

Title:

Russian Thanksgiving Dinner - Mystery Ingredients

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Summary:

Living for a year in Siberia was bound to results in a few laughs. There was no funnier time than my effort to celebrate Thanksgiving.

Keywords:

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Article Body:

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The Set Up

As an American male, my idea of cooking was dropping by the local Chinese restaurant on my way home from work. We are talking about a person who considers cooking rice a culinary challenge of the highest order. This lack of skill came to the forefront while spending a year teaching at a university in the Siberian city of Chita.

Thanksgiving

Experiencing the Russian culture was one of my primary reasons for moving to Siberia. Experiencing the American culture was apparently one of the prime reasons the University hired me. These conflicting view points resulted in every Russian and American holiday being celebrated, even if it wouldn't have been otherwise.

As the end of November approached, I started getting questions about Thanksgiving. My Russian peers and students were particularly interested in the concept of Thanksgiving dinner. In turn, I started asking seemingly innocent food related questions and was pleased to learn most of the necessary food items were not available in the local market. This included turkeys, cranberries and so on. Then I made my mistake.

Since the ingredients weren't available, I began to mouth off about the

injustice of missing Thanksgiving dinner. Oh, how I could cook a turkey. To bad everyone would miss out on it. The moral trifecta of justice, fate and karma rose up to put me in my place.

The uncle of someone's brother was flying in from Moscow. If I created a list, he would buy everything and bring it on the flight.

I was in deep, deep trouble.

Reverting to the times of my youthful indiscretions, I immediately did what anyone in my situation would. I emailed my mother for help. The first response was, "Very funny. You're going to cook?" After explaining the situation, I received a very long list of instructions written at a third grade level. "This is a knife" and so on...

Well, the magic day came and everything went shockingly well. The turkey tasted like turkey. The stuffing tasted like stuffing. Heck, the cranberries even came out red. Then it was time for the gravy.

In Siberia, you do not buy ingredients in pre-packaged bags. Instead, you buy everything in a clear plastic bag with no label. In theory, you should arrange everything at home so you know what it is when it comes time to cook. Thus did the flour adventures again.

Cooking instructions were read. Turkey juices went into the pan. Instructions were read. Flour went into the pan. Instructions were read. Constant stirring was undertaken. Instructions were read. Water was added.

Feeling cocky, I then did a tasting sample and nearly choked. The gravy was incredibly salty and exceedingly chunky. I added more water, but there was no change. For the next 20 minutes, I kept adding water and stirring. The gravy just kept getting chunkier, tasted horrible and actually began to smoke!

After awhile, one of my female students came into the kitchen to find out what was going on. She blanched as she tasted the gravy. We went through the instructions and I made a passing reference to my suspicion the flour might be bad.

She took one look at the flour and started laughing. Hysterically. She was laughing so hard she couldn't tell me the reason in English and my Russian was pretty bad. She recovered after a few minutes and gave me the English translation.

I had grabbed the stuff used to paste over holes in the wall, not the flour. Put

another way, I was making turkey drywall.

No wonder it was so chunky!

After the crowd left, I repaired a door knob hole in my bathroom. Thanksgiving lasted for months!