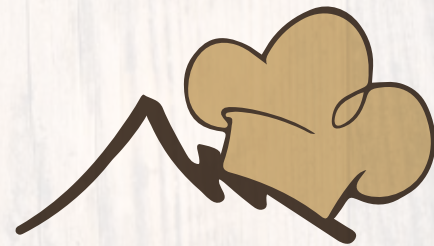


MONTENEGRO



Mountain Bounty

TRADITIONAL DISHES OF THE MOUNTAIN
REGIONS OF MONTENEGRO



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Team coordinator: Snežana Zečević

Recipes: Hosts and hostesses from the north of Montenegro

Recipes adapted by: Jelica Pešić

Text: Sonja Živaljević, Jelena Krivčević

Translation: Peter Stonelake

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Dear friends,

You have in front of you a publication which comes about with the aim of presenting in one place typical dishes from the mountain areas of Montenegro. The cuisine of this area is a reflection of the culture, tradition and history of the people who live here. This is an ethnically diverse territory, and every nation brings its own customs and recipes, and contributes to the riches of mountain cooking. What everyone who lives in the mountains has in common, what is as integral to them as their genetic code, is strong and high-calorie food, vital for the harsh weather conditions, but also for the great efforts and physical activity that are characteristic of this area, given that livestock breeding and agriculture have always been the main sources of income. An additional characteristic of the mountain kitchen comes from the fact that in the mountains folk have always lived in poverty, but this poverty demanded creativity in cooking and dependence on a large number of "wild" foodstuffs, which were not cultivated but simply picked in the forests and in the meadows, and this is a custom which carried on to this day in the rural regions. Our mountains are also a nurturing environment and the local people have survived various lean times by eating whatever they could pick.

Apart from recipes, we also present you with some of the stories that we have collected, related to the dishes, and to the habits and foodstuffs connected to those dishes. These recipes and stories will offer you a true insight into our culture and will explain to you who we are. Please do not take these recipes as the letter of the law: while collecting them we realised that a particular dish is prepared differently in various places, and also that the same dish in two territories can bear two different names. We have chosen the version which is most common, but feel free to experiment - every cook gives a dish their own personal stamp and has their own particular secret ingredient. These are not dishes that you will readily find in local restaurants - these are dishes that are prepared exclusively at home, and this publication is our contribution to ensure that these dishes do not die out. And this is not only our contribution. The recipes and stories which we present are not made up by us - we have merely collected them from more than 50 domestic cooks, chefs, housewives and shepherds in the mountains of Montenegro. We take this opportunity to thank them for the enthusiasm and courtesy they have shown. We would also like to thank all the other contributors who helped in the refining of the recipes, the preparation of the text, the photography and the entire work which

has led to this publication ending up into your hands. And of course we owe particular gratitude to the donors who have enabled this entire venture. Part of this work is being carried out through the Montenegro-Albania Cross-Border Programme financed by the EU and co-financed by the Ministry of Public Administration of Montenegro, and part is through a project financed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, through FAO and in cooperation with the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

You can sample the dishes presented in this publication in households along the local fine cuisine route and in restaurants and hotels which have trained their chefs to prepare these dishes; you will find the list on the site www.montegastro.me.

Read, find out and try. And, of course, enjoy getting to know us!

Jelena Krivčević,
Executive Director
Regional Development Agency for Bjelasica,
Komovi and Prokletije

The story of the table

Slavic tribes have been living in the part of the Dinaric Mountains which today occupies a large part of the geography of Montenegro since the sixth century – nearly one and a half millennia. Undoubtedly before them other people groups made use of the abundant resources of the pastures, fast-flowing rivers and peaceful lakes, and forests full of game – Illyrians, Celts, Romans, and at the same time, Vlachs, Saxons, Albanians, Turks and various people groups fleeing adversity. The roads from the Adriatic Sea led through the mountains deep into the interior of the Balkans and beyond. Traces were left by trading caravans, messengers and wedding processions from Europe's richest royal courts, and foreign soldiers from all four corners of the globe. Cities appeared, disappeared and sprang up again from the ashes. Villages appeared and were abandoned on the most precipitous slopes. For a long time houses were built from stone and wood, and these houses sought safety on the highest peaks, but at least there were high places. The katuns – settlements where shepherds pasture their flocks in the mountains during the summer – have changed least over the centuries. In recent years solar panels have enabled mobile phones to resound even in cottages at a height of 1,800 metres. It is easier now to get to these katuns – they are accessible by road, but there are significantly fewer people and livestock in the katuns than before. It is encouraging that the new times are bringing a concern for nature, a return to a “more natural” way of life, and so the mountain morning freshness, teeth-tingling spring water and the taste of homemade bread are being appreciated



more and more. Some remember it as the best taste of their childhood, guests experience it for the first time and try to remember it, to carry it with them when they leave the mountains of Bjelasica, Komovi, Prokletije, Durmitor and Sinjajevina, the Tara Canyon or the Lim Valley.

Over the centuries the population, habits and customs, foodstuffs and recipes have changed, but some “forms” of the dining table, dining itself, as well as a special relationship towards food, can still be seen today. These are the mountains, after all.

Trpeza is a Balkan (Byzantine) word of Greek origin which refers to a four-legged table, i.e. the table on which food is set. A rich trpeza refers to a “lavish spread”, overflowing with various dishes. But the road towards a wooden table with four legs, around which the entire family or a group of friends sits, was a long one. Of course, with the exception of medieval feudal lords or monastic brotherhoods.

In the small village houses it was much more convenient to free up space and hang up on the wall a sofa – a small, low, round wooden table which the Ottomans brought to the Balkans. One could take the sofa out anywhere, under the nearest apple tree for example, to enjoy a pleasant day, and it was also convenient to sit a group of children around it on the floor and to eat, for example, priganicas (small fried balls of dough) and cheese without plates or cutlery (very economical). In the cottages in the katuns, where everything revolves around the processing of milk, the sofa is still today a very useful thing. And finally, it is very easy to make, or carry with you, or load onto a horse. The dinner table can be even smaller. In the mountains



where the meadows, which need to be mowed from dawn to dusk or the fields where wheat is harvested in a rush in order to beat the rainclouds, are far from the house, food was brought out to the host and the helpers usually around midday. In that “lunch break”, a girl or woman would untie and spread out on the grass a bošča in the shade of a tree or near a stream. The bošča is a forerunner of the picnic blanket – a coloured woollen shawl, handwoven of course. It is strong enough to carry some bread, curds, a little cured meat or some stewed vegetables. It is also a table which is very quick to clear. In just a moment the corners of the shawl are tied, or if there is any food left first you can let the ants serve themselves and clean up the crumbs, while the mowers or reapers are resting.

The main means of transport in the mountains was horse. For travellers, any sort of flat, largish rock beside the track or a cleanly cut stump was a wonderful motivation to take a rest and enjoy one’s lunch. Can a dining room be any bigger or more lavish? An expanse of forests and meadows on either side, snow-capped mountain peaks in the distance, a smiling, wide blue sky overflowing with surprises, the sound of rustling leaves... Can anything be purer? A rock recently rinsed in the dew and dried by the sun. A tree protected for months by the snow; perhaps only lightly touched by a squirrel, or used by

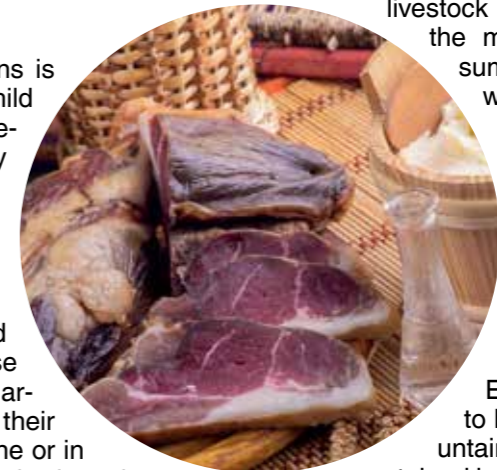


a rabbit to hide behind.

The smallest dinner table in the mountains is one’s own palm. A shepherd or a child walking to school – and today there are those who traipse many kilometres to school – sits on the grass and takes out of a woollen bag a piece of kolobotnjice (corn bread), a portion of dried meat or cheese and a clove of garlic. And so, from their hand, either alone or in merry company, slowly and joyfully, both body and soul are strengthened.

The mountains are respected by those who live in them. It is not always easy there. As beautiful and generous as they may seem, they can also be “unaccommodating” and merciless. But they charm their way into your heart so that you cannot live without them, and they are happiest when the sound of people calling to each other or of sheep bells echoes, or a line of mountaineers meanders through them.

And people respect their own effort, sweat and exertion to provide food in the mountains – for themselves and for the



livestock that they mainly depend on. Both the metres-deep snow and the rainy summers, both famines and years of war, both wolves and brigands are etched into their genes... And both fear and loneliness, and the threat of starvation. This is all found in the proverbs: “There is no greater trial than an empty stomach”, “Protracted, like a year of famine”, “Hunger drives even the wolf from the forest”, “In hungry hands every morsel is small”... Every morsel of bread, therefore, is to be respected. It is a gift of the mountain and of hardworking hands. Contained in it is also the love of the hosts, their good thoughts and wishes.

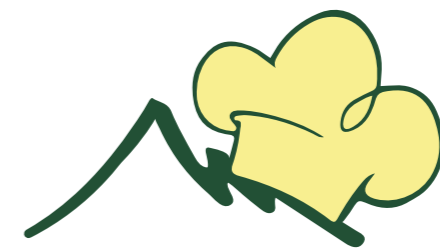
The mountain dinner table is not so modest and simple, as one may hear.

Even when the whole thing fits onto your hand – a hot and fragrant jacket potato, baked in an oven or in the fireplace, or the crust of hot, homemade bread, spread with kajmak – it is inseparable from the mountain and its people.

And the Montenegrin mountains are the most sumptuous in the world.

Every one of them is a special tale, a world of special beauty, of special history, but on every one of these mountains all of one’s senses are stimulated.

Enjoy!



Flour and milk

Regardless of the way of life, which for a long time had often been nomadic, even though livestock breeding was the main activity, the local food was never monotonous. Milk-based products and grain constituted the basis for mountain cuisine.



Kolobotnjica (corn bread)

Ingredients for 4 persons: 800g/1lb 12oz corn flour, 5g/1 tsp salt, 15ml/1 tbsp oil, 3g/1 tsp bicarbonate of soda, 3g/1 tsp baking powder, 5g/1 tsp sugar, 1 litre/1.8pt water

Preheat the oven to 250°C. Mix the flour in with the rest of the ingredients. Mix it for as long as possible so that the dough gains a medium thickness. When the dough begins to separate from the bowl, turn out into a well-greased baking pan. Bake in the oven for 20 minutes at 250°C, then 20-30 minutes at 200°C.

Corn or kolomboć

It was the 17th century. As with everything else, corn (maize) arrived in the Balkans from several directions. From Spain via Turkey, from Italy, Hungary... Traders also brought it from the south across the mountain region of Montenegro, from the coast and from the Zeta-Bjelopavlići Plain, and from Kosovo, or more precisely the fertile area of Metohija. We can assume that the local name for corn also arrived with these magical grains that would make bread - which meant life itself - significantly easier to come by: it was known that Christopher Columbus had brought it from America to Europe, so the plant was named kolomboć after him, and the bread made from the flour obtained by grinding these white and yellow grains was called kolobotnjica (the 'm' quickly disappeared from in front of the stronger 'b').

Etymologists claim that kolomboć is a Balkan word and that it reached Albanian, Bulgarian and our language from Modern Greek. Corn also grew well at higher altitudes. It was planted most in the mountains and very few people had wheat. Corn bread (called kolobotnjica, kukuruznica and kukuruza) became the most important type of bread in the mountains. It goes perfectly with bacon and spring onion, or dipped in hot milk or soured milk. At one time it was baked on the fireplace, under a sač (pronounced 'satch' - a bell-shaped iron lid, similar to a Dutch oven, placed over the food and covered in hot ash).

Cornmeal green pie

Ingredients for 4 persons: 4 eggs, 200ml/7fl oz soured milk, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 300g/11oz high-fat pressed cheese, 300g/11oz corn flour, 5g/1 tsp salt, 3g/1 tsp bicarbonate of soda (or baking powder), 1kg/2lb 3oz broad-leaved dock

Beat the eggs, add the salt, oil, corn flour, bicarbonate of soda (or baking powder). Combine the mixture until it is fully uniform. Wash the dock leaves, chop, sprinkle with a little salt and add the cheese. Pour half of the prepared dough into a greased baking pan and bake at 200°C. Remove this from the oven and put the prepared mixture of dock and cheese on it, and then pour the remaining dough on top. Bake for 40 minutes at 200°C/400°F. The Albanian dish laknur is similar to cornmeal green pie - the difference is in the ingredients for the filling. Local cooks prepare that dish with nettles, onion and kajmak.

Domestic strains of corn

Just as Europeans completely changed the way of life of the American continent, so also two American plants - corn and potatoes - completely changed the habits of Europeans. The fact that in the 1980s it was confirmed that there are about 2,000 "local populations" of a domestic strain of corn testify about how successfully corn has been adapted and domesticated. At the end of the 19th century this was the most popular farming culture in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. Jarik is an endemic type of corn which has survived to this day in this region.

This is also visible in the language. The Serbian language reformer, Vuk Karadžić, in his Dictionary of 1818 cites a series of terms related to corn (kukuruz): kukuruzište (cornfield), kukuruzno brašno (corn flour), kukuruznica (cornbread), kukuruzovina (corn stalk).



