

Title:

Russian Cuisine

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Summary:

Let them eat cake.

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Article Body:

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Nowhere was that separation so evident, though, than it was in Russia of the last century. While the wealthy dined on caviar, pheasants, creamed chicken and ice cream, the peasants developed their own cuisine that is unequalled for its versatility and variety in the face of the resources at hand. When Russian cuisine first moved beyond its own borders, it was the dishes of the royal table that defined the food of the nation. But it is the so-called peasant cuisine that is the true heart of the nation.

There is no other nation or region in the world that makes so much of soup. Russian regional cuisine features at least seven broad categories of soups,

based on ingredients and regions. From thin vegetable broths flavored with herbs, to thick, hearty stews rich with meat and vegetables, soup is a mainstay of Russian cuisine. In many homes, a pot of shchi stood on the back burner of the stove, simmering throughout the day. Although it is technically 'cabbage soup', the method of cooking gives shchi a flavor that is indescribable, but unmistakable. In poorer households, shchi might have no ingredients other than cabbage and onions, simmered on the stove and then placed in the oven to 'draw' the flavors. A more fortunate household might add anything from beans to sausage to fish to vegetables, to make a savory, soured soup that sticks to the ribs and wakes the taste buds.

Bread is another staple of Russian regional cuisine, and there's nothing in the world to compare to Russian black rye bread. Heavy and meaty, with a characteristic 'sour' taste, Russian rye bread is nearly hearty enough to be a meal in and of itself. It's the perfect bread to offset salted meats, pickled cabbage and sauerkraut. Toasted and slathered with butter, it's the perfect breakfast to start a day off well, and dipped in soup, it adds texture and flavor to anything from the thinnest broth to the thick, hearty stews of the northern steppes.

It's impossible to speak of Russian cuisine without mention of borscht. Another soup, this one based on red beets, it is served in many ways throughout Russia. In the Ukraine, for instance, borscht often is made with tomatoes, and has pork and sausage added as well as beef. In Kiev, borscht is often served with sour cream and a sprinkling of caraway seeds. Each region has its own version, and each is fiercely proud and protective of it.

Russian cuisine, like Chinese and US and European regional cuisine, is in reality a cornucopia of styles and recipes, with a dish in Chechnya bearing little resemblance to the same dish in Leningrad. It is wonderful, varied and hearty fare - fit for more than the tables of kings. It is fit for the tables of the people.