



JARMILA HLÁVKOVÁ

A Taste of Slovakia

EMILIA'S (NOT ONLY) COOKBOOK



PART 4 **SPRING**



THANK YOU

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IN A CASTLE KITCHEN

Despite long-lived preconceptions about Slovaks having been a nation of workers, the latest studies show that we had quite a few aristocratic families living in our lands. As citizens of the Kingdom of Hungary, they had their names Magyarized, but their private correspondence was carried out in Old Slovak and they also spoke the language at home. Among those were the majority of wealthy landowners from the Liptov, Turiec, Orava, Trenčín and Zvolen regions.

As was common at other European courts, castles and manor houses in the Kingdom of Hungary had kitchens built away from living quarters. It wasn't just for the noise and smoke they produced. Food was boiled in cauldrons hung above a fire, roasted on spits placed over large open fires, or cooked in ovens that stood either in the middle of the kitchen or by the wall. Although they were made of stone, the risk of wooden logs catching fire was still there. Depending on the size of a banquet or a feast, a staff of about 20 people would take care of the meals, including 4 – 8 cooks, each specializing in a different kind of food.

Early recipes didn't give the exact amounts of ingredients, nor did they include the cooking times. They were obviously written for experienced cooks.



Reliving the past: Preparations for a festive meal are underway at Budatin Castle, Slovakia.
Photo courtesy of Jana Kollárová





Morena – the symbol of winter and death – is carried out of the village, burned, and ...



... thrown into the river to be washed away.



Apparently, Dedko (Old Chap) has been saved from burning and floating down the river with Morena.

And what does modern Slovak fasting look like?

It is mostly elderly Slovak Christians who still observe Lenten fast. Young generations that came after the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia do commit to fasting and diets, but it is not only for religious purposes. They do so because they believe that meatless diets are healthier and less detrimental to the environment. They care more about animals and their wellbeing. The number of vegetarians and vegans has been growing steadily since 1989 when western ideas began spreading in the new democracies of Eastern Europe. Some people go meatless for at least part of the year, others have simply cut down on their meat consumption, or have chosen to replace meat with fish. Spring fasting is considered very beneficial, as our bodies need cleansing and rest after the winter feasts filled with meat, fats and sugary foods.

Homemade Egg Noodles

DOMÁCE VAJEČNÉ REZANCE



SERVES **8**

PREPARATION TIME **20 mins**

RESTING TIME **30 + 20 mins**

COOKING TIME **3 – 4 mins**



200 g fine pasta flour

2 eggs

a pinch of salt



This kind of short, very thin noodles is almost solely used in our clear soups, like beef, hen or chicken stock. They are commonly served at wedding receptions and other festive occasions (**see page 155**). The amount of the flour in the recipe is approximate, and will depend on the size of your egg and the type of flour used.

- 01** Break the eggs into a medium bowl. Add a pinch of salt and beat with a fork until the yolks and the whites combine. Little by little, beat in the flour. When it gets chunky, turn the egg mixture onto a lightly floured rolling board. Work together until the dough is smooth, elastic and shiny. It should spring back at the touch of your finger. Shape the dough into a ball and wrap in cling film, or cover with a bowl. Let sit for 30 minutes at room temperature.
- 02** Unwrap the dough and divide into halves. Shape two balls, cover one of them with the bowl to keep it soft and pliable, and start working with the other one (**see photo 1**). Flatten the ball out and with a rolling pin, roll it out into a thin sheet. Turn the dough clockwise, as you are rolling it, applying pressure evenly from the middle to the edges. Flip the dough sheet over and dust it with flour if it gets sticky. Put aside and do the same with the other dough ball (**see photo 2**).
- 03** Cut the dough sheets into strips about 6 cm wide (**see photo 3**). Dust the strips with some more flour, place three or four on top of each other, and with a sharp knife, cut off the thin noodles (**see photo 4**). Spread them in a thin layer around a baking sheet lined with parchment paper or a clean dishtowel (**see photo 5**). Let dry for 20 minutes, then cook in a pot of salted water for 3 – 4 minutes. Add to a beef, chicken or hen stock.
- 04** If not cooked immediately, let the noodles dry on the baking sheet for a few hours. Gently transfer them into a shallow, lidded container or a cardboard box. Don't pack them too tightly, as they will break. Store in a cool, dry place and use within a week

Dear Kristina,

thank you for sharing your recipes for Slovak pasta. They look simple on the picture, but you probably need to have the right flour to make it at home. And I'm surprised no pasta machines are involved – it's all done by hand! It certainly takes a lot of skill – and patience.

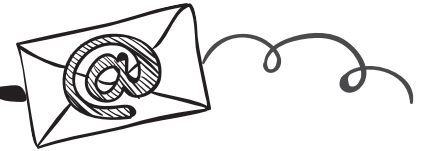
There seems to be quite a lot of variety in your country's gastronomy. Is it something to do with Slovakia's past? You write about similarities with Austrian and Hungarian dishes. How much have these cuisines influenced your cooking?

We, too, have had our famous pastry dough brought in by Austrian bakers. Have you heard of those flaky, buttery pastries filled with custard, jam or cream cheese? They are simply referred to as Wienerbrød or Vienna bread by Danes, but tourists call them Danish pastries. They come in various shapes and forms. Dad loved cinnamon buns. When he wasn't away travelling, he would have one with his morning coffee.

I hope your culinary project is coming along well.

Looking forward to your next chapter and more delights from Slovakia.