Prijeshnac with pork scratchings

Ingredients for 4 persons: 300g/11oz pork scratchings, 300g/11oz leek, 250g/9oz corn flour, 150g/5oz wheat flour, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 200-400ml/7-14fl oz water, 5g/1 tsp salt, 3g/1 tsp baking powder, pepper, salt

Mix the corn flour and wheat flour together. Chop up the pork scratchings and slice the leek into rings. Mix together all the ingredients, mix in the water and pour into a greased baking pan. Bake for up to 40 minutes on a medium heat.

Millstones

Homemade pork scratchings and leek give organic corn a moist texture and strong taste.

As far as the quality of the flour is concerned, even sparrows know that this largely depends on the method of grinding. When an entire grain of corn is ground on a grinding stone, it is very important for the grinding to last a long time, hours even. A reduced speed of rotation of the grinding stone prevents the flour, which is produced from milling, from becoming hot, and in this way it keeps all its original, natural characteristics, and these do not evaporate. Everything that goes in between the two stones (the entire grain) also comes out – both the chaff and the germ (highly valued as a strong concentrated foodstuff, because it contains much of the nutritional value).

The mills were built from stone and were mainly situated within the confines of the village. Villagers would bring their corn by horse, and would often spend the night in the mill. They had to wait until everything was milled, and often the journey back was long and the night too dark.





Homemade bread

Ingredients for 4 persons: 350g/12oz flour, 300ml/10fl oz water, 30g/1oz fresh yeast, 5g/1 tsp sugar, 5g/1 tsp salt

Combine all the ingredients with a wooden spoon, stir in the lukewarm water and leave to sit for around 30 minutes. Beat the produced dough with the wooden spoon, place into a greased baking pan and let it sit for another 30 minutes. Bake in a preheated oven for 20 minutes at 200°C, then 15-20 min at 180°C. Wrap the baked bread in a cloth for a soft crust, and for a crisp crust place the bread in a deep dish and allow to cool.

White wheat

Several types of wheat were also grown in the mountain regions up until the 17th century, but the yields were not large and a lot of work was needed to obtain a sack of grain. Here white flour was always highly valued, and folk singers often sang about "white wheat". Branka Bogavac in her memoirs writes about how they fed themselves in the villages around the city of Berane during World War II: "We constantly ate black bread, whose taste varied, depending on the type of grain. Barley bread was very pungent, rye bread was black and slightly gooey, and we didn't like buckwheat bread at all. Wheat bread was normal, but it wasn't white. White bread then was an unattainable dream." But the taste of bread did not depend only on the type of flour, there was also the magic of the fire. In the katuns the housewife would sometimes cover the dough with a leaf of cabbage or broad-leafed dock and then would cover it with hot ashes and cinders from the fireplace. Or she would cover the dough with a sač and pour cinders over it. Bread baked in this way is very tasty, especially when it is still hot. There is nothing wrong with what is baked today in the so-called "gypsy" stove. This is the famous small, black stove which "does the job" perfectly - it warms up quickly and bakes and cooks well, and is easy to maintain. And it is not only easy to move it around inside but can also be easily loaded onto a horse and moved to another place... As if the eternal travellers had invented it themselves...



Unleavened pogača

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb flour, 30ml/2 tbsp oil, 3g/1 tsp bicarbonate of soda, 5g/1 tsp salt, 700ml/1¼ pt lukewarm water

Dissolve the bicarbonate of soda in the lukewarm water. Put the flour into a bowl and pour into that the water and bicarbonate of soda mix. Add salt and oil. Knead into a thick dough and mix for as long as possible to make the loaf tastier. Shape the dough and place on a greased baking tray. Preheat the oven at 200°C/400°F. Leave the dough to sit for 15 minutes, then prick with a fork in several places and leave to bake for 45 minutes.

When it is baked, take the loaf out and leave in a deep dish to absorb extra moisture.

Practising patience and persistence

The modern era has given rise to many new types of pogača (bread bun). The shape remains the same - if it is not round then it is not a proper pogača - but there are many variants both in the ingredients of the dough and in the final appearance. It is more often soft, laced with milk, eggs and butter, can be quickly mixed and rises fast. The ancient unleavened pogača has fewer elements but has a longer story. It is more like a bread cake, it is so delicious and unique.

It is the kneading (the pressing of the thick dough) that makes the pogača special. For it to turn out right, one needs strong hands, patience and persistence. Some call this type of pogača soda bread.

Popara

Ingredients for 4 persons: 250g/9oz stale bread, 100ml/3.5fl oz water, 100ml/3.5fl oz milk, 100g/3½oz kajmak, 100g/3½oz cheese, 20g/¾oz butter, 5g/1 tsp salt

Place the water in a pan, add salt and bring to a boil. When it boils add the milk, the bread broken into fine breadcrumbs, butter, cheese and kajmak. Mix together and cook until the liquid starts to boil.

The best popara is made from (homemade) black bread. Popara can also be made from corn bread.

A crumb is to a loaf as a drop is to the sea

Food in Montenegro is not thrown away. Especially not bread. Popara is considered a dish of the poorest people, who do not throw away even the hardest remnants of dry bread. The dish itself is not to be underestimated: popara served hot, seasoned with cheese and kajmak, and enjoyed with a glass of soured milk is an excellent, high-calorie breakfast.

In the mid-19th century the British archaeologist Gardner Wilkinson wrote: "The poverty of Montenegro is certainly a great bar to their civilisation; but notwithstanding all that, they are neither mercenary nor selfish; and while I was travelling in the interior of the country, poor people often ran out from their cottages to give me fruit, or whatever they had." They explained to him, "This is to welcome you; we are at home, you are a stranger."





Priganicas

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb flour, 10g/2 tsp sugar, 10g/2 tsp salt, 10g/½oz yeast, 100ml/3.5fl oz milk, 30ml/1fl oz fruit brandy, 300ml/10fl oz oil or lard, 100ml/3.5fl oz water

Place the sugar in some lukewarm water, add a little salt and dissolve the yeast in it. Pour the activated yeast, brandy and salt into the sifted flour, gradually add lukewarm water so that the dough is not too thin, and combine well. Leave the dough to rise and mix it occasionally. Shape it with a spoon and deep-fry the priganicas until they turn yellow.

As a welcome and for a large family

As bread and salt are to other nations, so priganicas and honey are in Montenegro. A symbol of being welcome. Today, in one restaurant in Mojkovac, all guests who stop there before midday, even for coffee, are served free priganicas with homemade jam or honey. In fact, the priganica has been raised to a symbolic level, distinguishing it from ordinary bread dough. In order to feed a group of impatient children in the house or cottage while the bread was baking, the housewife would often fry small balls of leftover dough. This could be accompanied by something savoury, cheese, kajmak, or something sweet. More recently the bread dough would be enriched with milk, and some people even add an egg, but it has been discovered that if fruit brandy is added it absorbs the fat, and that priganicas expand because of it, becoming softer and bubblier.

“Handmade” priganicas are synonymous with “real” priganicas. In order to get their shape without wasting much time, the housewife usually takes the dough in her left hand and squeezes it through her fingers, while holding a spoon with her right hand with which she breaks off enough dough for one priganica and lowers it into the hot oil.



Lečénik

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb wheat flour (or ½kg/1lb wheat flour and ½kg/1lb corn flour), ½kg/1lb broad-leafed dock or spinach (or leek or spring onion), 5 eggs, 1 litre/1.8pt milk, 200ml/7fl oz oil, 200ml/7fl oz soured cream, 250g/9oz cheese, salt to taste

Beat the eggs, add the milk, oil, cream and cheese. Wash the spinach, dry it and chop it up and add to the prepared mixture. Add the flour and combine the mixture. Heat a greased baking tray in the oven at 200°C/400°F and pour the mixture into the heated tray and bake at 200°C/400°F for about 45 minutes.

Spinach as an example

There are prejudices about mountain cuisine being based on meat. Lečénik is a good example of nutritious and exceptionally healthy dishes which are prepared in a simple way in the mountain region and which can satisfy the needs of vegetarians. Broad-leafed dock can be found in meadows, and if the meadows are far away, one can also use spinach.

As with other vegetables, spinach is grown in smaller kitchen gardens and vegetable plots, and most of what is produced is organic. In the villages or suburbs there is no need to use pesticides, there are no industries or polluters in the surrounding area. The soil, water and air are all clean.

It could not be healthier.

Cornmeal kačamak (polenta)

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1½-2 litres/2½-3½pt water, 500g/1lb corn flour, 300g/11oz cheese, 200g/7oz kajmak, 5g/1 tsp salt

Add the flour onto the boiling salted water. The flour should not be stirred in but should be allowed to remain on the surface in a mound-like shape through which you should make an indentation with a wooden spoon and leave to cook on a low heat for about 40 minutes. When the flour disappears from the surface of the water, strain out the surplus water (if there is any) into a separate pot. Mix the cooked polenta, known as kačamak, with a kačamar - a wooden beater - (if the mixture is too thick, add some of the strained-off water) until the entire mixture becomes uniform. Melt the cheese and kajmak in another pot and blend into the kačamak.

An institution

Polenta, or kačamak, is more than just a food. As with the image of shepherds who still eat this dish somewhere in a manner that is who-knows-how-old - from a single pot, a cauldron on the fireplace - but there is also something here bigger and deeper. Something removed from time. The phrase "quick and easy" does not apply to this traditional mountain dish, which people specially come to Žabljak or Kolašin to sample. This cannot be made in less than an hour. Time enough to take a stroll among the tall fir trees and spruces, through the thick and lush grass, take a draught from cold springs, take a photograph of kingly Mt. Durmitor or the royal Kom Mountains with snow-capped peaks and scree slopes. In the meantime the cook has attempted to blend the potato and flour with a special wooden implement called a kačamar, to enrich the kačamak with kajmak and cheese - preferably layered cheese. The wooden plates for kačamak are perfectly complemented by wooden cups for homemade soured milk, so thick that it can be cut with a knife. The feast of all the senses may begin.





Buckwheat cheese kačamak

Ingredients for 4 persons: 2 litres/3½pt water, 1kg/2lb potatoes, 200g/7oz buckwheat flour, 200g/7oz wheat flour, 300g/11oz cheese, 300g/11oz kajmak, 200g/7oz butter, 5g/1 tsp salt

Peel the potatoes, chop them into small cubes, place them in a pan with the water to boil and add salt. When the potatoes have softened, add the previously mixed buckwheat and wheat flour and make depressions with a spoon in several places. Continue cooking for another 20 minutes or so. When the kačamak is cooked, make the entire mixture uniform with the wooden beater. Put into another pan the butter, cheese and kajmak to melt. Add to that the beaten kačamak. Slowly mix on a low heat for 5 minutes and serve balls of the kačamak (with a deep wooden spoon or ladle).

Great return

A version of kačamak which is made with wheat flour and potatoes is a trademark of the Montenegrin mountains and is eaten and prepared practically everywhere. This is also the only dish in whose preparation men traditionally participated, and in Montenegro it is well known that males do not cook! They participated in the preparation of kačamak because it demanded physical strength, and the quality of the kačamak depends not only on the quality of the ingredients, but also how well beaten it is - not one lump of flour is allowed to remain visible. Kačamak beaten in this way is then blended with the melted cheese and kajmak. And kačamak "in a lump", which is eaten only with the fingers, is also very practical. It is made by taking a dollop of hot kačamak that has not been blended with melted cheese; an indentation is then made in the middle into which kajmak is placed, and a lid of kačamak is made over that, and you wait until the kajmak melts. According to one's needs a "lump" of kačamak can be carried with one and eaten outside while looking after cattle.

In more recent times, buckwheat flour is being used more and more. After a pause of several decades (and the absolute totalitarianism of white wheat flour), aromatic fields of buckwheat in this region are once again a paradise for bees (there are few plants as rich in nectar).

Gotovac or cicvara

Ingredients for 4 persons: 500g/1lb full-fat cheese, 400g/14oz skorup, 200g/7oz corn flour, 500ml/18fl oz water, 1 litre/1.8pt soured milk

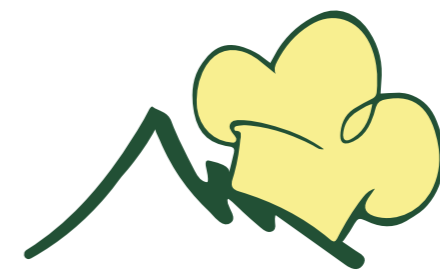
Place the cheese into a frying pan or regular pan to melt, add the skorup and mix together until the skorup has also melted. Slowly add corn flour until the desired quantity is used up. Mix the gotovac until it starts to separate from the walls of the pot and release its fat. During cooking half a cup of water may be added. It is served hot, with soured milk.

Womanly skill

Here we should put up a sign saying "Warning!" This extremely strong dish is definitely not for delicate stomachs, even though it used to be prepared, above all, for special guests, as a particular honour. Of course, everyone can eat it, but just be careful about the quantity. Preparing gotovac is a matter of the know-how, skill and concentration of the housewife. When she has already set aside a generous quantity of cheese and skorup, she lights the fire so that it is not too hot, and patiently, unceasingly, slowly mixes this porridge with one aim: to make it release its fat. In some regions cicvara is the name for a dish in which cheese and skorup are melted, but it is called gotovac if only mature skorup is used.

Skorup or kajmak is traditional dairy product, mainly produced in the mountain areas of Montenegro. Cow's or sheep's milk, or a mixture of the two, is brought to a boil and then left to cool. Within one or two days cream forms on the top and then this rind is removed, dry salted and put into layers to mature, which takes up to three months. Skorup has a pleasant dairy aroma and unique taste, but due to its high fat content it is consumed or added to other dishes in small quantities.





Savoury pies

In this region pies are one of the most common dishes, and they have been left to us as a legacy of the Ottomans who brought with them food which was accepted and well incorporated here. There are many variations on this theme, depending on the amount of time you have available and also depending on the skill of the hostess. Because, of course, not everyone can prepare the famous koturača as it should be!



