

Carpatho-Rusyn Easter Foods...Colorful and Delicious

by Georgia Zeedick

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We thank Mrs. Zeedick for her contribution in promoting the cherished Carpatho-Rusyn Easter basket tradition.

On Holy Saturday, Slavic people everywhere will be taking baskets loaded with holiday foods to church for the traditional Easter blessing, which is a must prior to eating those exquisite foods.

Neatly arranged in the baskets will be ham, slanina (bacon), chrin (beets with horseradish), salt, paska, kolbasi, hrudka (sirets), butter, pysanky (ornately decorated eggs) for decoration, colored eggs for eating and kolachi. Some people may add candy and a bottle of wine to their baskets.

After the foods are placed in the basket, an embroidered cloth cover is placed over them, and a blessed candle is fastened upright near the basket handle.

For the first-timers who have never put together an Easter basket, let alone prepared foods for it, the whole process can be mystifying. Every cook has his or her favorite way of preparing these foods and of measuring the ingredients for them, and asking for recipes can result in confusion.

To take some of the mystery out of the preparation of the traditional foods, here are a few recipes gleaned from my own experience and a few Slavic cookbooks.

Hrudka (Sirets)

1 dozen eggs

1 or 2 teaspoons vanilla

1 quart milk

1/2 cup sugar

Combine all ingredients in a white, enameled pan. Cook over medium to low heat, stirring constantly, until mixture curdles. Pour mixture into a colander that is lined with several thicknesses of cheesecloth. Once mixture is drained, pick it up --cheesecloth and all -- and shape into a ball by twisting the top part of the cheesecloth. Tightly tie open end with string, placing string very close to the top of the ball. Caution: This will be hot. Hang over sink until cool. Remove cheesecloth when cool; wrap and refrigerate. (The whey from the hrudka can be saved and used when making pascha. To conserve the whey, place the colander over a large pot before pouring mixture into cheesecloth).

Paska

3 cups scalded milk, or enough scalded milk added to whey from hrudka to make 3 cups

1/2 teaspoon salt

6 beaten eggs

1/2 cup lukewarm water

1/2 cup sugar

1 cup melted butter

1/2 large cake yeast or equivalent portion of dry yeast

12 to 14 cups flour

In a large bowl, combine milk, sugar, salt, butter and cool to lukewarm. Save 2 tablespoons of the eggs and add the rest of the eggs to the milk mixture. In a separate bowl, crumble yeast in water and let stand for 10 minutes. Add to above mixture. Add flour - about 2 cups at a time - until the dough can be handled.

Knead on a floured board for 15 minutes. Place dough in greased bowl, grease top and let rise in a warm place for about 1 1/2 hours.

Punch down and let rise a second time for about 45 minutes.

After second rising, shape into four balls and place into greased pans. Small 1 1/2 quart enamelled saucepans can be used for baking. Let rise. Brush tops with 2 tablespoons eggs to which some milk has been added. To achieve that glazed appearance on the loaves, brush tops several times prior to removing them from the oven. Bake at 325 degrees for about 1 hour.

NOTE: Before placing dough in pans, about 1 cup of the dough can be saved and shaped into designs (plaits, crosses, etc.) and placed on top of the unbaked paskas. These fancy shapes can be prevented from scorching in the oven by placing aluminum foil on top of the paskas during baking.

CHRIN, or Beets with Horseradish

8 cans whole beets, drained

3 bottles horseradish (Do not use creamed horseradish)

Grind beets using fine grinder attachment. The juice can be saved for soup. Add horseradish to beets; mix well. Refrigerate. An empty horseradish jar (washed, label removed and dipped in boiling water to sterilize it) can be filled with the mixture and placed in the Easter basket. The jar's cap can be disguised with aluminum foil, thus hiding any advertisement.

KOLACHKI (Nut and poppyseed)

8 egg yolks

8 cups flour

1/2 pound butter

1 cake yeast

1 cup sugar

2 cups scalded milk

4 tablespoons shortening

Beat eggs and sugar. Melt butter and shortening in hot milk, saving 1/2 cup for the yeast. Dissolve yeast in lukewarm milk and let stand for a few minutes. Combine both mixtures in a large bowl.

Add flour and mix well with hands until dough leaves the hands. Refrigerate overnight. In the morning, divide the dough into eight balls and let rise for one hour. Roll out on floured boards and spread with filling. Roll up gently, tucking in ends.

Bake at 350 degrees until brown, about 45 minutes.

Brush tops of rolls, prior to putting into oven with an egg-milk mixture. Doing so produces beautifully browned, shiny rolls.

Nut Filling

1 pound ground walnuts

1/2 cup canned milk

1/2 cup sugar

2 eggs

1/4 cup honey (optional)

Combine sugar and nuts. Beat eggs and add to mixture. Add honey and milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly. Bring to boil. Remove from stove, let cool. Roll out dough to 1/4 inch thick, brush with butter, place filling on dough and roll up. Bake

Poppyseed Filling

1 pound ground poppyseed

1/4 cup honey

1/2 cup sugar

2 tablespoons melted butter

1/4 cup milk

Combine sugar with poppyseed. Add melted butter. Then add honey and milk. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally until blended. Cool and spread over dough that has been rolled out to 1/4 inch thickness and brushed with butter. Roll up and bake.

HAM

The ham is decorated and baked according to your favorite recipe. How large a ham you buy and use depends on how many people you are serving. For a 20 pound ham; cut it in half, decorate the halves, bake them and place one of them in the basket.

KOLBASSI

Again, the amount of kolbassi you purchase (or make), depends on how many eager eaters you are serving.

Place the kolbassi in a pan, cover with water and boil for about 45 minutes. Some cooks, after the kolbassi is boiled, place a few into a baking pan and sprinkle them with about 2 tablespoons of brown sugar and honey. This is then popped into the oven for about 15 minutes at 350 degrees. Cool before refrigerating.

BUTTER

If you prefer not to use already prepared butter for the Easter feasting, the butter can be made by whipping heavy cream. Use either one pint or one half pint heavy whipping cream, place in bowl and mix with hand beater until butter forms. Place sample of butter in a small fancy bowl and decorate for use in Easter basket.