

HOW TO MAKE RUSSIAN BORSCHT

Due to the large response from hungry husbands to my chicken soup epistle of last year, I am presenting this publication with another delicious soup recipe. This time a famous Russian one. I guarantee it will stick to your soul.

The recipe is secret and has been handed down from Voykin to Voykin for hundreds of years. It was given to me and my healthy brothers by my dear Mother just before we left Canada, where her borscht was famed far and wide for feeding not only a big Russian family, but a wandering Romanov or two.

Reading "special occasion" recipes makes me laugh, especially those by celebrities and famous chefs, who do their conjurings with meats and vegetables for our very commercialized holidays. These recipes are frustrating and expensive to prepare; another example of the Jones Syndrome. But now, dear friends, your worries are over. From now on, instead of keeping up with the Jones, you'll just have to keep up with the Voykins. And that, I assure you, will be easy and inexpensive because we enjoy Russian borscht for all the important holidays, and also in between. Frankly, our Russian borscht is a soup for all seasons.

A little known but true fact is that Russian borscht is a delicious and powerful aphrodesiac. Coincidentally, it is also a well known fact that Russian families traditionally never number less than five children. And so it is with the interests of the many love-starved and hungry greenkeepers in heart that I pass on my recipe for Romantic Russian Borscht. And I do this at the end of the golfing season, because I feel strongly that Midwest wives would welcome a little tender re-creation.

However, before I relate the recipe, I must clear up what I regard as a serious misconception throughout the Western world. My recipe is for Russian borscht, which is made with a basic ingredient of sweet cabbage with pieces of meat, and not for Ukrainian borscht containing red beets in a broth. You can perhaps understand my amazement and frustration in New York last January at the Russian Tea Room, the gathering place for many years for Manhattan's elite in the arts. Unfortunately, what the tea room called Russian borscht was actually Ukrainian borscht. This "goulash" mixture of beets and cabbage topped with sour cream is a good soup, but not a great one. A facsimile type of Ukrainian borscht is peddled in supermarkets throughout our land. Except for this major mistake, the other food in this famous restaurant was authentic Russian. (If you ever go there, be sure to order their cream of chicken soup called Roszolnick, made with chicken, giblets, potatoes and numerous vegetables.

Okay, here's my recipe.

First, put water in a large kettle and turn on the flame. When the water boils, add 3 pounds of shortribs, cut up. The shortribs should be lean. When water returns to a boil, add salt, reduce to simmer and cover. Simmer for about 1½ hours or until meat is ready to fall from bone. Skim fat off surface. While meat is simmering, chop 1 medium cabbage, 1 large seeded green pepper, 1 bunch of green onions, 2 tablespoons of carrot (optional), dice about 6 medium potatoes; crush 2 cloves of garlic. Melt a stick (¼ lb.) butter in a large skillet, add above vegetables along with 2 cans tomatoes. Saute slowly, stirring to coat vegetables with butter until cabbage is translucent (not soggy-do not overcook, as potatoes will become mushy).

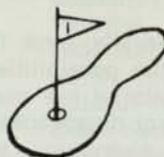
When vegetables are done (about ½ an hour) add to meat and water in soup kettle, add salt to taste, black pepper and 2 teaspoons fresh dill or dried dill weed. (Fresh dill is hard to come by. It can only be obtained once a year and at that, very rarely in supermarkets, as fresh dill must be picked and used immediately from a garden). Stir vegetables into a broth and meat, if necessary. You may have to add a little water, but the soup should be fairly thick. While I am stirring the stuff, I like to listen to some Russian songs, particularly "Meadowland" played by the Red Army State Band. Never play acid rock or Texahilly, because I will not be responsible for how the borscht turns out.

Now bring out your borscht bowls (any large deep bowls will do), ladle a generous portion in each, and start to eat. But wait! Let's go Russian all the way. Get several dry, small red hot peppers, crush them (or a dash of bottled, crushed pepper) and stir them into the bowls. Eat with Russian rye, black or pumpernickel bread. Then, for an ecstasy shot, put that chilled bottle of Stolichya vodka on the table. Uncork it, and pour down a shot and immediately lift yourself right into the borscht ethos. In this manner, Mr. and Mrs. Greenkeeper, you are ready for the most elite and sumptuous meal you will ever taste. Hopefully, after enjoying that super soup - Russian borscht - a romantic evening will follow.

P.S. - For an added bonus, put in refrigerator any left over borscht. To reheat, place in saucepan and simmer till heated through. Never, but never reboil left over borscht. I find borscht tastes even better the second day after flavors have a chance to settle.

Paul Voykin

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