Fast pie

Ingredients for 4 persons: 4 eggs, 200ml/7fl oz soured milk, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 300g/11oz crumbled cheese, 600g/1lb 5oz flour, 5g/1 tsp salt, 12g/4 tsp baking powder, 500g/1lb broad-leaved dock, 500ml/18fl oz water

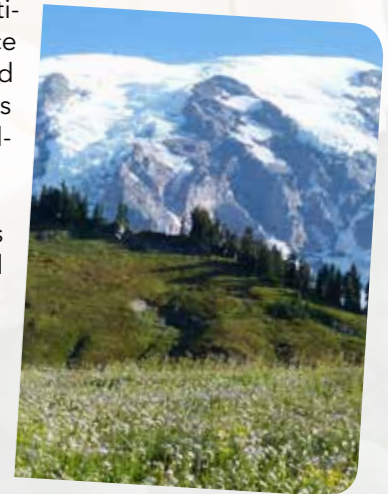
Beat all the ingredients, adding them one-by-one in order and finally add to the mixture the roughly chopped dock leaves. Bake the pie in a greased baking tray in a preheated oven at 200°C for 40 minutes. Serve with soured milk.

Market where everything is free

The mountains are rich in a variety of uncultivated, wild plants which have been used since long ago in food. Apart from broad-leaved dock - for salads, thick soups, stews and pies - one can also pick nettles, dandelions, broad-leaved dock, sorrel or hogweed.

From some just the leaves, from others fruits and seeds, and bulbs. Dock leaves are full of vitamins and chlorophyll and other useful substances.

They are usually picked in the morning, still wet from the dew or after rain. In principle they are prepared the same way as cultivated vegetables.





Fliya

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb flour, 2 eggs, 700ml/1¼pt water, 250g/9oz butter, salt to taste

Prepare a mixture of eggs, flour and water, which should be a little thicker than pancake batter. Melt the butter and grease a baking tray. Heat the oven to 180°C/360°F. Dole out the mixture evenly into a thin layer with a spoon, not covering the entire surface of the baking tray but "in a flower shape", then put the baking tray in the oven to bake until it the mixture starts to turn yellow. Take out the baking tray, spread with butter, and pour in the next layer of dough to fill in the empty space. Repeat this procedure until all the mixture is used up and then coat the fliya with butter and bake for 25-30 minutes until it starts to go yellow.

Layered-flower dough

Fliya is traditionally prepared in a sač, but when there isn't one nearby, you can also use a wood-burning stove. Or any oven in fact. This dish is a unique kind of layered dough pie. It is true that it demands devotion, you must make sure that the layers that are coated with melted butter do not overcook. Fliya can also be spread with a mixture of cheese, kajmak, or cream, which will have the same effect as butter, but will have a more rounded taste.

Fliya is actually an Albanian national dish, which is prepared in a similar way although under different names in various parts of Montenegro: maslenica, razlijevnica and also heljdija, which we present as a dish in its own right in this cookbook.



Koturača pie

Ingredients for 4 persons: ½kg/1lb flour, 150ml/5fl oz oil, 200ml/7fl oz water, 300g/11oz wild garlic, broad-leaved dock or nettles, 3 eggs, 100g/3½oz skorup, 200g/7oz cheese, 5g/1 tsp salt, 1 litre/1.8pt yardum

Mix the flour, 2 tablespoons of oil, salt and lukewarm water into a smooth dough until it becomes medium-hard. Cover with a cloth and leave to sit for 20 minutes. Then divide it into two balls, each of which should be kneaded with your hands and coated in warm oil. Roll out the balls one after the other as thinly as possible on a floured surface. Wash the wild garlic, dock leaves or nettles, drain, chop and place in a bowl. Season with salt, add the beaten eggs, skorup and cheese and mix together. Brush each piece of pastry with hot oil and spread the filling over the entire pastry. Using a tablecloth slowly roll up the pastry and place in a baking tray in a round shape, until the baking tray is full. Brush the pie with oil and bake on a medium heat for 30 minutes. Serve with yardum.

Bear's garlic

If it is good enough for the brown bear after a long hibernation without food, why wouldn't it also be for humans?! The young leaves of bear's garlic or wild garlic (*Allium ursinum*) are picked from April to June, and the aroma of garlic gives it away, so it is easy to find. Apart from the leaves which are mild and therefore are suitable for both salads and to add to dishes, its bulb, which is spicy, is also used. The brown bear also has it etched into its genes that wild garlic contains valuable minerals for recovery and gaining strength (iron, magnesium, manganese and zinc), vitamin C, carotene, carbohydrates, protein, fat and cellulose. Apart from having antibacterial properties, wild garlic also cleanses the entire organism, reduces blood pressure and improves memory.

The tastes of wild plants are particularly expressed in domestic handmade pie pastry. It involves a lot of work, but nothing can replace *koturača*.



Heljidiya (buckwheat pie)

Ingredients for 4 persons: 200g/7oz buckwheat flour, 500g/1lb wheat flour, 3g/1 tsp baking powder 5 eggs, 100g/3½oz cheese, 100g/3½oz kajmak, 200ml/7fl oz soured cream, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 100ml/3.5fl oz milk, 200ml/7fl oz water, 5g/1 tsp sugar, salt to taste

Mix the buckwheat and wheat flour with the baking powder. Add the beaten eggs, salt, sugar, warm water and milk. Mix the batter (just as for pancakes) and fry pancakes. For the filling combine the cheese, kajmak and cream. Arrange the pancakes and filling alternately in a baking tray. Finish with a pancake, spread with kajmak and bake for 15 minutes at 200°C/400°F. Serve warm.

Mongols in the Lim Valley?

Uncultivated strains of buckwheat can today be found in the Himalayas at altitudes of as much as 4,500 metres (15,000 feet). It is believed that the Mongols brought buckwheat to Europe from China during the invasion in the 13th and 14th centuries. Montenegrin history has not recorded the descendants of the Mongols, but this dark-coloured seed adapted well to the Montenegrin peaks, managing to ripen at higher than 1,500 metres (5,000 feet) before the first frosts, although the yields were at one time very modest. Buckwheat is a very interesting plant. Its rough chaff in former times served as packaging filler, e.g. for glass objects, because it is very resistant to bumps and knocks. Now it is also used in places as a packing material, for burning as a fuel, or as thermal insulation. Pillows filled with flakes of buckwheat are recommended in alternative medicine. As a strong foodstuff, buckwheat also requires strong accompaniments. So do not skimp on the kajmak, cheese or cream.

The popularity of buckwheat is increasing because nowadays its qualities are well known. It contains no gluten, it is an excellent source of high-quality protein; it has more vitamin B than wheat and more iron, phosphorous and potassium than other grains.

Pancakes are the most common thing made from buckwheat, but many things can be made when it is combined with other types of flour - even kačamak, layered pastry, bread rolls, proja (corn bread), pogača, savoury buns and breadsticks.



Rastirač

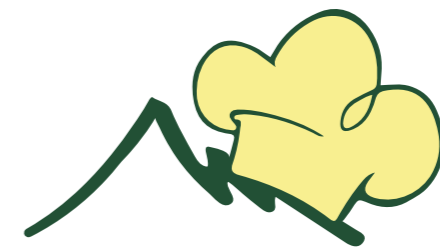
Ingredients for 4 persons: 2 eggs, 60-90g/4-6 tbsp flour, 200g/7oz kajmak, 200g/7oz stale bread, salt

Mix together a dough of eggs, flour and salt to be firm. When the dough is mixed, roll it between the palms to separate into balls of dough. Place the dough balls in boiling water to cook them. While this is happening, melt some kajmak in a frying pan and add the drained dumplings and stale bread. Finally mix everything together.

Nothing without skorup

Other peoples are proud of their cheeses. The peoples in Montenegro are also proud of their cheeses. And they do not talk up kajmak (skorup) that much as the second-most significant dairy product, but they should. Just as Pljevlja's cheese, Kolašin's layered cheese and the cheese from Kuči have their own identity and character, so kajmak from Piva or Mojkovac, or Durmitor's kajmak made in animal skins are all different. As we have seen, kajmak is a vital ingredient in many dishes, and without it these dishes would not have their final superb charm, and some would not even exist. Until recently only wooden equipment was used in its production: the milk was poured into shallow wooden bowls, karlicas, and after a day or two the kajmak would be skimmed off the surface and placed in a wooden tub.

The only choice they had was wood, but it was also the best material - it added something to the taste of kajmak, and besides that, the wooden tubs also had an opening in the bottom so that it could be drained and mature, and be kept for a long time.



Summer drinks

If you thought that in the summer juices are drunk, then you are mistaken. One of the more famous drinks during the summer is *yardum*, which is made from sheep's milk. *Ira*, or whey, is also very popular; it is refreshing and nourishing and, besides that, it is also very healthy. And there is also the famous *boza*, which has come to define many of our generations. So these are our summer drinks.



Ira

Ingredients for 4 persons: 5 litres/9pt milk, 15ml/1 tbsp rennet

Place rennet in milk fresh from the cow and put next to the stove. When it curdles, drag a spoon up and down and across the curdled milk so that the whey separates out. Then place in cheesecloth, tie up, and press down on it with a chopping board to strain out the liquid. The liquid that separates from the cheese is ira (whey), which is then boiled, and a little soured milk may be placed in it too.

Happiness is contagious

During the summer cattle breeders often drink soured whey instead of water. A cup of soured milk is poured into the boiled then slightly cooled ira, the pot is covered with a lid, warmed, and after several hours the ira can be drunk. If it is left until the following day, it obtains an "authentic" sharp taste and becomes a real delicacy.

Ira is not an ordinary refreshing drink. It invigorates, heals and makes one happier. It has been well known for a long time among country folk that ira is a natural remedy that regenerates the liver, improves immunity and revives one's strength. Science has proved that it contains important minerals and vitamins, is low in calories, that it perks one up and enables the production of serotonin. This is no wonder when it contains all the best things in milk, and this is milk from happy cows which have been feeding for weeks unfettered in the best pastures on the docile Mt Bjelasica, the enormous Mt Durmitor or the mystical Mt Sinjajevina.



Yardum (salted sheep's milk)

Ingredients for 4 persons: 2 litres/3½ pt sheep's milk, 10g/2 tsp salt

Put the salt into the sheep's milk, put on the stove to boil and stir until it thickens.

A katun speciality

The best yardum is prepared only after St Elijah's Day - 2 August. The sheep are in the katuns, high up, and their milk obtains the maximum thickness from the grass that they feed on at that time. Even if it seems that it is simple to make, a little experience is needed for it to turn out perfectly. The people who live in the mountains, especially at the time of their more strenuous work, such as scything grass, have no problem enjoying this elixir. It will give them the energy they need. The rest of us, if we overdo it, can have problems with diarrhoea. Therefore, to begin with, a small cup of this pure, full-fat, strong sheep's milk is enough. The smell of yardum cannot be easily compared with anything else.

The Vasojević tribe consider yardum their own speciality, but it is also prepared in the Pešter plateau and elsewhere. The word yardum has a Turkish origin and means "help". According to Vaso Labudović, who has a Masters in pharmacy and received an award in Milan for his scientific paper on yardum, this substance is also a remedy for impotence.





Boza

1kg/2lb corn flour, 10 litres/16pt lukewarm water, 40g/1½oz baker's yeast, ½ litre/1 pint of water to dissolve the baker's yeast in

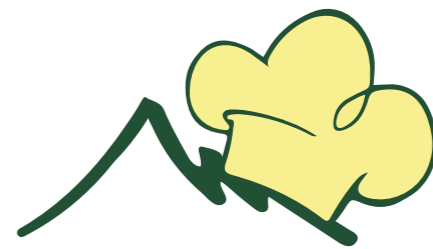
Pour the lukewarm water into the corn flour and leave overnight. The following day, boil for two hours on a medium heat, stirring occasionally, then remove from the heat and leave to cool. Dissolve the baker's yeast in ½ litre/1 pint of water, pour into the boiled flour, stir well and leave to stand. The following day, strain it through a thick cloth, sweeten to taste with honey or sugar, chill in the fridge and serve.

Muuuch better than fizzy drinks!

Boza is the favourite refreshing drink in the Balkans. Today it can be bought in shops, ordered at confectioners' owned by Highlanders or Albanians, and is linked in the mind with the East, the Orient. And it is an oriental drink, more than a thousand years old.

Boza is a completely natural, unsurpassed refreshing summer cold drink, full of vitamins. It contains vitamins B1, B2, B3, B6 and B12, as well as A and E. There is also iron in it. And useful bacteria.

Apart from this recipe, there is also another one: a celebrated confectioner in Podgorica says that the secret of the best boza is when it is made from a combination of different grains. Boza's drinkability is demonstrated today in our slang, where if one wants to say that something is easy, one says "oh, that's boza!"



Clear and thick soups

It's not a real lunch if you don't use a spoon.
Soup is also a medicine. It is good for dinner as well.
It is easily transformed into a main dish. It is also delicious the next day.



Lamb soup with rice

Ingredients for 4 persons: 600g/1lb 5oz lamb shoulder, 1 medium-sized onion, 2 carrots, 130g/5oz rice, 5-6 black peppercorns, 2 bay leaves, water, skorup or soured milk, salt

Rinse the meat, cut into large chunks, place in a saucepan and pour the water onto it. Bring to the boil. In the meantime chop the onion finely, peel and slice the carrots into discs. When the meat has come to the boil, skim off the foam, add the onion, carrots, pepper and bay leaves. When the meat is fully cooked, remove the meat from the stock. Return the stock to boil and put the rinsed rice into it. Remove and discard the bones from the meat. When the rice has softened put the meat back in and add salt to taste. When serving, add skorup or soured milk.

