



PolishOrigins

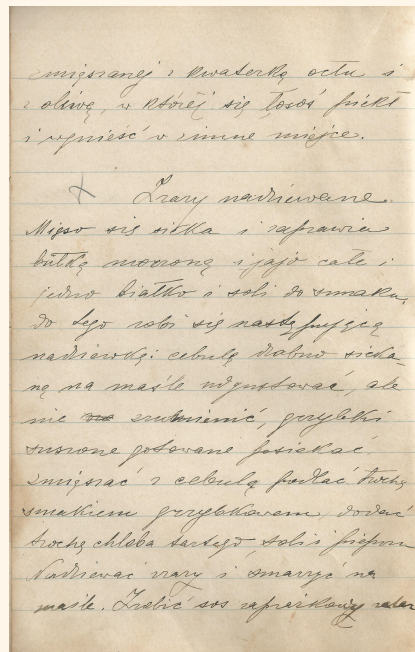
CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

POLISH RECIPES

Genuine recipes of our grandmothers

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Christmas is a very special time.
In Poland we celebrate especially the Christmas
Eve. Well, we celebrate for the
next few days as well, but the menu for traditional
Polish Christmas Eve
is different, special and unique. We have to
remember that this was the time of
the year when fresh fruits and vegetables were not
available. People had to use
what they had in their cellars or what they
managed to preserve. This is why
instead of fresh fruits, people used dried ones,
salted herring instead of a fresh
one, groats and cabbage.



Above there is a genuine page with the recipe from my grandmother's recipe notebook.

So what is the first dish that comes to your mind when you think about Christmas? For me it is beetroot sourdough borsch – barszcz czerwony.

Barszcz czerwony (Beetroot sourdough borsch)

It's a long process. You have to plan it much earlier. But it's worth it. I can't imagine Christmas Eve without Barszcz. It's hot, spicy, full of flavours, delicious. Even if you cook Christmas Barszcz the same way on any other date it never tastes the same.

The secret is the sourdough. It's prepared about 2 weeks before Christmas. My grandma used to collect scraps of the wholemeal rye bread and dried it. Than in a clean big glass jar, she put sliced beets together with the dried bread and covered it with water. And just waited for the ruby fluid. The borsch made this way was perfect. It was sour but sweet at the same time. However, if you didn't collect the bread for the last weeks you can still make a borsch. Just this time we will use salted water, so be prepared to use more fresh beets to add this sweet flavor.

Cut fresh beets into pieces. Separately boil the water and salt it. For 1 liter (1 fl qt) of water use one tablespoon of salt. The amount of fluid will depend on the amount of beats. It has to cover all the beets, otherwise mould may appear. Just remember that it has to be non-iodized table salt or a pickling salt. Iodized salt won't do the magic.

After boiling, leave the water to cool down.



Prepare the herbs: peppercorns, bayleaf, allspice and garlic cloves. In the glass or ceramic (no plastic!) container prepare a layer of herbs, then cover with the layer of beets and again herbs. Do that until you run out of beets. Then cover it with cooled (but not cold!) salty water. Make sure you covered all the beets. It's worth to cover it with a small plate, to make sure that all the beets are under the water surface. Then cover it with a cloth and leave in a dark, warm place for about two weeks. Have an eye on it, to make sure that no mould appeared.



Make sure to prepare the borsch on the Christmas Eve, so the color remains. Every time you reheat it, it will lose the color bit by bit and from the beautiful ruby red it will get more and more brownish. It will still be tasty, but will just lose the color. So for Christmas Eve we want to have it beautifully red.

The day before you plan to cook the borsch take about two handfuls of dried mushrooms (this is the amount for a 7-liter pot – a little bit less than 2 gallons) and soak it for the night. On the Christmas Eve prepare a vegetable broth with the fresh beets. This is the moment when you decide how many beets you want to add. Taste your beetroot sourdough. If it's sour and salty, then add more fresh beets. But if you used only dried bread and the beats for the sourdough, then it will be sweeter and you will need less beets at this point. When the broth is almost ready, add mushrooms. Add the beetroot sourdough. Again, the amount depends on the size of the pot you used and on your own preferences. Tasting is the key to success. After few times you will know what works best for you.

Chop an onion and fry it until it's golden. Then add it to the borsch together with minced garlic (just one or two cloves). In the end, fry 2 tablespoons of flour on oil and add it to the borsch. It won't change much of the taste but it will preserve the color for longer.



Uszka („Ears”)

There is no barszcz without uszka! The word “uszka” means little ears. Well, some of your uszka will look like ears, others will not. But for sure they will taste delicious.