*Take care,
Anne*



Hello Anne,

it's interesting to see how easily cooking ideas travelled through regions and countries in the past. We thought it must have been difficult before the Internet, but history shows us that recipes crossed borders with no tolls, visas or passports. Food brought people together, no matter what country or nation they belonged to. This was also true about Slovaks. They mixed with the Magyars, Romanians, Serbs, Croatians, Rusyns and other nations in the old Kingdom of Hungary. When it became part of the Austrian Empire, Slovaks were exposed to still more influences. But the diversity in our cooking can also be explained by the variety of Slovakia's landscape and climate. We write about it in the next chapter, which gives an overview of our famous breads and pastries. You will also find Slovak cinnamon buns there, although under a different name.

*All the best,
Kristina*



Poppyseed, Apple & Sour Cherry Strudel is the queen among Slovak strudels, closely followed by walnut, apple and raisin filled strudels.



10



11



12



13



14



15

04 About 20 minutes before baking the bread, put the baking trays in the oven – one on the middle rack and the other one at the bottom. Preheat the oven to 250°C (480°F). When the oven is ready, turn the dough out from the banneton onto a piece of parchment paper or an oven-proof mat (**see photo 13**). Score the top of the loaf with a bread lame or a sharp knife (**see photo 14**). Slide it onto the baking tray and place on the middle rack in the oven. Pour a glass of water into the bottom tray to create steam.

05 Bake the bread with the steam tray for 10 minutes, then remove the tray and lower the temperature to 180°C (356°F). Bake for another 30 minutes, then take out of the oven. Transfer the loaf onto a cooling rack and let cool for at least 2 hours before slicing (**see photo 15**).



Pussy willows (*bahniatka*) are a symbol of spring and Easter. They are laid on the festive table and adorned with eggs.



Handmade ‚*kraslice*‘ – decorated Easter eggs – are a common article at street markets before Easter. They are not only used as ornaments, but also given to boys and men after ‚*oblievačka*‘ and ‚*šibačka*‘.

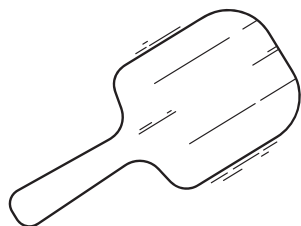
WHAT IS THERE ON THE SLOVAK EASTER TABLE

Eggs as a symbol of fertility and new life are omnipresent in Slovak homes at Easter time. They are exquisitely decorated and hung on the pussy willow (*bahniatka*) or forsythia (*zlatý dážd*) twigs placed either on the window sill or at the centre of the festive table.

Eggs are not only used as decorations and gifts, but they are also served at Easter meals: hard-boiled, scrambled, fried with ham or bacon and sprinkled with fresh herbs, incorporated into cakes and unique Easter dishes, like egg cheese (*syrek*).

Cold meats – mainly smoked ham and sausages are served with horseradish & beetroot salad on Easter Monday. Sunday and Monday breakfasts always include braided sweet bread, which has different names and shapes across the regions (*mazanec*, *pletenec*, *paska*).





**This particular Paska bread was baked in the reconstructed 300-year-old wood-fired oven at the Fintice Manor House. The cooking times were slightly different: The Paskas were baked uncovered for 10 minutes, then they were covered with tinfoil to prevent the tops from burning, and baked for another 30 minutes (see photo 2).

***In the east of Slovakia, Paska bread is served alongside Easter ham, smoked sausages, bacon, boiled eggs or egg cheese.



Trout (pstruh in Slovak) is the most common Slovak fish native to our lands.



Barbel (mrena in Slovak) is a carp-like freshwater fish of the genus *Barbus*.



LIFE IN OUR LAKES AND RIVERS

Fishing was one of the oldest and simplest forms of food provision. Although its importance decreased with the arrival of agriculture and livestock farming, fishing remained an important source of sustenance for our ancestors – mainly because of the abundance of fish and other creatures living in our streams, rivers, ponds and lakes.

The rising industrialization after WW2, as well as introduction of chemicals into agriculture, brought pollution to our soils and waters. To provide enough healthy fish for Slovak consumers, man-made ponds were built for fish farming, which have supplied most of our freshwater fish up to these days.

The most popular fish in Slovakia is **carp**, mainly because of its traditional use at Christmas dinner. Other favoured species include **trout**, **catfish**, **pike perch**, **northern pike** and **sturgeon**. The largest Slovak fish is **Danube salmon**, also known as redfish, which is native to the Danube basin. Because fish is generally considered a fasting food, it is increasingly consumed during Lent (**see page 47**) and other religious fasting times.

Traditional fishing with a rod, line and hook has become a very popular leisure activity in the last decades. In order to fish for wild fish in Slovakia today, you have to buy a valid „fisher's card” issued by the village or town office. Also, you have to have a fishing permission from the owner of the fishing ground.

There are about 900 fishing grounds in Slovakia, most of them located along the rivers of Danube (Dunaj in Slovak), Váh, Poprad, Ipeľ, Hron, Ondava, Orava, Laborec and Nitra. Recreational fishing is also allowed in Slovak dam reservoirs like Oravská priehrada, Liptovská Mara, Zemplínska Šírava, Duchonka, Veľká Domaša, Ružín or Dedinky.



My special thanks go to Jana – my graphic designer and a professional photographer. She has been on this creative journey with me since the beginning, always listening to my thoughts, comments and suggestions. Although *A Taste of Slovakia* series has come to an end, I will stay active on my website www.cookslovak.com and other **online platforms**



Here you can also get in touch if you want to order the previous volumes of the series (Summer, Autumn, Winter). Each book was recognized on the international stage through the prestigious Gourmand World Cookbook Awards in 2018, 2020, and 2023.