A handful of rice

It is well known that a good meat soup, clear or thick, is not just a warm-up act to the main dish. When it is enriched with vegetables or rice it is a main dish. Meat soup is full of minerals and is a real elixir after hard physical work or an illness. In the Montenegrin mountains rice is mainly called "oriz". This is yet another word which came to the local language from Greece, and it also existed in Sanskrit (an ancient Indian language). Rice itself was brought by traders (and conquerors) from the East, but also from Italy where it has been grown since the 15th century. There were paddy fields growing rice much closer in the Balkans, in North Macedonia. Ever since the time of Alexander the Great in the 4th century BC, rice has been grown in the Kočani Valley along the River Bregalnica. Even today Kočani rice is the choice of many local cooks, because of its taste and quality, even if various types of rice from different parts of the world can be found in supermarkets.



Nettle soup

Ingredients for 4 persons: 500g/1lb young nettles sautéed, 100g/3½oz onion, 100g/3½oz carrots, 100g/3½oz parsnips, 100g/3½oz corn flour, 2 litres/3½ pt stock, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 5g/1 tsp salt

Fry the grated onion, carrot and parsnip in the heated oil. When it turns transparent add the stock and the sautéed chopped nettles. Mix the corn flour with cold water and add to the boiled nettles, stirring continuously. Cook for another 20 minutes. Add salt to taste. Serve kajmak, soured cream or soured milk with the soup.

Springtime gift

Of the “wild” ingredients in mountain cuisine, nettles are perhaps the most highly valued. This exceptionally healthy plant appears when it is most needed: after the long, exhausting winter, to purify and strengthen one’s organism and give it new energy.

Science has shown that nettles contain calcium, phosphor, iron, magnesium, vitamins C, A, B2, B5 and K, carotene and a lot of protein, carbohydrates and fat. It is a richer source of vitamins C and A than the majority of cultivated plants.



90-120 min



Bolete soup

Ingredients for 4 persons: 250g/9oz fresh boletes (or around 50g/1¾oz dried boletes), 1 potato, 1 carrot, 1 egg, 15ml/1 tbsp soured cream, oil, fresh parsley, salt and pepper

Dice the potatoes and carrots finely and fry in a saucepan, with a little oil. Add the salt, pepper and chopped boletes (if using dried boletes, soften them ahead of time in warm water for 15 minutes) and pour 1 litre of water onto the mixture. Cook on a medium heat for 20 minutes.

To improve the taste, when serving, the soup can be poured onto legir - beaten egg white with soured cream.

A door into the world of mushrooms

Around 2,000 types of mushrooms grow in Montenegro, of which 200 are edible. In the northern region the most common ones are boletes and chanterelles, but morels are also highly valued.

There is a rich tradition of picking mushrooms, but not of using them in food. This is mostly because of fear and carefulness, because many edible mushrooms have very similar poisonous sisters.

When there was no dilemma, it was enough to put a mushroom over glowing coals or on a stove's hotplate, sprinkle on some salt and enjoy the exquisite taste.



Gourd soup

Ingredients for 4 persons: 500g/1lb pumpkin (gourd), 2 bay leaves, 700-800ml/25-28fl oz chicken stock or water, 50ml/2 fl oz fresh single cream, oil, a little chopped parsley, salt and pepper

Dice the rinsed pumpkin (gourd) and fry it in oil for 2-3 minutes. Add the bay leaves and pour over the chicken stock or water. Bring to a boil and simmer for 20 minutes until the pumpkin completely softens.

Then take out the bay leaves and blend the soup in a food processor, return to the heat to boil and add the salt and pepper. Take off the heat and mix in the cream. Add water if you want the soup to be thinner.

You can even roast it

Gourds were once used a lot as animal feed, and were especially significant during the winter as "fresh material" which can be preserved in a cool, dark place.

No one would think twice about slicing one up, putting it in the oven, roasting as desired with a little sugar on top also for the family.

Often housewives would make pies out of gourds, sometimes sweet, sometimes savoury.

Gourds go very well with corn, and so they are often planted near each other. In autumn, these are a real decoration in the fields.



Gruel

Ingredients for 4 persons: 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 200g/7oz flour, 800ml/28fl oz water, salt or sugar

Heat the oil and add the flour. Fry on a low heat until it turns a light-brown colour, then pour on the water. Boil until it thickens and add salt or sugar, as desired.

As long as we use a spoon

At one time there was no oil. From a spoonful of animal fat, a handful of flour and water, in just a few moments there appeared an appreciated, warm, aromatic, invigorating gruel.

Now, the taste depends on the type of flour used, and today almost anything can be added, but for a poor person in the mountains, even done this way it was a miniature feast. Today this dish is not made too often, even the poor people nowadays have more ingredients than oil, flour and salt. It is on you to be creative and enrich this dish, but it is not bad to know also this basic recipe.

Nettle porridge

Ingredients for 4 persons: 800ml/28fl oz water, 100ml/3.5fl oz milk, 600g/1lb 5oz rinsed young nettles, 300g/11oz of corn flour, 100g/3½oz butter, 300g/11oz young kajmak and 300g/11oz cheese, salt

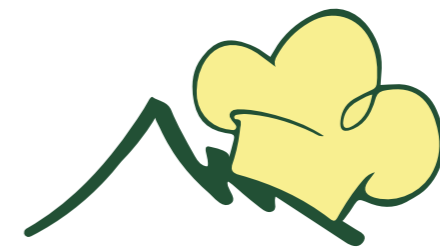
Sauté (blanch) the nettles in a saucepan with boiling water for about 5 minutes, strain and pour cold water over them in order to retain a green colour. Once they have been strained, chop the nettles up. Then place the nettles in salted water which has been brought to a boil, and simmer for 10 minutes on a low heat. Then, with the fingertips, sprinkle on the corn flour and slowly mix with a brkljica (beater) so that the mixture does not clump together. Cook for 30 minutes at a medium temperature. When it is cooked, add butter and chopped cheese. Serve in deep bowls with kajmak. This can be eaten hot or cold.

Salvation in difficult times

You can still hear from elderly people that during times of war (and those were not so rare) nettles saved the nation from starvation. For porridges, thick soups or pies, nettles are picked when they are young. They do not sting too much, and after boiling the leaves become completely safe and soft. They can also be picked later, as long as they have not grown too much or started to flower, but they can also be preserved by drying. Nettle tea is recommended as a remedy for a long list of problems and illnesses.

In order to break up the flour in this dish and stop it clumping together, a special implement called locally a "brkljica" was invented, made of a stick which branches on several sides. The brkljica is lowered into the porridge and spun left and right with the hands. Like a forerunner to the modern mixer.





Dishes without meat

Even though today people who come to Montenegro say that our cuisine is characterised by meat and that meat is an integral part of every meal, this once wasn't the case and it isn't the case today if we are talking about dishes that are prepared at home. Our housewives used to be ingenious and prepared dishes without meat, but dishes that were nutritious (high in calories and strong) which provided the energy needed for the hard work that needed to be done. In this section we present to you our meat-free dishes.



Mushroom goulash

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb fresh mushrooms (bolete, chanterelle, or similar), 400g/14oz onion, 1 bay leaf, pepper, salt, parsley, 100ml/3.5fl oz fresh cream (or kajmak), 500ml/18 fl oz white wine, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 15g/1 tbsp flour

Chop the onion finely and fry in the hot fat. Clean the mushrooms and stew them, then chop them finely and add them to the fried onion, then add the bay leaf and peppercorns. Sauté for 20 minutes, then add a tablespoon of flour. Pour in a little water (or soup stock), add the white wine and salt. Boil for another 10 minutes, then add the cream and chopped parsley and remove from the heat.

Mushroom pickers

Mushroom picking has become an important source of income for many families, especially in places where industry collapsed when socialism and Yugoslavia fell apart and where there was no one available to restore the villages and agriculture.

So today, for example, many village inhabitants in the mountain area of Montenegro equip their children for school and provide wood and food for the winter by collecting and selling oyster mushrooms, boletes and chanterelles which are sold, even fresh, in European supermarkets.

The diverse forests and damp mountain climate have created the ideal conditions for hard-working mushroom pickers.

Wax beans with kajmak

Ingredients for 4 persons: 600g/1lb 5oz wax beans (or green beans), 50ml/3½ tbsp oil, 1 large onion, 3 cloves of garlic, mixed herbs to taste, 3g/1 tsp Cayenne pepper, 3g/1 tsp flour, 100g/3½oz kajmak, salt

In a pan, sauté the finely chopped onion in oil. Add the beans and sauté everything together for about 50 minutes, stirring occasionally and adding water if needed. In a little oil, make a roux using the flour, Cayenne pepper and garlic. Add this to the sautéed beans and season with salt and mixed herbs.

The kajmak is added when serving.

A tale of beans

In the Western world string beans are not as popular as in the Balkans, and in Montenegro it is a staple that can be found in almost every garden. It also grows successfully at high altitudes and there are many varieties.

This is a plant full of fibre, extremely nutritious and forgiving when preparing, because stew-like dishes can be made with it and it can also be roasted. For some reason, children do not like it much, and it is only when people get older that they fall in love with bean dishes.

This is probably because once in the villages there was not much choice regarding vegetables, so green beans were often set on the table.



Wax beans with eggs (60 min, 4 persons): 1kg/2lb wax beans, 3 onions, 4 eggs, 200ml/7fl oz milk, oil, salt, pepper to taste, ½ litre/1 pt water for sautéing

Sauté the onion and add the beans. With the frequent addition of water, sauté the beans until they are 80% softened, and add the salt and pepper. Pour the bean mixture into a greased baking pan and place in the oven for 10-15 minutes to cook. Then pour in the beaten eggs, milk and a little salt. Return to the oven to cook for another 15-20 minutes at 180°C/360°F.



Lenten stuffed cabbage with walnuts

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb pickled cabbage leaves, 3 onions, 1 carrot, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 150g/5oz rice, 200g/7oz ground walnuts, 5g/1 tsp salt and pepper to taste

Fry the chopped onion in oil, and when it is soft add the rice and grated carrot. When the rice is sautéed, add a cup of water and remove from the heat. Add the ground walnuts and season with salt and pepper. Leave the mixture to cool, and then wrap in medium-sized cabbage leaves. Arrange the wrapped stuffed cabbage leaves until they fill up a row. Then drizzle with oil and arrange a new row until the filling is used up. Finally cover with entire cabbage leaves, pour over water to surround the stuffed cabbage, place a shallow dish on top as a lid and leave to simmer on a low heat for about 90 minutes. During cooking, occasionally shake the baking pan.

Saint's days when fasting

As elsewhere among the Orthodox Christian Slavs, the family saint's day - a gathering in honour of the family's protector saint - is one of the main events during the year. One would save and prepare well in advance for that day in order to show guests hospitality.

The ceremonial Slavic dinner table has to be sumptuous even when the holiday falls on a fasting day, and there are many of these in Orthodoxy. Ingenious housewives, especially when fish could not be caught or bought, used to modify dishes, which would otherwise be made from meat, into a fasting variant. In this way ground walnuts entered the scene in the famous sarma (stuffed cabbage leaves) as a worthy replacement for minced meat.

Proper sarma, which is prepared with minced meat, is a dish which has remained in this area as a legacy of Ottoman rule. Sarma is so rooted that it has become a trademark of every major family event - New Year celebrations, religious ceremonies, joyful and sad gatherings, and those ones celebrated by all religious groups in Montenegro. And pickled cabbage has a long tradition in these parts. Full of vitamin C, it is eaten fresh as a salad, and various dishes are made from it - boiled cabbage with cured meat is probably the oldest dish from the mountain areas, and today its aroma reminds everyone of winters spent at the grandparents.

Potato-stuffed peppers

Ingredients for 4 persons: 8 peppers, 200g/7oz leek, 1kg/2lb potatoes, 2 tomatoes, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 10g/1 tbsp flour, 10g/1 tbsp Cayenne pepper, salt, pepper, parsley

Remove the seeds and stalks from the peppers and rinse them. Rinse the leek, clean and chop into small cubes and fry in oil. Then add the grated potato and sauté this all together on a low heat. Add salt, pepper and parsley to taste. Stuff the peppers and cover with slices of tomato. Arrange the stuffed peppers in a pan, pour on the water and leave to cook. When they are done, fry them in a thin roux (oil, flour and Cayenne pepper). Bake them in the oven at 180°C/360°F for 15 minutes.

Plan B

Stuffed peppers are also a favourite meal when cooked or roasted with meat. However, since “the principle is the same, everything else is nuance”, peppers, like other vegetables suitable for stuffing, can be stuffed in various ways, or with different combinations of ingredients. In this case we have four types of vegetables with pronounced individuality, which go together tolerably well, while retaining their own uniqueness but also taking on the properties of the other ingredients.



Rice-stuffed hot peppers

Ingredients for 4 persons: 8 pickled hot peppers, 400g/14oz leek, 300g/11 oz rice, 2 potatoes, salt, pepper, bay leaf, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 10g/1 tbsp flour, 3g/1 tsp Cayenne pepper

Wash the leek, chop and fry in oil. Rinse the rice, add the leek and season with salt and pepper. Stuff the peppers with the prepared mixture and seal the top with a circular slice of potato, pour in the water, add the bay leaf and cook for 40 minutes. Prepare a roux of oil, flour and Cayenne pepper and fry the peppers in this.

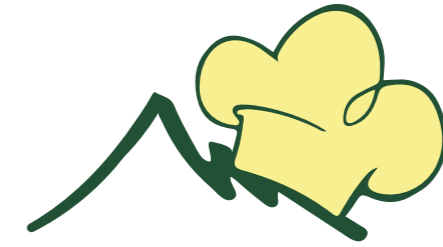
A word about leek

Leek, an ancient Mediterranean biennial plant, has adapted superbly to altitudes of more than 1,000 metres. It is even as if the mountain suits it, because it grows to a length of up to two metres and it remains juicy enough to be even eaten fresh, as a salad.

