
BALKAN CUISINE COOKING CLASS WITH KOSTA POPOVIC



MUSAKA (MOUSSAKA) WITH POTATOES

Musaka is a common dish in Serbian cuisine, and is typically made with potatoes instead of eggplant, like the Greek version. The eggplant can still be added to improve the taste, as well as completely replace the meat if you prefer a vegetarian version of musaka.

Ingredients:

- 3 eggs
- 1 cup plain yogurt or sour cream
- 2 cups milk
- 1/2 teaspoon salt, or to taste
- Vegeta (all-spice seasoning)
- 5-6 medium/large potatoes
- Olive or other oil.
- 1 pound lean ground beef
- 1 medium eggplant or ~ 1/2 lb eggplant pulp
- One large onion, chopped

Preparation:

- Put the chopped onions and ground beef in the oiled skillet on medium/high and keep breaking up beef as it cooks. Keep mixing and cooking as the meat browns and onions get tender. Add vegeta and salt to taste.
- Peel the eggplant and chop it finely. If you are not using the pulp, cook the eggplant in some water and salt for 10-15 minutes, just to soften it up. Discard the water and add the eggplant to the beef and onion. Stop cooking when the meat is brown and onions are yellow/caramelized.

- Peel the potatoes and slice them thinly to about ½ cm thickness.
- Make your first potato layer about 2 potato slices, with the surface being fairly even. Sprinkle the layer with salt to taste.
- Add about ½ of the meat/eggplant mixture on top of the potatoes and spread evenly.
- Make another layer of potatoes to completely cover the meat mixture.
- Add the rest of the meat/eggplant mixture on top and spread evenly
- Finish with one more layer of potatoes
- Bake covered in a preheated oven at 450F for 20 minutes.
- In the meantime, beat the eggs and mix with yogurt and milk.
- After you uncover the moussaka pour this mixture over the top covering all the potato slices.
- Bake for another 30-45 minutes until potatoes are brown on the top. If you want, you can turn the broiler on for the last few minutes to make them crunchy.

BAKLAVA

Baklava is a rich, sweet pastry made of layers of phyllo dough filled with chopped nuts and sweetened with syrup. It is characteristic of the cuisines of the former Ottoman Empire, which is how it found its way into Balkans, where it has been traditionally prepared for a few centuries and has become an integral part of cuisine in many Balkan countries.

Ingredients:

- 1 pound frozen phyllo sheets
- 1 cup melted butter (or oil)
- 1 cup milk
- 2-3 cups finely chopped walnuts
- 2 cups sugar
- ½ cup raisins (to taste)
- 1 cup honey
- 1 cup water
- 1/3 cup lemon juice (to taste)

Preparation:

- Using a pastry brush, lightly brush the bottom and sides of a 9x13" pan with melted butter/milk mixture.
- Open the phyllo dough and layer 6 whole leafs (or 12 half leafs) in the pan, buttering each layer as you go. (The edges will extend over the side, cut them off and use in future layers)
- Keep pastry not being used covered with clean damp dish towel to keep it from drying out.
- Mix walnuts with 1 cup of sugar
- Spread 1/4 cup of the walnut/sugar mixture and sprinkle some raisins.

- Keel laying 2 or 3 leafs of dough, (don't forget to butter each layer) and ¼ cup of walnuts/sugar/raisins until you run out of walnuts
- Finish with 4-6 leafs of phyllo dough.
- Cut baklava pastry into 2-inch diamonds.
- Bake at 350° until brown and crisp, about 30 to 40 minutes
- Meanwhile, in a saucepan, combine remaining 1 cup sugar, honey, water, and lemon juice and bring to a boil.
- Boil baklava syrup for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until syrupy.
- Cool and pour over baklava.
- For best results, allow baklava to soak the syrup for at least a few hours, the longer the better.
- Serve with sliced lemon strips.

PASULJ PREBRANAC (BAKED BEANS IN SAUCE)

This is a national dish amongst Serbians. The beans used are a sort of large yellow bean that has a buttery texture, but if you can't find them in a Balkan market, you can use Peruanos/Limas available in Mexican markets or a mixture of various beans.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb large lima beans
- 2-3 medium onions, cut up
- Approx. ¼ cup oil (to sauté the onions and carrots)
- 1 large carrot, cut up
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 Tbsp paprika seasoning
- Ground black pepper
- Vegeta
- 1 Tbsp of flour
- Smoked meat (beef, pork, bacon - optional)

Preparation:

- Soak the beans for 30 mins
- Boil beans for about 10-15 min, and then drain completely
- Add fresh boiling water, bay leaf, salt/vegeta to taste, and smoked meat and then cook beans for 1 hour over low heat, or until cooked, but not falling apart.
- Check occasionally to make sure you don't completely dry them out. Drain, but save the water, don't discard.

- In a separate pan, sauté onions and carrots, and when caramelized, add paprika seasoning, garlic, black pepper and a tablespoon of flour
- Place a layer of beans in a baking dish, traditionally clay baking dishes.
- Follow with a layer of onions and finish with a layer of beans.
- Pour the water you save from cooking the beans on top.
- Bake for 15 minutes at 400 F. Mix it all together and bake for another 20 minutes or until well baked on top.

PODVARAK (BAKED SAUERKRAUT)

Podvarak is a dish made of finely chopped sauerkraut, onions, other vegetables and optional meat, usually pork or beef, which are combined and baked in an oven.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb of finely chopped sauerkraut
- Lard/oil
- Black pepper, 1 garlic clove, minced
- Smoked meat (optional)

Preparation:

- Cook the sauerkraut with lard on low heat for an hour, with 1 cup of water, add more as necessary
- Add the spices and smoked meat, mix well and place in the oven at 400F for 30 mins or until well baked.

URNEBES SALAD

Urnebes (translation: disorder, mess) is a type of salad characteristic of Serbian cuisine. It is made of cheese and fire roasted peppers as well as ground dry hot paprika.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb mixture of crumbled white feta and kefir cheese
- 10 finely chopped fire roasted peppers
- 6-7 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tbsp hot paprika
- 3 crumbled hard boiled egg yolks
- oil/salt to taste

Preparation:

- Mix all the ingredients together. Serve cold

TURŠIJA (TORSHI)

Tursija refers to pickled vegetables in the cuisine of many Balkan and Middle East countries. Tursija is a traditional appetizer or salad and making turşu at home is still a widespread tradition during the autumn months, even in the big cities.