewer.
4. Grill for about 20 minutes. Or put in oven.