It is interesting that leek immediately goes well together with rice, they complement each other, like a married couple. Rice tempers the sharpness and dominating character of leek, and it gives rice backbone and strength.

Together they will have a good effect on other vegetables or meat, so they are suitable for stuffing peppers, as an accompaniment to clear and thick soups, and on their own, as risotto, they are sufficient for an entire meal. Leek is the key ingredient in leek pie and is an important accompaniment in other pies.





Meat on the plate

Although livestock breeding has been a dominant livelihood in our region, meat was not often found on our tables, for the simple reason that it was not easy to preserve it in those times before electricity and freezers. Fresh meat was prepared on those occasions when many people had to be fed, when something was being celebrated, when there was major work going on, when a house was being made and the neighbours and friends had come to help, and for the major religious holidays. Of course, there was also cured meat which can be more easily preserved and is a trademark of these parts, which can be eaten just as it is, but is also cooked and prepared.



Boiled meat

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb 3oz veal on the bone (shoulder, rib or neck), 100g/3½oz carrots, 1 onion, 3 litres/5¼ pt water, 1 bay leaf, peppercorns, salt

Rinse the meat and cut into large pieces, pour over hot water and leave to boil. When it boils skim off the foam and add the seasonings (cut the onion in half, sear on the hotplate and add to the pot). Simmer with the lid on for two hours. Add salt at the end.

Veal three-in-one

Veal is a good meat for cooking, a little complicated but healthy and tasty. A good host will personally pick a tender cut of veal with a marbling of fat and the odd bone. (Do not despise the bones, they are an important factor, and not only for the taste.) A whole palette of herbs and spices can go with the meat (celery, basil, an entire fresh pepper, several carrots...). The onion has a particular role when cooking meat, and is fairly crucial for the taste. Either cut in half or even better - whole and peeled, seared on the hotplate, it has a unique smell and starts to ooze its liquid. Only in that way that can it do its work properly in the saucepan.

Boiled meat has a long tradition in these parts. When there was no electricity or fridges and freezers, meat could not be stored for long, so calves were only slaughtered for major occasions. Here there are a whole series of customs connected with funerals, and a lot of attention is paid to it. There was a tradition that when a local died, everyone who came to express their condolences had to be served food. Boiled meat served such occasions as the most precious thing that a family could serve. And the broth in which the meat was cooked, in a moment, turned into veal soup, which everyone who comes to the Balkans mention as a real delicacy. Even in the most modest drinking establishments an excellent veal soup can be ordered.

Ćešle

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1 medium-sized chicken (1-1½ kg/2lb 3oz-3lb 4oz), 1kg/2lb 3oz cracked barley, 200g/7oz kajmak, salt

Rinse the crushed grain (barley) in cold water, sauté and strain. Add three times as much water as grain, the entire chicken and boil with added salt on a low heat for 4-5 hours. When it thickens into a potage, remove from the heat, take out the bones and mix with a wooden spoon until the mixture binds together and becomes uniform. Add salt if necessary.

Serve in deep dishes and place a spoonful of kajmak on top. This dish can also be prepared with mutton.

Simmering over a low heat

Dishes which are cooked for a long time were not any kind of problem in the mountains, especially in the villages, where a wood-burning stove is irreplaceable.

It was also convenient in the morning to put whatever you had into a pot, cover and leave next to the stove, and from time to time check that the fire had not gone out. In the meantime a lot of work could be done regarding the livestock or in the meadow or garden.

When all the members of the family gathered in the evening from their various activities the lunch/dinner could simply be brought out onto the table.



Boiled lamb in milk

Ingredients for 4 persons: 800g/1lb 12oz young lamb shoulder, 1 litre/1.8 pt milk, 1 carrot, 1 onion, 5g/1 tsp salt, black peppercorns, 1 bay leaf

Cut the lamb into portions and boil in boiling water with the vegetables and seasoning. Simmer for about one hour. When it has softened, strain the fond (cooking liquid) and seasoning in which the lamb has been cooked. Then drop the boiled lamb into boiled milk, add salt to taste, cover and simmer for another half an hour on a very low heat. Serve with boiled potatoes.

All good but, oh, the lamb...!

Well, this is truly an exceptional lamb dish. Tender "like a soul", melts in the mouth "like butter". It sticks to the palate, the taste is savoury but somehow also sweet, refined. The tastiest and cheapest thing that the host could offer on special occasions, for the traveller dropping by. The cult of hospitality decreed the best food is chosen and prepared, and that there is no lack. We should remind the reader that lambs are born in early spring and that the lambs are fed on grass abundant in medicinal herbs...

In Montenegro lamb - domestically produced lamb - is really highly valued. Every household knows where to buy it. Not in supermarkets where the meat is mainly imported, but in local, ignored, small butchers', where the butchers still procure lambs from cattle breeders who spend the summer with their cattle in the katuns, on untouched pastures, without any sort of additives and chemical substances. So when you try lamb from the supermarket and this domestic lamb, it'll be clear what we're talking about!



Boiled offal (tripe)

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1½kg/1lb 1oz veal or lamb offal (tripe), 2 small onions, 2 cloves garlic, black peppercorns, bay leaf, salt, crushed chillies

Wash and rinse the offal and chop into large pieces. Put these into a pan with water to boil, then strain them and again pour on cold water. Repeat this procedure twice more and the final time add onion, garlic, bay leaf and peppercorns to the water. Boil for 3-4 hours on a low heat and towards the end add salt. When the offal is cooked, remove from the water and cut them into smaller pieces. Serve warm and season to taste with crushed chillies.

Some really like that

Meat was more the exception than the rule on the shepherd's table. When an animal was slaughtered, everything was used, and whatever little remained afterwards was happily accepted by the shepherd dog.

Many consider tripe to be a speciality. However, many hesitate to try it, but there really is no reason. The male family members would suspend the veal or lamb from a plum tree near the house and "process it" roughly, while the women would scrape the offal and wash the intestines in ice or ice-cold spring water, which would wash away the darkest thoughts. The intestines would cook quickly on the glowing coals, and they would disappear even quicker because they are tasty and crunchy, but the offal required time to soften. Time which the children would use to get away from the smell which, unlike the taste, is truly not very charming.





Potoplika

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb 3oz dried veal or lamb with bones, 250g/9oz flour, 300ml/10fl oz lukewarm water, 30ml/1fl oz oil or 20g/¾oz butter to grease the pan, salt

Put the meat into a pot with some water to boil. Mix together a dough of flour, salt and the lukewarm water. Mix until it starts to separate from the bowl, then turn out the dough onto a floured chopping board, knead it and divide into 12 balls. Flatten each ball with a rolling pin, roll out the pastry and, one by one, place them onto the stove's hotplate covered with foil and roast each one for 10 seconds on both sides to dry out and lightly brown. Remove the boiled meat, separate from the bone, strain the broth and leave to cool. Grease a baking dish with fat, break up the baked pastry, dip into the cooled broth and arrange in the oven dish. Alternate rows of pastry with rows of meat until all of the pastry is used up. On the final row of pastry place some meat, then pour over the broth and slightly bake in the oven.

Potoplika or pačapita

During the winter there are fewer obligations in mountain regions and more time for socialising, but also for making things that were needed: various objects made of wood (stools, tubs, shelves, beehives...) or of wool (from which everything could be knitted, from socks to caps). There is also more time for children to play at preparing dough and rolling out pastry. Shops are today accessible and there is a wide choice of ready-made pastry, thick for savoury and thin for sweet pies. However this cannot come close to what the skilful hands of the housewives make. During the preparation of this ancient dish, everyone told us, children would mill around the (wood-burning) stove and watch for an opportunity to steal the hot aromatic pastry, while the mother was making sure that it did not burn on the stove. And whatever food children try to take without their mother seeing, you know that it is the best and tastiest. Potoplika can also be prepared with fresh meat, and depending on which area of northern Montenegro you visit, the hosts will prepare you either potoplika or pačapita - the only difference is in the name.



Fried cured meat with leek

Ingredients for 4 persons: 600g/1lb 5oz smoked meat without bones (from the neck), ½kg/1lb 1oz leek, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil

Dice the meat and chop the leek into thin slices. Fry these in a little fat, enough to soften the leek. Serve with boiled potatoes or *kačamak* that has not been blended with cheese.

Quick, but powerful

This is a manly dish. In terms of both the ingredients and the manner of preparation. There is no great philosophy or finesse, wasting of time and washing of pots. When the snow has been cleared, the livestock fed or one's company has returned from a walk on snowshoes or skis, while the potatoes are cooking and the table is being laid, it is essential to have a sip of homemade plum or pear brandy. With a little young cheese, if it can be found in the house. In a few manly moves, the dried meat is chopped up as if with a sabre, and then the leek, just to complicate the story slightly, and everything is quickly heated up, Chinese-style, fried up and, there you go, it is already on the table.



Pickled cabbage with dried mutton

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1½kg/1lb 1oz pickled cabbage, 1kg/2lb 3oz dried mutton, 200ml/7fl oz oil (or lard), salt

Shred the pickled cabbage into short shreds. Rinse in water and strain. Dice the mutton into large cubes and first of all wash them in hot water, then cold water. Put the meat to boil and when it has started to boil, cook for another 30-40 minutes. Then add the pickled cabbage and cook for another two hours. At the end, add the oil (or lard) and cook until the water evaporates.

While there is cabbage it is not winter

Snow can last for weeks or even months. It can lie as much as two metres deep. It is difficult to get to the barn, let alone to the neighbours'. What was prepared in the autumn would be hanging dried in the loft, soft pork rump or tough mutton, sausages. The potatoes would be stored in a dark, cold hole called a trap, while the pickled cabbages would be stored in a tub. When the house is filled with warm, powerful aromas, even the cat is full and satisfied next to the stove. He doesn't care about the winter.

Dried mutton is one of Montenegro's protected products and has been granted a geographical certification mark in the European quality scheme. As we have already mentioned, the domestic mutton and lamb here are high-quality. Try them for yourself.

Pickled cabbage can also be cooked with other types of dried meat - pork or beef. Smoked meat lends the cabbage a wonderful aroma.





Baked sweetbread and lamb's liver

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb 3oz lamb's liver with sweetbread and heart, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 1 small clove of garlic, salt and pepper

Stew the sweetbread (thymus gland), lungs, liver and heart in boiling water for 20 minutes. Arrange the sautéed, strained and chopped innards in a greased earthenware pot, making sure the sweetbread goes on top. Pour over it a marinade of oil, pepper and finely chopped garlic. Bake for 15 minutes at a relative high temperature until it turns a golden colour.

And the rest is made into suet and aspic

Since meat was rarely found on the dinner table in mountain regions - as it was difficult to preserve, our housewives learned never to throw anything away and to make use of everything on those rare occasions when an animal was slaughtered and the meat was prepared and dried. The innards were used to make meals on those days when an animal was slaughtered and suet, which could last a little longer. Suet and aspic (products which are created by cooking meat and bones for a long time) are still made to this day, although in much smaller quantities.

Suet

Washed veal offal, head, intestines, lungs and liver, kidneys and heart, onion, garlic, salt and pepper to taste

Boil all the ingredients, the offal separately, squeeze and skim off the fat from the stock. Remove the head from the stock, separate from the bones, skin the tongue and dice everything into small cubes. Fry this in the fat and tallow which were earlier skimmed from the surface. Add a little of the stock in which the ingredients have been boiled, add some salt and pepper to taste. Fry for one hour, and add some finely chopped garlic. Place the prepared mixture in a baking tray, pour the remaining fat over and leave to cool. The suet made in this way can be formed into cubes.



Birjan or pilav

Ingredients for 4 persons: ½kg/1lb 1oz veal neck or shoulder, or chicken, 200g/7oz rice, 4 onions, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 2 carrots, ½ litre/1pt water or stock, pepper, salt

Boil the meat until it is 80% cooked and add the seasonings. Fry the finely chopped onion in oil. When it is transparent, add the rice which has been rinsed and strained. Fry for 10-15 minutes and cover with the broth in which the meat was cooked.

Cut up the boiled meat into small pieces, add to the rice, add salt and mix together. Put on the hob until it boils, then pour into an appropriate pot, cover with the lid and place in the oven to bake for 30 minutes at 180°C/360°F until the liquid has evaporated.

A dish of verbs

You have already seen this: it sounds familiar, something like a meat risotto. It is prepared often, it is a common meal. And it isn't as tiring as it seems, although in this recipe there are almost 20 verbs of action. The only slight problem is - the name. While researching recipes for this dish, there were many problems because it is called different things in different places. For example, in the region of Bihor, birjan is rice with meat, while for example in the cities of Berane and Plav, this same dish is called pilav. And then we encountered another illogicality - in Bihor and in the city of Bijelo Polje pilav is a dish made with pastry, and not with rice. Whatever it is called, it is very tasty and nutritious, and is often prepared in our households.

Roma-style cabbage

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1 medium-sized cabbage, 400g/14oz finely chopped veal or mutton, 200g/7oz rice, 500g/1lb onion, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, salt, pepper, Cayenne pepper, 10g/1 tbsp flour

Chop off the end of the cabbage where the stem was (the lid) and hollow out the head of cabbage. Prepare the mixture for stuffing: fry the onion, then add the chopped meat and when this has browned, add the seasoning, rice and finely chopped cabbage, which was removed from the head of cabbage. Fill the hollowed-out cabbage with the prepared mixture and cover with the cabbage lid. Place in a pot, pour over the water to cover with water and leave to cook on a low heat for about 1 hour. Prepare a roux - fry some flour in oil, add Cayenne pepper, and fry the cabbage in it.

