

# Cuisine of the Wallachian Kingdom

Wallachian Kingdom is a soubriquet for the Wallachian region in the **eastern part of Moravia**. This region is known for its beautiful hilly landscape, its folk architecture and mainly for its famous fruit cakes.

## Welcome to the plumdom

If there is an ingredient which could be considered universal for this region, it would most definitely be **the plum**. If you provide a local with sufficient amount of plums, he will prepare any meal from starters to desserts. And after he is finished, he would probably **distil some slivovitz** (*slivovice*).



Plums are the most plentiful fruit of the Wallachian region. It is no wonder then that our forefathers learned to make the best of it. Apart from the famous **plum frgáls**, which became a cultural heritage protected by the European Union quite recently, you can taste various plum sauces, plum butter, delicious dumplings with plum filling, baked plums in bacon and so on, but also, of course, the **traditional Moravian spirit** called slivovice (*slíva* is one of the Czech words for a plum).

Another typical representative of local cuisine is the traditional **Wallachian cabbage soup** called *kyselica*. The name is derived from the word *kyselý* which is the Czech for sour.

**Cabbage** can be found across the whole area of Czech Republic and is one of the most important ingredients which, together with potatoes, is also a necessary ingredient for preparing really good kyselica.

This soup is so popular among housewives and cooks that there are competitions for the best kyselica in the region and it has been awarded as the best traditional dish of all Wallachia. The winner made this soup with rabbit meat and used a recipe she found in her grandmother's closet. Traditionally, this soup is made with sauerkraut, potatoes, caraway and sour cream. The taste is then enriched by a Wallachian sausage or smoked meat and spiced with garlic and marjoram.

## Sweet treasure



The famous **Wallachian cake** called *Frgál* is a type of sweet bread with rich fruit topping and streusel. The fruit used for frgáls comes, of course, from the local resources and these cake-like breads are usually made with plums, pears, blueberries or apples. As a variant to fruit we can have also walnut, poppy seed or curd cheese. If you cannot decide which one to choose, you can have variations of two or four different toppings on one large cake. It surely no surprise that frgál goes so well with coffee.

The region is also known for its **cheese production** by small farmers who make their products the old way in their own households, and for slivovice which has served as a universal cure and spirits raiser for generations. Local cuisine consists of food from people's own resources and the range of fresh goods is quite diverse. Spending time in this region is not only delightful but, thanks to its landscape, vast

forests, clean environment and tasty cuisine, also quite healthy.

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## The Magic of Silesian Cuisine

The **Silesian cuisine** is quite rich regional cuisine of the **northern part of Moravia** and the area of southern Poland near the borders with Czech Republic. Local cuisine is influenced heavily by **Polish and German cookery** but also by Pomeranian and East-Prussian regional cuisine. Some of the specialities which have origin in the **Silesian region** are now cooked predominantly in Germany. Regional dishes are quite simple yet very tasty. Their preparation is based on local ingredients and culinary skills which are passed on from generation to generation.

### Potatoes everywhere



One of the traditional ingredients in **Silesian cuisine** is **potatoes**. These serve as a **side dish, for potato soup**, or as the main course in form of **potato pancakes**. Other ways of preparing potatoes include various mashes, dumplings or small gnocchi-like potato bits. Potatoes are cooked both peeled and unpeeled – in dependence on the recipe. They could be boiled in water, baked or fried. People usually drank fermented milk, buttermilk or usual fresh milk. Potato pancakes were made with raw potatoes, usually grated, and milk, eggs, flour, and to taste people usually add lots of garlic and marjoram which give these pancakes its unique flavour. The basic ingredients could be enriched by

some kind of smoked meat like sausages or even bacon.

Various kinds of potato gnocchi and dumplings also have a long tradition not only in Silesia and the Czech Republic but also in Slovakia. Potatoes are used in dough which is then rolled up and boiled in a form of small cylinder and then it is sliced and served with meat and cabbage. Another way is to prepare the dough and by tearing it off with your fingers making small bits which are thrown into boiling water. When cooked, these small pieces of boiled potato dough are served with sheep cheese called bryndza or with cabbage, fried onion and bacon.