For the filling you will need about 200 grams (about 7 oz) of dried mushrooms (we usually use boletus mushroom), one medium onion, about 2-3 tablespoons of bread crumbs, one egg, salt and pepper. First, boil the mushrooms, until they are soft. Then chop finely an onion and fry it until it's golden. The next step is to chop the mushrooms. You can blend it as well, but chopping it gives a little bit of texture. Mix mushrooms, onion, egg and bread crumbs, add some salt and pepper. The filling is ready.

For the dough you will need some flour, about 3 table spoons of oil, one egg and some water. How much you ask? Well, Polish grandmas do everything “na oko”, what means they measure it with their eyes. So just mix the wet ingredients and then add gradually the flour. If the dough is too thick, add some water.

How to make them? Probably there is about a dozen ways of doing it. But here is the way my grandma taught me. Roll the dough finely, than cut it in squares. Put some filling in the middle of each square (the amount will depend on the size of your square), then fold it into a triangle. Wrap it around your finger and glue the ends together.



Boil them in salted water until they float on the surface for about 30 seconds.

Zupa grzybowa (Mushroom soup)

There are actually two soups typical for a Polish Christmas Eve. Bortsch and mushroom soup. I was shocked when I found out once, that some people eat mushroom soup instead of bortsch on the Christmas Eve! But they do and it usually depends on their place of origins.

Soak the mushrooms for the night. The amount of mushrooms will depend on the amount of soup you're making. Prepare a vegetable broth. Remove all the vegetables and add mushrooms. Boil until they are soft. Add one tablespoon of butter (big tablespoon). The last ingredients are sour cream, salt and pepper - add them according to your preferences.



Sałatka jarzynowa (Vegetable salad)

So we cooked a vegetable broth. But what to do with the vegetables we used? Throw it away? Never! Our ancestors didn't waste anything. So what you can do with them? A vegetable salad (Sałatka jarzynowa)!

Every housewife makes her own version of the salad. Great thing about it is that you can add whatever you have or whatever you like. Here is my family recipe.

Take all the vegetables from the broth (carrot, parsley, celery root) and dice them. The size of the dices depends on your preferences. Important thing is to be consequent – all dices should have similar size. Boil 2 or 3 potatoes, cool them down and dice. Add diced fresh apple and pickled cucumbers. I also add canned green pea and corn. Then add salt and pepper. In a cup mix some mayonnaise, mustard and sour cream. The proportions may differ depending on your preferences. In my case the amount of each is similar.

If you prepared some huge amount of the salad, you may want to wait with mixing everything with the sauce. Leave it only with salt and pepper in the fridge and it will stay fresh for longer.



Gołąbki z kaszą gryczaną (Gołąbki with buckwheat)

Traditional gołąbki are usually with rice and meat. However it's not a reason not to eat gołąbki on Christmas Eve! This is the meatless version of gołąbki.

We will need sauerkraut. But not hacked, chopped or sliced, but the whole head. My grandma fills a huge wooden barrel with sauerkraut before the winter and on the top she leaves few heads of cabbage. Specially for Christmas Eve gołąbki. However if you do not have a wooden barrel or didn't have time to make your own sauerkraut this year, don't worry. Take the fresh head of a cabbage and boil it with one teaspoon of citric acid and salt. It has to soften a bit. Than you just hold your cabbage with its root up and cut each leaf separately.

Boil the buckwheat (the amount will depend on the amount of leaves and its size) with a few dried mushrooms. Fry chopped onion and add some more chopped mushrooms. Mix everything, add salt and pepper and fold with the cabbage leaves. Then put it tightly in the roasting pan, add some oil and water and bake for about an hour. If you have trouble with holding gołąbki together, you can help yourself and tie them with a bit of a thin rope or a thread, just remember to remove it before eating :-).



Karp (Carp)

Carp is a traditional fish served on the Christmas Eve in Poland. I remember bunch of carps swimming in my grandmum's bath when I was a kid. I got friendly with them but every year they were disappearing just before Christmas. It took me few years to understand what was their fate...

There are two ways of cooking carp in my family. The one I remember was baked with champignon mushrooms and cheese. The other way is much older. My great grandmother was frying the carp. The first steps are the same for both versions.

First, rub some salt and pepper into pieces of the fish. If you want to bake it, then fry sliced champignon mushrooms on the butter. Put the fish into the roasting pan and cover it with fried mushrooms. Add some oil and bake it.

When the fish is almost ready, sprinkle it with your favorite yellow cheese and when the cheese is melted, the dish is ready.

If you want to fry it, then rub gently salt and pepper into the fish, cover it with some flour and put it on the hot frying pan.



Kapusta z grzybami (Cabbage with mushrooms)

Boil the sauerkraut. Then change the water to get rid of the sauer taste.



Add some sliced dried mushrooms. Boil pea (the white, big one) with a little bit of salt. When it's soft, knead it with a pestle (this is my grandmum's way of doing it, you can just blend it) for a paste. Than mix it with the boiled sauerkraut and mushrooms when it's soft. Prepare a roux from the oil, add flour and mix it in.