Making a pot out of a small head

Sarma (stuffed cabbage leaves) is a favourite dish in a large part of the Balkans (and foreigners love it too), but preparing the meat and cabbage, and especially folding the cabbage leaves, requires quite a lot of time and skill. Roma racked their brains and solved this problem with the logic of Solomon the Wise - i.e. with the "picture within a picture" or rather "pot within a pot" method. The head of cabbage becomes a pot with a lid, giving you cabbage with meat - and this truly sounds like "gypsy magic"! There is something else totally practical here - with this technique the tastes and nutrition in the vegetables and meat are preserved. Neither should the piquing of one's curiosity be ignored: it is always interesting to discover what lies under the lid, whether it is a cabbage leaf, a hat or the firmament.





Češek

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb 3oz boneless veal, 200g/7oz rice, salt, pepper, bay leaf

Boil the meat whole, season with salt and pepper and bay leaf. Take out the boiled meat and separate it with your hands into threads. Add rinsed rice to the broth, boil and then return the boiled meat. Gunguljoš can be served as a side dish with češek, or can be mixed into meat and rice.

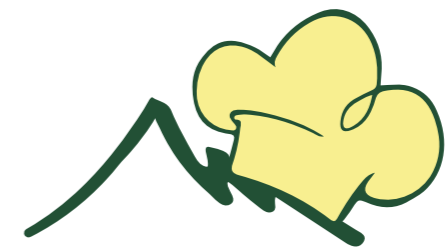
Gunguljoš

Ingredients for 4 persons: 130g/4½oz butter, 30-40g/3-4 tbsp flour, 2 egg yolks beaten

Place the butter in a frying pan to melt, then make a roux with the flour until it browns; add the two beaten egg yolks, then stir on a medium heat on the stove until the mixture becomes firm. Shape the mixture into a cylindrical shape, cut into small pieces and fry these in oil until they are browned.

Meat and rice again

Boiled veal can also appear in a somewhat more complicated variant. Češek is a very old dish originating from the East. It comes from the Turkish word *keşke* meaning 'I wish'. In the Middle East it refers to a combination of meat and available grain, which has been completely blended together. In this region, rice can also be used in the recipe and, in order for the crowding and *gungula* (from the Persian word *ğolğole* meaning 'commotion') in the pot to be even greater, more *gunguljoš* is added.



Salads and torshi

It is certainly true that Montenegrins are not great fans of salads. In this country salads are not a meal, just a side dish for the main course, but as such we have a lot to offer. And something that is a long tradition in our parts is torshi (pickled vegetables) which is prepared even today as a side dish, for example, for the famous mountain kačamak.



Wild garlic and soured milk salad

Ingredients for 4 persons: 200g/7oz wild garlic, 800ml/1½ pt soured milk, as required, 100ml/3.5fl oz soured cream, salt

Wash the wild garlic, add salt, slightly crush it, pour over the soured milk and soured cream to taste. We have already spoken about this herb - it is unusually medicinal and very aromatic. It smells of garlic and can also be used as a seasoning. But one must be careful with wild garlic - consumed in large quantities it can lower one's blood pressure. Wild garlic grows exclusively in extremely clean places. Locals know where to find it, and those places are often very relatively inaccessible. There is a lot of it in the Biogradska Gora National Park, all around Lake Biograd. The entire surrounding area smells of wild garlic.

Cucumber and soured milk salad

Ingredients for 4 persons: 2 cucumbers, 4 cloves garlic, 800ml/1½ pt soured milk, 100ml/3.5fl oz soured cream to taste, salt and parsley

Peel the cucumbers, cut into cubes, add salt, chopped garlic and pour over soured milk and cream to taste and mix.

Milk for everything

Vinegar, oil, salad dressing - no need! In the mountains there is always soured milk in reserve, and even when it has slightly gone off it is excellent for salads that are quickly prepared, and they invigorate one perfectly. Almost all main courses go perfectly with this.





Raw torshi

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1kg/2lb 3oz somborka peppers, 1kg/2lb 3oz green tomatoes, 1kg/2lb 3oz dill cucumbers, 2 litre/3½ pt water, 250g/9oz salt, 15ml/1 tbsp vinegar

Wash the vegetables, then prick them with a fork so that the water gets inside easier, and arrange in a pot. Sprinkle salt over every layer of vegetables. When all the vegetables are used, press down with a plate and place a small stone on the plate. Leave for 24 hours so that the vegetables release their juices. Boil some water with the remaining salt and cool. Pour the cooled water over the torshi, add the tablespoon of vinegar and again press down with the plate and stone. Cover and leave to sit for 21 days.

A salad which everyone loves

Torshi is a word of Persian origin and it means "pickled". It is used in practically an identical form in the Middle East, the entire Balkans and Turkey. A large number of families in Montenegro make their own torshi today, even though in the supermarkets they can find all sorts of pickled salads. But homemade torshi is a tradition here and what is sold in the supermarkets can never be compared to what is made at home. And if the family has peppers, cucumbers, tomatoes and the rest in their own gardens then it is something very special. Raw torshi is the most widespread torshi in this region. It is called raw because it is not boiled or baked, it is easy to prepare and everyone loves it. Old-fashioned raw torshi is prepared without preservatives or Campden tablets (potassium or sodium metabisulphite). One more of those foods that are good for a hangover! And they also told us this - the appearance of mould will be prevented if crossed cherry twigs or a handful of nettles are placed on it before the plate and stone are put on top.



Peppers in cream

Ingredients for 4 persons: 4 peppers, 1kg/2lb 3oz cream, 10g/2 tsp salt

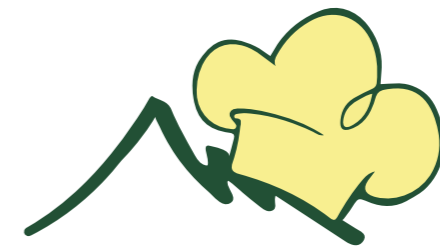
Wash each pepper and sprinkle some of the salt over. Stand them upright and allow to sit for a day. After that drain off the surplus water. Add the rest of the salt to the cream, lightly beat with a spoon and stuff the peppers. Cover the bottom of the pot with cream, then arrange the peppers, filling the spaces between them and in the end cover with cream. Close the pot tightly and leave to sit for 10 days in the fridge. After this the peppers are ready to be eaten.

It also can be made with yardum

Peppers can also be covered with yardum. It is slightly salted and left for two weeks, to mature together. This is katun-style torshi, because yardum is prepared during the summer, when the sheep are in the high mountain pastures.

Although it seems that these ingredients do not actually go well together, you have to try peppers with cream. The pepper remains fresh and crunchy, and the cream acquires a peppery aroma, and you simply cannot stop eating them. This salad can easily turn into an entire meal, because the cream is high in calories.





Baked sweets

The smell of cakes was not often experienced in the mountains. They were prepared exclusively for major holidays and celebrations. The delicate ingredients for cakes were not easily available, and they were expensive too. What was important was to feed large families, and cakes were a luxury. But for this reason there are several traditional confections that have survived until today, and whoever you mention them to will tell you that these remind them of their childhood. Because, children remember sweets, especially if the house rarely smelled of them.



Mafis

Ingredients for 4 persons: 250g/9oz flour, 2 egg yolks, 15g/1 tbsp sugar, 100ml/3.5fl oz soured milk or lukewarm milk, zest of 1 lemon, 12g/4 tsp baking powder, 500ml/18fl oz oil for frying, 100g/3½oz icing sugar, vanilla sugar

Mix a smooth, firm pastry from the egg yolks, sugar, soured milk, flour and baking powder and zest the lemon into this mixture. Shape into a ball and leave uncovered for 15-20 minutes. Then roll out the pastry to a thickness of 0.5cm (¼ inch), cut into triangles or squares and shallow-fry in hot oil, until they start to turn yellow. Occasionally baste the *mafis* with the oil in which they are frying so that they rise better. When they turn yellow, turn them over and fry on the other side. Remove and place on a baking tray lined with kitchen roll to absorb the excess fat. Dust with icing sugar and vanilla sugar. *Mafis* can also be eaten as a savoury dish by adding cheese or *kajmak*.

Nothing or something to remember

- Is there anything here?

- *Mafish!* (short for the Arabic mafi shay'in - there's nothing.)

Grandma also refers to this "nothing" when the grandchildren ask if there is anything to eat (as if they hadn't just eaten half an hour ago) and she says, pretending to be cross: "there's mafish!" "Nothing" then means that "nothing" in mafish. That which is puffed up and hollow, empty, deserving of ridicule. But when it is covered with sugar, jam or *kajmak*, mafish is really something, something really delicious and good, which smells gorgeous and triggers memories... Of course, in its original form there was no lemon zest or vanilla sugar, these simply were not available then. We, the newer generation, added these ingredients to give mafish a bit of aroma. Anyway, there was nothing wrong with what our grandmothers made, it is etched into the memories of all children who milled around the stove waiting for mafish, so you also can skip the lemon and vanilla.



Sponge cake

Ingredients for 4 persons: 12 eggs, 300g/11oz sugar, 250g/9oz flour, zest of 1 lemon or orange, 6g/2 tsp baking powder, vanilla sugar

Separate the egg whites and the yolks into two bowls. Whisk the egg whites, gradually adding the sugar. When the egg whites are thoroughly whisked, gradually add the egg yolks, one by one, and continue to beat. When the mixture becomes uniform, gradually add the flour which has been mixed with baking powder. Gently mix with a spoon until the mixture becomes uniform and add the ground lemon or orange rind. Pour into a mould that has been greased and sprinkled with flour. Bake for 15 minutes at 250°C/480°F, then for another 30 minutes at 200°C/400°F. Do not open the oven during baking. Sprinkle the baked sponge with sugar and vanilla sugar.

Ode to our grandmothers

At one time, no table for a special occasion could be imagined without sponge cake - the most universal sweet dish in Montenegro. Nowadays it is hard for this not to turn out right - the eggs are whisked thoroughly and quickly with a mixer, baking powder guarantees that it will rise well and remain at the attained height. But before electricity was discovered, everything was just a little more complicated, however simple the recipe was. Sure, there were fresh eggs aplenty, even if it sometimes happened that a lazy or tired hen would remain somewhere outside the fence, on the grass, and not in the chicken coop. But you needed to have strong arms to whisk 12 egg whites without a break - it is easy for the egg whites to "sink" without a single bubble if the cook stops. Everything had to be firm enough so that it would not fall flat when the flour was added, or at the moment when it was taken out of the oven. Apart from that, one had to be an expert to stoke the fire to a temperature of 250°C/480°F and then 200°C/400°F! And the housewife could only dream about the magic of baking powder. Well done to our grandmothers, all respect to their strong arms and their love.



Revanija or Unutma

Ingredients for 15 persons: 6 eggs, 250g/9oz sugar, 100ml/3.5fl oz boiling water, 200ml/7fl oz oil, 250g/9oz flour, 12g/4 tsp baking powder, 3g/½ tsp salt

Separate the egg whites from the yolks, add salt to the egg whites and whisk them at the fastest speed. Slowly add 100g/3½oz sugar and whisk the egg whites until they are firm. Beat the yolks with the remaining sugar, pour in the hot water and beat for a little longer so that the sugar dissolves completely. Then add the oil and whisk in the mixer at the lowest speed. Slowly add the flour mixed with baking powder. In the end, add the whisked egg whites and mix with a wooden spoon. Pour the mixture into a circular baking pan 30 cm/12 inches in diameter, which has been greased and sprinkled with flour.

Bake in a preheated oven at 100°C/210°F for 10 minutes, and then cover with foil and bake for another 90 minutes at 150°C/300°F.

The cake can also have sherbet (sugar syrup) poured over it. It can be made with half flour and half semolina, and with sherbet poured over it. The basic mixture can be spiced up with chopped walnuts, raisins, coconut and the like.

For beat-masters

If anyone is a hero/heroine at cooking with eggs, they should prove it by making revanija. To the experienced cook probably everything is clear - but, beginners - take it slowly. Luckily we're only dealing with six eggs here...



Gurabije

Ingredients for 15 persons: 3 eggs, 250g/9oz sugar, 250ml/8 fl oz oil, 100ml/3.5fl oz yoghurt, 12g/4 tsp baking powder, 250g/9oz flour

Beat the eggs, add sugar and beat until the sugar dissolves. Then add the other ingredients. Mix into a dough of medium thickness. From the dough make cubes, arrange in a baking pan with 2 cm/1 inch clearance around each one. Bake in a preheated oven at a medium temperature for about half an hour.

A sugar cube in the middle

The first association is a grandmother who, finally, takes out of the oven the baking pan which has been making the whole world smell; then comes the running outdoors with cakes in one's hand and playing, playing, for the whole day... This ancient sweet gurabija, they say, had to have something in the middle: a sugar cube or a piece of walnut. But even without that, the crisp dough of the sweet buns was extremely delicious, and also nutritious. Gurabija also arrived from the Middle East (the Turkish word gurabiye comes from the Arabic *gurābiyyā*), where the basic dough served as the basis for a series of similar delicacies. Hence, with a little imagination, out of the classic round gurabija you could make various variants by playing around with the shapes and adding fruit or jam, or dipping them in chocolate...

When there was no time for imagination, the housewife would simply place the entire dough in a baking pan and, after baking, would sprinkle a little sugar and cut into triangles, more like a cake. We tried it with coffee, and it was perfect.