## **Bigos and Silesian Heaven**

A **traditional Polish appetizer** prepared also in the border areas among Poland, Czech Republic and Germany is **Bigos**. This speciality is also known as the hunters stew and is made with cabbage and meat. Typical ingredients are cabbage or sauerkraut, whole or puréed tomatoes, honey, mushrooms and various cuts of meat and sausages. The meat used in bigos can be pork, ham, bacon, sausage, veal, beef and, since it is considered a *hunter's* stew, it may include venison, rabbit or other game. Leftover cuts find their way into the pot as well. It may be seasoned with pepper, caraway, juniper berries, bay leaf, marjoram, paprika, dried or smoked plums, and other ingredients. Bigos is usually served with mashed potatoes or rye bread. As many other stews, this meal can be kept in a cool place and later reheated.

A very original meal, called **Silesian heaven**, is prepared with smoked bacon and dried fruit, cinnamon and lemon peel boiled in water. Then roux is prepared and made into a sweet sauce served with slices of bacon and the dried fruit. Silesian heaven goes well with potato dumplings.

**Various soups** are an inseparable part of each meal in this regional cuisine. They are made with pretty much everything you find in a Silesian garden, but the most favourite ones are **garlic soup, potato soup and cabbage soup**. Cabbage, by the way, is also very popular and served as a side dish to various meals. As a dessert you can have local **Ears of Štramberk** (Štramberké uši), which is a kind of gingerbread pastry rolled into a shape resembling ears and, as the name suggests, it comes from nearby Štramberk. Silesian cuisine is undoubtedly very rich and has had great influence on the surrounding regions of Germany, Czech Republic and Poland and some of the meals from this region have become traditional parts of national cuisines of these countries.




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## **Magdalena Dobromiła Rettigová and her legacy**

Every country has its **culinary tradition** and typical cuisine. Family and national recipes are passed on from generation to generation similarly as folklore stories. These recipes contribute largely to the national identity and are treasured accordingly. As well as folklore tales have their collectors, so do **traditional recipes**; and as well as collectors of tales, the gatherers of traditional recipes also publish their work from time to time.

# Woman of many sides

**Magdalena Dobromila Rettigová** lived between 1785 and 1845.  She was a Czech revivalist and **author of cookbooks**, poems, plays and short prose. Magdalena, by maiden name Artmannová, married a Czech lawyer, patriot and writer J. A. Rettig. She was brought up in German environment and her first writings were also in German. Under the influence of her husband and Czech writing society, she started to write in Czech and her “silly verses and weepy stories” were gaining in popularity.

Rettigová was historically the first woman to show **great interested in women**, in regards to their position in society. However, she did not struggle for equality of women but endorsed their feminine qualities. She started to teach young women **how to cook or sew** and she showed them the manners and rules of dining and conduct. Her activities resulted in publishing the first literature on cookery. The most significant book Rettigová wrote is undoubtedly her **Home Cookbook** from 1826. This was not only a collection of traditional recipes for meals prepared with local crops and meat from locally bred domestic animals such as pork and beef. It contained also a code telling women how to be good housewives to deserve respect for their femininity.

The focus of this enlightened woman was put also on sharing her knowledge with others. She was trying to propagate education and patriotic sentiment among other women. She was lending books to these women and then openly discussed their content and the women’s opinions.

## Unhealthy yet tasty tradition

“A Household Cookery Book or A Treatise on Meat and Fasting Dishes for Bohemian and Moravian Lasses” by the first Czech propagator of cookery became a **true bestseller in the 19<sup>th</sup> century** and was published in many editions. The latest

editions come from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although the meals prepared by the recipes in this book are often quite unhealthy and expensive – mainly when you really want to make them properly using quality ingredients, there are many salads and around fifty other vegetable recipes. The book could serve to anyone, it contains meaty meals which can be really quite expensive and not exactly healthy – her family could afford various ingredients, but also meals affordable for the less wealthy and the poor, because the land had gone through an after-war crisis and not everywhere were many types of food affordable or at hand.