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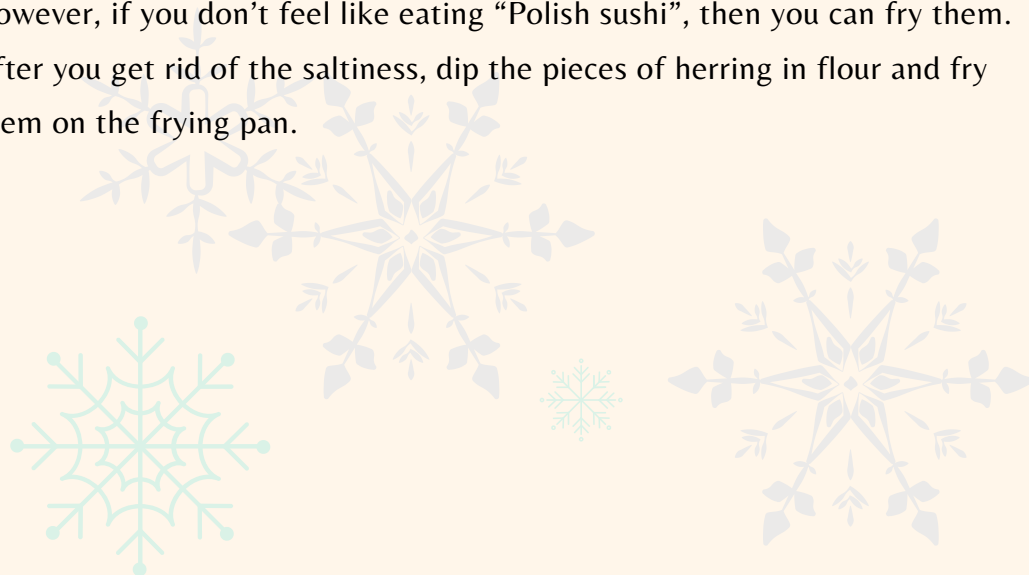
Śledź w oleju (Herring with oil)

Herring is a must have on the Christmas table. We usually just buy whole salted herrings. They are kept in a jar filled with salted water. So first thing is to get rid of that salt. Put it in water for the night, change the water and repeat if necessary. Then gently dry them with paper towel, put them in a glass jar, add some sliced onion, bayleaf and cover with oil. It should be prepared at least one day before Christmas.

In this case, the oil is very important. Each region of Poland will use different kind of the oil. One of my grandmas uses mainly rapeseed oil, the other linseed oil. Both live in the East of Poland just about 100 km away from each other. So it's rather up to you which oil you will use.

Fried herring

However, if you don't feel like eating "Polish sushi", then you can fry them. After you get rid of the saltiness, dip the pieces of herring in flour and fry them on the frying pan.



Pierogi z kapustą i grzybami **(Pierogis with cabbage and mushrooms)**

If there is a Christmas version of gołąbki, is there also any Christmas version of pierogis, you ask? Of course! And as you probably already know, it contains sauerkraut and mushrooms.

Boil the sauerkraut in unsalted water to get rid of the sour taste. Change the water as many times as you like, to reduce the sourness. Add mushrooms, bayleaf, allspice and boil until the cabbage is soft. Then put everything on the colander to get rid of the water. Add some fried onion, salt and pepper, bread crumbs and an egg. The consistency is important here. To prepare a dough you need flour, an egg, some oil and water. It's exactly the same as for Uszka.



Makowiec (Poppy seed cake)

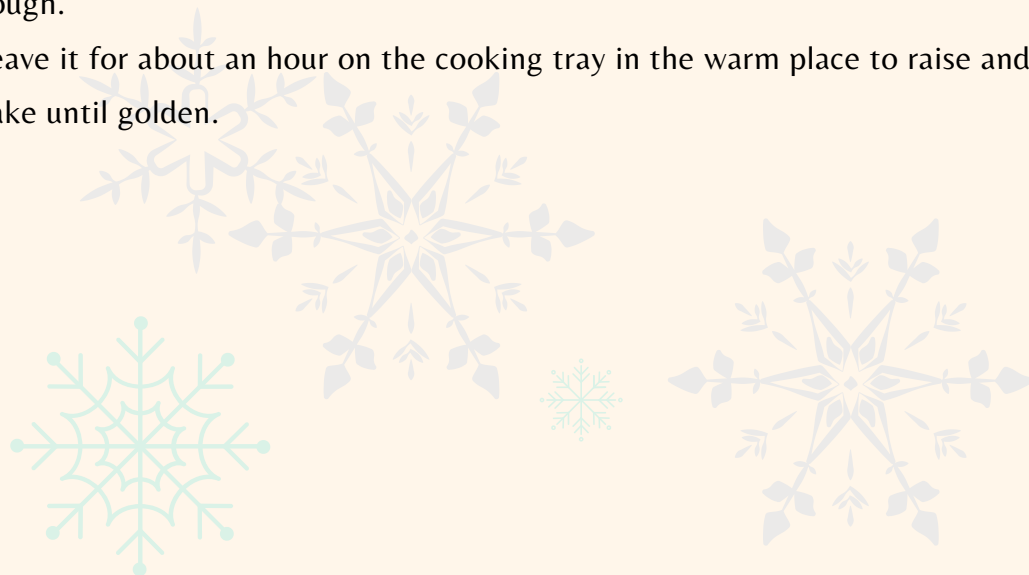
If you are a big fan of cakes and cookies, then you'll have to wait for Easter. However, Polish Christmas also have some sweet treats. Not many, but it still counts.