Poljupčiči (little kisses)

Ingredients for 15 persons: 250g/9oz lard or margarine, 2 egg yolks, 1 entire egg, 135g/9 tbsp sugar, 50ml/1¾ fl oz oil, 12g/4 tsp baking powder, 500-600g/1lb 1oz - 1lb 5oz flour, a little lemon juice, zest of 1 lemon, 250g/9oz icing sugar, 20g/1½ tbsp vanilla sugar, pekmez

Blend the lard or margarine well with the sugar, then add the yolks and entire egg and continue to beat until the mixture becomes foamy, then add the remaining ingredients and knead the dough. Flatten the dough to a thickness of 1 cm/½ inch, cut into circles with a small glass, arrange on a greased baking tray and bake at 180°C/360°F for 20 minutes. Spread the baked cookies with pekmez, join two halves together and roll in a mixture of icing sugar and vanilla sugar.

A small brandy glass as a cookie cutter

Poljupčiči (little kisses), better known as vanilice (vanilla cookies), are even more delicious if they sit for several days in a cardboard or tin box. They become so soft that they will melt in the mouth, a bite so satisfying that you will close your eyes and sigh, as you might when kissed. But it rarely happens that they last that long, they are true irresistible. Not so long ago, every housewife used to prepare them. And they were essential on their own, for members of the household and for various celebrations (saint's days, weddings...). They were a decoration on the table. An ordinary brandy glass served as a circular cutter. Traditionally, the two halves of the cookies were stuck together with pekmez, and children would particularly rejoice if, by some chance, some other jam was used as a filling. Some more lavish variants of poljupčiči are possible if ground walnuts or hazelnuts are added to the dough, but there are also Lenten variants.

Sutlijaš (rice pudding)

Ingredients for 4 persons: 200g/7oz rice, 1 litre/1.8 pt milk, 10g/2 tsp vanilla sugar, 120g/8 tbs sugar, pinch of salt, raisins and cinnamon to taste

Rinse the rice under a jet of water, place in a pan and only just cover with water. Leave to boil and add a little salt. When it comes to the boil, reduce the temperature and gradually add another 100 ml/3.5 fl oz or so of water. Stir constantly with a spoon. When all the water has evaporated, gradually add milk. As the rice swells, pour in the milk until the foreseen quantity is used up. When the rice is cooked and the milk has thickened, add sugar and vanilla and stir for another minute or two. Leave to stand for 10 minutes in a covered pan. Then pour into a dish and sprinkle with cinnamon to taste. If you add raisins, while cooking they should be put to boil in the milk.

Rice and milk for a great delicacy

Even though rice pudding cooked in milk can be found in many world cuisines, in the Balkans, where milk has always been readily available, it is particularly popular. Sutlijaš (from the Turkish word sütlaç) is often found on the dinner table in households, but also on the menu in restaurants. Children adore this simple delicacy and so do many older people. I suppose, because the milky taste takes them back to their childhoods. For the housewife, sutlijaš is an easy thing to prepare. The only important thing is to not forget it while it is simmering on the stove. Sometimes it can even be a substitute for dinner. Sometimes honey or fruit or a teaspoon of something sweet - wild strawberries, for example - was added to it, while today's favourites are cinnamon or grated chocolate. Warm or cold, thick or more runny, with things added or not, it will be excellent. So simple, but so good.



Montenegrin pancakes

Ingredients for 4 persons:

For the batter: 300g/11oz corn flour, 200g/7oz wheat flour, 700ml/1¼ pt milk, 5 eggs, water as needed, salt and sugar to taste

For the filling: 500g/1lb 1oz de-stoned prunes, 400g/14oz sugar, 200ml/7fl oz freshly squeezed orange juice, 100ml/3.5fl oz plum brandy, 100ml/3.5fl oz cream

Place the sugar into a heated pot with a teaspoon of oil and heat until it becomes slightly yellow. Pour into the juice of one orange, plum brandy and sliced prunes. Boil on a low heat for 15 minutes. Dip the fried pancakes into this mixture on both sides. Stack them on a warmed plate, pour the sauce and a teaspoon of cream over the top. Prepare the pancake mix two hours before frying.

Brandy instead of jam

One cannot do anything in the mountain kitchen without corn flour, not even when pancakes are concerned. But this time it is less important. A mixture of prunes (local varieties of plums, unsprayed, mountain-strength, sweet-bitter-sour ones), plum brandy and sweet oranges - for example from the coast near Bar - it piques one's curiosity, sounds exciting. And also the fact that the pancakes are dipped on both sides makes sure that the tastes and aromas of the mountains are absorbed completely... This needs to be tried.

This dish, we admit, is not traditional. But everything in it is traditional, apart from the orange which is added to give a sweet and sour taste.



Bilberry cake

Ingredients for 4 persons: 5 eggs, 125g/4½oz sugar, 160g/5½oz flour, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 100ml/3.5fl oz milk, 6g/2 tsp baking powder, 500g/1lb 1oz bilberries, 100g/3½oz icing sugar

Heat the oven to 180°C/360°F. Beat the eggs and sugar, then add the milk, oil and flour mixed with the baking powder. Pour the mixture into a baking tray and bake for about 10 minutes. Take the baking tray out of the oven and place the bilberries over the batter so that they sink into the mixture, then return to the oven to bake for another 20 minutes at 180°C/360°F. The cake is cut into squares and served sprinkled with icing sugar.

The noble blue berry

The wild European blueberry, or bilberry, (*Vaccinium myrtillus*) is the most expensive of our mountain fruits. This is absolutely justified. This aristocratic, high-altitude plant from the heather family, a relative of the cranberry, is extremely nutritious, and besides that, picking a kilogram of bilberries is no easy work. First one has to climb up to the edges or clearings in a spruce forest or fir and beech forest, then stoop down to the ground, and with the fingers pick the berries, one by one, from the low bush for hours. This country's law prohibits picking bilberries using a so-called 'rake', because it can cause long-term damage to the plants. This plant loves gently sloping land, exposed to the sun, but also snow because it protects it and gives it moisture. It can withstand temperatures down to -28°C (-18°F).

The juicy, sweet-sour berries, each weighing a gram or two can make an ordinary cake into a special one, even with the addition of a small quantity, or together with other fruit.





Ashure

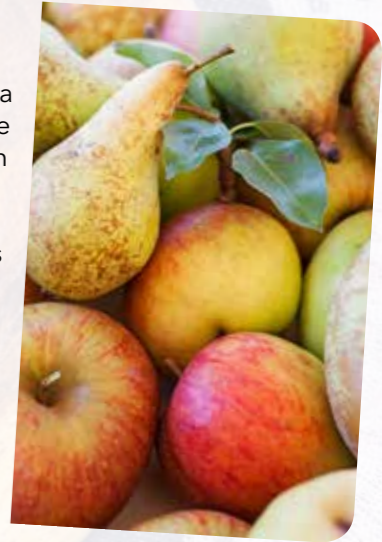
Ingredients for 4 persons: 200g/7oz cracked wheat, 1 pear, 1 apple, 50g/1¾oz dried figs, 50g/1¾oz sugar

Boil the wheat, strain and place to cool. Then add the fruit chopped into cubes and sugar. Before preparing, the wheat needs to be left to soak in water overnight.

Festival of new beginnings

Ashure or Noah's Pudding, as it is also called, is a Muslim dessert, which is usually prepared on the festival Ashura, on the tenth day of the Muslim month of Muharram.

Ashure is made from between 7 and 77 foodstuffs – fruit, nuts and cereals, and there must be an odd number of them, and it is shared with friends and neighbours, in at least three houses. The symbolism of Ashura is linked to the prophet Nūḥ, or Noah, but this is a unique dish that was reputedly served when Noah's Ark rested on dry land after the Great Flood. On that day, the people from the Ark prepared this dish because, after the long voyage, only a little remained of various foodstuffs, which were cooked together and eaten. For this reason, this delicacy is a symbol of togetherness, and has been preserved as such to this very day.





Dry cookies

Ingredients for 4 persons: 250g/9oz lard or margarine, 2 egg yolks, 1 whole egg, 9 tablespoons sugar, 12g/4 tsp baking powder, 500-600g/1lb 2oz-1lb 5oz flour, a little lemon juice, zest of one lemon, 60ml/4 tbsp oil, 250g/9oz icing sugar, 20g/5tsp vanilla sugar

Beat the lard or margarine well with the sugar, then add the egg yolks and whole egg, and beat until the mixture becomes frothy. Add the oil, lemon juice, grated lemon rind, flour and baking powder. The mixture should separate from the inside of the bowl. Then flatten the pastry to a thickness of 1 cm/½ inch, and make various shapes with cookie cutters. Arrange onto a greased baking tray and bake at 180°C/360°F for 20 minutes. Roll them in icing sugar mixed with vanilla sugar.

A favourite, for all occasions

Housewives particularly love dry cookies. Since there was never any time for complicated dishes and sweets, especially in the villages or katuns, where there was a lot to do concerning the livestock and preparation of cheese and kajmak, ideally "something sweet" would be what could be made quickly, in large quantities, and could keep for days. Before margarine appeared, only lard was used for making dry cookies - that same, organic lard, which was spread on bread to make a snack for the children with the addition of a little Cayenne pepper or sugar. By using it, cookies, however dry and hard they were, would crumble and melt in the mouth. They are more delicious and healthier.

They go perfectly with tea or coffee.



Alšijaš

Ingredients for 4 persons: 300g/11 oz bilberries, 40-50g/4-5 tbsp flour, 60-75g/4-5 tbsp sugar, 20g/5 tsp vanilla sugar, ½ litre/18 fl oz water

Boil the bilberries in water and strain them. Mix the flour into a paste with a little water. Add the sugar, vanilla sugar and the flour paste to the water in which the bilberries were cooked and boil this. When the mixture boils, add the boiled bilberries, slowly mixing them in. Pour into a bowl while it is still hot.

Bilberry pudding

Without additives or preservatives. Without milk. A light and healthy delicacy made from bilberries. Somewhat similar to pudding or sutlijaš (rice pudding). During the "Day of Bilberries" festival in the city of Plav, hosts serve akšijaš in wooden bowls. In the city of Rožaje somehow the dish akšijaš has transformed into ikšijaš. In more recent times vanilla pudding mix (or custard powder) is used to prepare this delicacy instead of a flour mixture.

60 min





Halva

Ingredients for 4 persons: 60-75ml/4-5 tbsp oil, 40-60g/4-6 tbsp flour, 90g/6 tbsp sugar, 200ml/7fl oz water, 100g/3½oz chopped walnuts (as required), icing sugar for dusting

Prepare the sherbet (sugar syrup): boil the sugar and water for 10 minutes. Pour the oil into a large frying pan, heat it and add the flour, fry at a fairly low temperature until the flour turns a beautiful brown colour and starts to separate from the spoon. Pour the hot sherbet into the frying pan and constantly stir until the halva thickens. Take out the cooked halva with a spoon and serve on a plate. Dust with icing sugar.

Sweet as halva

"It goes like halva" is a saying in the Balkans to this day for something that is very in demand, that quickly goes, similar to "it sells like hot cakes". This is proof of how well-loved halva was, as is the fact that there used to be specialised halva shops. Versatile homemade tahan alva (sesame halva) can be found today in Plav. Halva is the original 'sweet' - the word halva means 'sweet' in Arabic, and it came to the Balkans from Arabic countries. It is very quickly and easily prepared, but many variations are possible - by adding honey, fruit or chocolate, as well as by making it with corn flour.

The problem with halva is stopping. Halva possesses the power of the sirens who tricked and enticed Odysseus, and when someone gets a taste for it, it is difficult to resist the pleasure.



Kadaif

Ingredients for 4 persons: 1 bag (300-400g/10-14oz) kadaif noodles, 200g/7oz butter, 75ml/5 tbsp oil, 400-500g/14-16 oz walnut pieces; sherbet: 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar, 45ml/3 tbsp lemon juice, 800ml/1½ pt water

Place the butter and oil in a saucepan on a hot ring to melt the butter. Grind half the walnuts, and chop the rest. Place half of the kadaif noodles (shredded filo pastry) in a baking pan and slowly pour one-third of the hot melted butter over it with a spoon. Arrange the walnuts evenly over the noodles, then cover the walnut with the rest of the noodles. Lightly press down with your fingers and pour over the rest of the butter and oil. Heat the oven to 180°C/360°F and bake the kadaif for about 1 hour. It is ready when it begins to separate from the edge of the pan.

We prepare the sherbet when the kadaif is placed in the oven. The sherbet must be fairly thick because this is of vital importance for the kadaif. When it is ready, take the kadaif out of the oven to slightly cool, and then we pour over it the still-hot sherbet with a ladle, in a thin stream.

Honey nest

In Greece and Turkey they say that kadaif is their national dish, even though it is originally from Palestine. These ultra-thin, short noodles are the basis for various sweet and savoury delicacies, and the combination of pastry and butter, as with baklava, requires walnuts and thick syrup for completeness and balance. The noodles can also be made at home, with a little skill and patience.

Urmašica, Brdajlija or Dud

Ingredients for 15 persons: 250g/9oz margarine, 2 egg yolks, 1 whole egg, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 100ml/3.5fl oz thick soured milk, 900g/2lb flour, 6g/2 tsp baking powder, 3g/½ tsp bicarbonate of soda, 200g/7oz walnuts; sherbet: 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar and 1 litre/1.8pt water, 1 lemon

Beat the margarine into a froth, add the egg yolk, whole egg, soured milk and oil. Mix the baking powder and bicarbonate of soda into the flour. Add the flour gradually to the mixture, and when the pastry begins to separate from the bowl, make balls the size of walnuts, place on a weaving reed and roll them out. Add a walnut piece. Surround the walnut piece with pastry and place on a baking tray with the contents facing downwards. Bake for 40 minutes at 200°C/400°F until they turn brown. During this time, prepare the sherbet - boil 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar and 1 litre of water for 30 minutes, add the lemon cut into slices. When the brdajlijas are finished, while they are still piping hot pour over some of the hot sherbet. Cook the remaining sherbet for another 5 minutes with the slices of lemon. Then pour this over the *brdajlijas*.



