
Erasmus Club Cooking Class Nr. One

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In the second half of November, the first Czech cooking class was organised by the Erasmus Club of Faculty of Arts here at Charles University in Prague. The Erasmus students who attended the event learned to make the most traditional Czech side dish, Czech dumplings.

The event was opened by a brief presentation on the different kinds of dumplings served here. The class itself was mainly concerned with the bread dumplings ("houskové knedlíky") most commonly used as a side dish with things like Goulash and Svičková. These are usually made in a long cylindrical shape and then cut into slices. Then there are potato dumplings ("bramborové knedlíky"), made from mashed potatoes and also served in slices, and bacon dumplings ("špekové knedlíky"). The bacon dumplings are usually made in small ball shapes and are mixed with pieces of bacon. Stuffed dumplings ("plněné knedlíky") were next on the presentation - they are also round, are filled with smoked meat, and are generally served with sauerkraut. There are also sweet dumplings which can be desserts or main meals in the Summer. They are round and most often filled with apricots, plums or strawberries, then sprinkled with cottage cheese. The final two types of dumplings which were mentioned are the Karlsbader dumpling ("Karlovarský knedlík") which is similar to German ball shaped type of bread dumplings (the main difference to the Czech type aside of the shape is the seasoning by herbs which is missing in the Czech case), and the furry dumplings ("chlupaté knedlíky") made out of previously uncooked potatoes.

After the presentation we set about preparing the food. First several of us took turns cutting the bread rolls into small chunks whilst the tutor mixed up the dough out of flour, lukewarm milk, an egg, salt and backing powder. The dough was then passed around so that we could all have a go at making sure there was plenty of air in the dough so it would rise and see what consistency the mixture should be. When this was done the bread was added and the dough was moulded into long sausage like shapes. Then we chatted to one another as they boiled. When it was time to remove the dumplings from the boiling water (the cooking takes 25 minutes), the tutor produced this interesting Czech gadget called "kráječ na knedlíky" (dumplings' slicer). It is a sort of scoop with cheese wire attached so that you can slice the dumpling straight after you have taken it from the pot.

At first the dumplings were a bit hot as they burnt my fingers but soon we were all trying them and they were delicious! They are similar to English dumplings in a way, although the British make theirs with suet and they are prepared in small round ball shapes. Those dumplings will then usually be placed in a stew to cook; in the Czech Republic the dumplings are cooked separately and usually served with meat and sauce

The Czech cooking class is the first a several which will take place, at the request of previous students who took part in the ERASMUS programme.

The dumplings were easy to make and did not take that long to prepare, here is the recipe so you can try them yourself:

Ingredients

0,5 kg HRUBÁ MOUKA (Czech flour type with bigger grains, actually closer to semolina than normal flour used e.g. for backing of a cake) (NOTE: IT MUST BE HRUBÁ FLOUR)

A little over half package BACKING POWDER

A little over half table spoon SALT

About 300 ml lukewarm MILK

1 EGG

2-3 BREAD ROLLS (it is possible to use also other types of white bread, e.g. a baguette).

Preparation method

1. First cut the bread into small square like chunks. Then put them to one side.
2. Prepare a mixing bowl and add the flour and backing powder (possible is also to use yeast, but in such a case the mixture will need about ? hour to rise; the backing powder rises immediately).
3. Pour lukewarm milk over the backing powder (Note: the milk must be warm so that the backing powder will rise) and leave to rise.
4. Add the egg and mix the dough.
5. Then add the salt, but be careful to make sure the dough has risen so the salt does not interrupt the process.

6. Add the bread to the dough and then hook it using a spoon till it no longer sticks to the bowl and it is thick. A good way to hook the dough is to push the spoon under the dough and scoop up. This is also an ideal way how to get enough air into the mixture. If the air is missing, the dumplings will not be soft.
7. Roll the mixture into 2-3 long sausage like strips before placing in a pan of boiling water.
8. They should be ready after 25 mins.
9. Remove from the pan and slice, best served warm with a gravy based dish.
10. Enjoy.

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