The traditional ones that were made in my home contained a lot of poppy seed. Here is "Makowiec" my grandma always does.

In the old times, usually people had their own poppy seed. They were soaking it during the night, then rubbed it with pestle to get something what we could describe as textured paste. Then added some honey. Today you can buy canned poppy seed, that is ready to use.

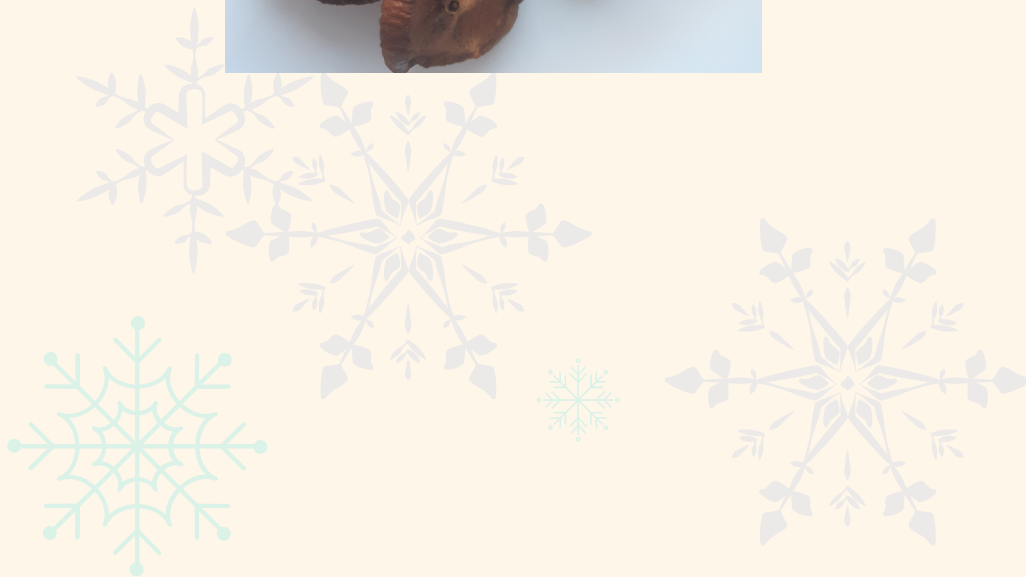
For the dough you will need ½ kg (17,5 oz) of flour, 150 grams (5,3 oz) of butter, 2 eggs, 1 egg yolk, 3 tablespoons of sour cream, pinch of salt, and 60 grams (2,1 oz) of yeast. After preparing the dough divide it in two parts (each for one cake). Roll them into squares or rectangles, depending on the size of the cooking tray. Cover it with the poppy seed paste. You can also add any additional ingredients at this point like raisins or nuts. Roll the dough.

Leave it for about an hour on the cooking tray in the warm place to raise and bake until golden.



Kompot z suszu (Dried fruit compote)

A traditional non-alcoholic drink for Christmas is dried fruit compote. It make sense, since fresh fruits were hard or even impossible to get at this time of the year. So, what fruits did our ancestors use? The ones they preserved during the Summer and Autumn: apples, pears and plums. All you have to do is to boil them with a little bit of cinnamon and cloves. You can also add some lemon juice.



So here you have 12 traditional Polish Christmas Eve dishes to try out in your home. What we have to remember is that each region had its own typical dish. Christmas Eve table for sure looked different in each part of Poland. Even in our PolishOrigins team, Christmas dishes look different depending on the region we come from.

So do Polish people avoid meat through whole Christmas, you ask? Of course not. Christmas Eve is the last day of Advent when we are vegetarians. After Christmas Eve dinner and unwrapping presents that Christmas Star brings us (well... we have different present suppliers in different regions of Poland and yes, we unwrap presents on Christmas Eve), there is a mass at the midnight called Pasterka. After coming back from it, you are allowed to eat whatever you want... but this is a completely different story...

Merry Christmas!



Who we are

PolishOrigins was established in 2004 out love to genealogy and passion to sharing historical and current beauty of central and eastern Europe.

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