Healthy or not healthy, **Czech cuisine** is definitely tasty and rich. M. D. Rettigová managed to collect the best and most **traditional recipes**. She put together the most practical and useful advice not only on how to prepare each of the meals properly and dutifully, she also provided countless practical **advices for women** on how to take care of their kitchen and, more importantly, of themselves.

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## Typical Czech Cuisine

**Czech cuisine** is famous for its varieties of meat, which plays the main role on a plate, and further for the variety of delicious sauces, dumplings and soups.

## Local tastes



As in every country, the traditional cuisine of the Czech Republic is given by its location, its climate and crops which find favourable conditions in this area. It is no wonder then that in this moderate climate with large water areas, many rivers and forests the

typical meals consist of field crops, vegetables and game. The **Czech cuisine** is also rich in mushrooms, for the Czechs are quite keen mushroom pickers and the climate in this country, as well as in the most Central Europe, is just perfect for growth of mushrooms. When it comes to desserts then, the Czech land is rich in many kinds of pulp fruit and berries used in cakes together with curd cheese, walnut and poppy seed. One of the main characteristics of **Czech cuisine** is that the meal usually consists of a soup and a main course. The soup has quite often a form of broth with various ingredients, mostly vegetables according to the season, and pastinas. Thickened soups are also very common and traditional way of preparation. As a thickener the Czechs usually use roux of flour and the most typical ingredients are legumes, sausages or giblets. This kind of soup can be served as a main course with bread. **Traditional soups** include for example the potato soup, bean soup, lentil soup, cabbage soup, mushroom soup, fish soup – which many households hold for their **traditional Christmas soup**, and so on. Another typical feature of **Czech cuisine** is meat, the Czechs hardly pass a day without a proper portion of meat for lunch. **Traditional meat on a Czech table** is pork, poultry, beef, fish. Veal and mutton are rarer in use and in regions with gamekeeping tradition it is not a problem, in certain seasons, to have a nice boar or roe deer noisette. On festive occasions, the Czechs mostly relish roast mallard or goose with cabbage and dumplings. As you can see, the range is pretty wide. The ways of preparation, on the other hand, are



to a certain extent alike. It is mostly roasting or frying – as our **favourite schnitzel** or anything covered with breadcrumbs or as the typical and almost legendary **Czech fried cheese**.

## Sauces and side dish



What mostly comes with meat is either potatoes, which have rooted in the **Czech cuisine** really deeply since they were brought from the US, or the already mentioned fluffy dumplings. **Czech cookery** is also known for its almost excessive use of various sauces. These sauces are prepared on béchamel-like basis

and the most traditional ones are the dill sauce, tomato sauce, mushroom sauce, paprika sauce and the very favourite cream sauce which is made with root vegetable and goes so well with sirloin, lemon and cranberries. Apart from these quite heavy on flour and cream sauces, there are variants as the side dish to meat. Mostly it is vegetables such as stewed spinach or cabbage.

# Snacks and desserts

In pubs you can order also small snacks with your beer. The most traditional and omnipotent ones are a pickled bratwurst called the 'drown man', pickled camembert-like cheese usually with a pepperoni, very often you can also have a garlic toast, and of course that it would not be a proper pub without a proper goulash, although it is originally a Hungarian meal. As a dessert you can have a strudel, which is also borrowed, from Austria this time, but has long ago found its place on Czech tables. Typical are various kinds of cakes with fruit fillings made of plums, cherries, peaches, apples, blueberries and so on; or with poppy seed, walnut, curd cheese and raisins. In Wallachia you can find more kinds in one big cake called 'frgál' which was included in the European Commission's list of products with protected geographical indication quite recently.

So, as you can easily conclude, **Czech cuisine** is not of the healthiest ones. The amount of meat, cream based sauces, and also smoked meats and sausages, etc., makes it quite heavy but very, very rich in nutrition. Yet it has its tradition and if done really properly and well, it has its unmistakable magic. The traditional meals can be found in almost every restaurant. It is still good, though, to find a better place to taste the real sweet smoothness of cream sauce with a slice of sirloin, good roast duck with red cabbage and bread dumplings, or a really nice mushroom soup.