Well-known desserts

Baklava and urmašica are the most popular Oriental sweets. One does not need to worry too much about the large quantity of sugar in the sherbet (sugar syrup) in which urmašica and similar cakes feel like a fish in water. Firstly, one or two of the delicacies satisfies one's need for something sweet, and secondly, in the mountains there are very few fat people. The thin air, plenty of moving up and downhill, in fact the constant physical activity, as well as the low temperatures, burn up any surplus calories. Housewives would attempt to decorate this delicacy as best they knew and could, in times when there were no tools intended for that. They decorated them by rolling them on a 'reed' (brdo) (part of a weaver's loom, resembling a comb) - and that's where the name brdajlije comes from, but this can also be done on a grater, on the palm of the hand, with a fork or similar. Sometimes lye (wood ash mixed with water and strained) was used for making urmašica, and that is the authentic recipe for this sweet, but hardly anyone nowadays makes it in this way.



Tatlije

Ingredients for 15 persons: 2 eggs, 100ml/3.5fl oz oil, 480ml/2 cups milk, 25g/1oz fresh yeast, 650-700g/1lb 7oz-1lb 9oz flour; sherbet: 800g/1lb 12oz sugar, 1 litre/1.8 pt water, 30g/2½ tbsp vanilla sugar

Put the yeast in a bowl with the milk to start it bubbling and add a teaspoon of sugar to it. In a mixing bowl place the flour, eggs, oil and the activated yeast. Mix the dough and pull off small balls. Press the balls onto a grater (pieces of walnut may be placed on top) and roll in the direction in which you would grate. Bake at 200°C/400°F for about half an hour (until they turn a yellow colour). When they are done, leave to cool. When they are completely cooled, pour over them hot sherbet which has been boiled for 5-10 minutes. Leave overnight to absorb all the syrup.

A walnutty surprise

There are no almonds in the mountains, children eat the hazelnuts as soon as they notice them, and pick them even before they have completely ripened, and for this reason there are walnuts for cakes. This is a plant that should be kept away from the house because it has very strong roots which are also used for dyeing. Its leaves give wool a green tint. Usually a few unripened walnuts are added to plum brandy to make it into a bitter liqueur. The fruit is gathered when it falls to the ground or is picked, and one's hands become totally black from handling it. Cracking walnuts is a lovely winter entertainment. If you don't take care of this in good time, sometimes it's the squirrels that get to enjoy that entertainment more.

While we were gathering recipes we heard one unusual story about tatlija. In our region there is a long tradition of believing in "exorcising fear" - a technique to help a child when it is restless and given to crying, when it wakes up in the night or has nightmares. In every place there was a certain woman (and there still are today) who exorcise a person's fear by casting molten lead into water, and from that lead various shapes would be created, which would show the woman who was practising this what it was that was causing fear in the child. They told us that tatlija was made with water that had been used for exorcising fear. Why this is the case, they did not explain. Maybe tatlija has some magical power!



Hačajlija

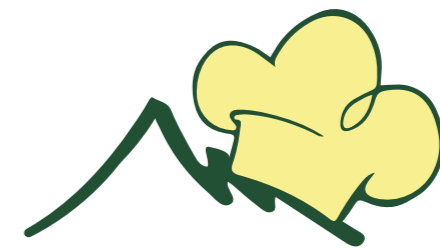
Ingredients for 15 persons: 250g/9oz butter, 200ml/7fl oz oil, 200ml/7fl oz soured milk, 50g/1¾oz sugar, 1kg/2lb 3oz flour, 5g/1 tsp bicarbonate of soda, 200g/7oz walnut kernels. **For the sherbet:** 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar, 1 litre/1.8 pt water

Place a little butter, oil, soured milk and sugar in a pot and bring to the boil on the stove. Remove from the stove and leave to cool a little. Pour the flour, which has been mixed with bicarbonate of soda, into the cooled mixture and then place back onto the stove and stir continuously for 10 minutes at a medium temperature. Form the dough into equal-sized balls, and place a walnut half inside each, arrange on a baking tray, roll out with your hand and add texture with a fork.

Bake for 15 minutes at a temperature of 200°C/400°F, then turn the oven down to 100-150°C/210-300°F and bake for another hour. The sherbet which is poured over the baked cake is prepared by boiling 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar and 1 litre/1.8 pints of water for half an hour. Leave the cooked sherbet to cool. When the hačajlijas are done, pour over the cooled sherbet and put back into the oven for another 5-10 minutes at a temperature of 150°C/300°F.

Speciality of Plav-Gusinje

Hačajlija is a delicacy which is prepared only in the cities of Plav and Gusinje. It is rare to find dishes that are so localised, but no one was able to tell us how it came to be so. This delicacy is also prepared today in almost all households which overlook Lake Plav.



Jams and sweet spreads

September and October are the months when you will nowadays encounter gardens and yards where a fire is kindled and a large quantity of jam is being prepared, because this is prepared outside, so as not to get the house dirty. Housewives work hurriedly because the fruit has ripened and it needs to be preserved for the winter. And this is where artistry comes into play, in the combinations of fruit, and absolutely every hostess likes most, when everything is ready, to cast a proud glance towards the shelves in the basement where a whole variety of differently coloured jars are arranged with the smells and tastes of home-grown or wild fruit. Of course there is not a single child who wasn't given a hiding at least once for stealing a jar of preserve, but the jar was worth it!



Uncooked Cornelian cherry jam

2kg/4½lb Cornelian cherries, 2kg/4½lb sugar

Wash the Cornelian cherries, squash them and squeeze through a coarse strainer. Put the strained content into an appropriate bowl and add the sugar. Leave to sit for 24 hours, stirring occasionally. Pour the jam into jars and close tightly. Store in a cool, dark place.

Pekmez od šljiva

4kg/9lb plums

Wash the plums, remove the stones and place in a pan on the stove. When it starts to boil stir continuously with a wooden spoon. Simmer at a medium temperature for 2½ to 3 hours. The pekmez is ready when the mixture begins to separate from the walls and base of the pan. Pour the finished, hot pekmez into hot jars. For the pekmez to bake, place the jars in the oven at a medium temperature for another 20-30 minutes. Towards the end of boiling, 100 g/3½ oz sugar and cinnamon and a clove can be added.

A little reminder

Plum jam can be prepared in several ways. Pekmez is made, it is said, when you forget when it was that you started cooking the jam. In any case, for a good pekmez, apart from a long cooking time and constant stirring, you also need good plums. In our mountains many different types of plum are cultivated and everyone knows which ones are for brandy and which ones are for jam. For jam, plums can be combined with apples, pears and other fruits, but it is best with just plums and nothing else. The plum trees are not sprayed, and are protected only with a coat of lime in the spring. Slightly tart, but sweet as honey. Often people in our region love to dilute a spoon or two of pekmez in a glass of cold water and drink it; some like this just on its own, to refresh themselves and sweeten their mouths, while some like to drink it with a meal, especially on days of fasting. The preparation of jams for winter is one of our traditions which has survived to the present day. Although pekmez is ever-present, a whole variety of jams are made - rosehip, Cornelian cherry, raspberry and various fruit jams. Making rosehip jam is very demanding, it takes a long time to process the rosehips and there is a lot of work involved in it. But its taste is perfect, the effort is definitely worthwhile!



Blackberry preserve

1kg/2lb 3oz wild blackberries, 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar

Arrange the washed and drained blackberries in a pan in alternating layers of sugar and blackberries, until all the sugar and blackberries are used up, but finishing with a layer of sugar. Cover with a cloth and leave to sit overnight. On the following day, boil the preserve - from the moment when it comes to the boil, cook on a medium heat for about 45 minutes, shaking the pan slowly left and right, and occasionally skim the foam from the surface. When it has finished cooking, cover it with a damp cheesecloth or tea towel. When it is completely cooled, pour into glass jars and seal with a lid.

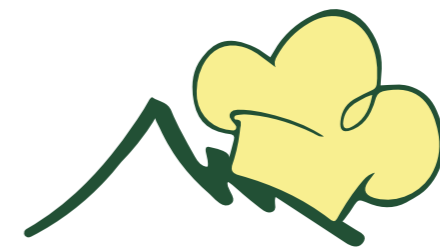
Plum preserve

1kg/2lb 3oz peeled and de-stoned plums, 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar, 200ml/7fl oz water

Peel the plums and remove the stones. Place the plums in a shallow pan with the sugar and the water. Boil at a high temperature for about 25 minutes and occasionally shake the pan (do not stir). Cover with a damp tea towel and leave it to stand for 24 hours. Fill the jars first with the plums and then with the syrup.

Preserves

Guests are offered fruit preserve and water before brandy and coffee. Fruit preserve is very sweet and so only a teaspoon is taken, maybe two. For almost every type of fruit, equal weights of fruit and sugar are used. In the larders of hardworking housewives one can also find forest fruit, bilberry, quince, cherry and plum preserves. And just imagine, there is also rose preserve!



Juices and compotes

Obviously in this region juices were never bought from the shops, but they were always there in the house. Depending on the season, they were prepared from early spring right up to the autumn. The season always opened with elderflower, and maybe that is why children like it most, because during the winter they had become bored with "red" juices made from raspberry, blackberry and bilberry. Compotes are a trademark of our winter, although they can be conserved and drunk at any time of the year. This is our forerunner to iced teas.



Syrup

8 rose flowers, 2 litres/3½ pt water, 10g/2½ tsp citric acid

Gather some large, undamaged, nicely blooming flowers of scented May roses. Break off the petals, wash them and stack in a large jar. Pour cold water over them, add some citric acid and stir. Seal the jar with cellophane.

Expose in a sunny place, where it should remain for at least 21 days. After this time, strain the liquid through a straining bag and pour into bottles. This syrup has a very beautiful scent and can be sweetened with sugar to taste.

Scent for the soul

Even to those who since their childhoods have looked at jars of rose petals in the sun, rose water still seems something special, unusual and exotic. As does in fact everything involving roses, including folk love songs in which a girl is often called a rose.

Rose water is all scent and aroma, it has no taste and is not drunk, but rather inhaled, the soul yearning for it and with it, like the lover sighing for his beloved.





Bilberry juice

1kg/2lb 3oz bilberries, 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar, 20g/5 tsp citric acid, 1 litre/1.8 pt water

Wash the fresh bilberries in cold water and drain them. Mash the bilberries in a large bowl, pour in the citric acid, cover with water and stir well. Leave to stand for 24 hours, stirring occasionally. After 24 hours, strain the juice into an appropriate pan, add sugar to it and bring to the boil. Boil the juice for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, and then pour it into sterilised glass bottles and seal them hermetically.

Wait for the juice to completely cool and keep in a cool, dark place. When serving, dilute the syrup with water.

There's no better

In autumn, the edges of the forest and clearings become a dark-red carpet, particularly magnificent on Mt. Bjelasica and the Prokletije Mountains. While the bilberry leaves there are still showing off their beauty and strength, the fruit - picked at the end of the summer in pleasant, dry weather, after the dew - is already preserved in juices and jams, or else they are dried, and all the more nowadays - frozen. Bilberry juice is also medicinal. As is everything involving this remarkable plant. It is difficult to list all the things it contains (a complex of anthocyanins, tannins, phenolic acids, sugar, organic acids - cider vinegar and citric acid - vitamin C, a complex of vitamin B group, vitamin A...) and what it can be used in (it used as an anti-diarrhoeal, it preserves and improves sight, it preserves the capillaries, rejuvenates, and is a strong antioxidant...)

Cornelian cherry juice

1kg/2lb 3oz Cornelian cherries, 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar, 1 litre/1.8 pt water

Wash the fresh Cornelian cherries in cold water and drain them. Mash them in a large bowl, cover with water and stir well. Leave to stand for 24 hours, occasionally stirring the contents. After 24 hours, strain the liquid into an appropriate pan and add the sugar. Stir and bring to the boil. Cook the juice for about 5 minutes after it comes to the boil, stirring occasionally, and then pour it into sterilised glass bottles and seal hermetically. Wait until the juice completely cools and store in a cool, dark place. When serving, dilute the syrup with water. During the preparation you can also add citric acid.

Healthy as a Cornelian cherry

Cornelian cherry is a wild plant well known in nutrition and medicine ever since the Ancient Greeks. Like many other berries which nature gifts to us without asking for anything in return, these dark-red berries have found wide application in the mountain regions. They ripen at the beginning of the autumn, just as various juices and jams are being prepared, and so Cornelian cherry juice and jam can also be found on housewives' shelves. Dried Cornelian cherries are used in compotes or tea, to provide extra vitamin C to ward off colds. And you are guaranteed, as the saying goes, to be "healthy as a Cornelian cherry". Juices are also made from wild raspberries and blackberries, and their aroma is something unbelievable. Today raspberries are also cultivated commercially, so are easier to get hold of, but chokeberries (aronia) are also cultivated, which have extremely medicinal properties. And maybe you will also have the fortune to sample the unbelievable taste of wild cherry, which is still called locally 'black cherry' or 'bird cherry'. Birds adore its small, black fruit, sweet and sour and bitter, and when it is completely ripe, one should pick it before the birds do. And the juice is something like Spanish passion, Eastern wisdom and Balkan mystique... all rolled into one.





Elderflower juice

10 elder flowers (completely opened), 1 litre/1.8 pt water, 800g/1lb 12oz sugar, 1 lemon, 10g/2½ tsp citric acid

Submerge the flowers in the water with citric acid and the slices of lemon. Stir well and leave to stand in a cool and dark place for 24 hours. Then strain the liquid, add the sugar and stir well. Leave to stand for another 24 hours, with occasional stirring. After 48 hours pour the syrup into glass bottles, seal hermetically and store in a cold place. Serve the syrup diluted with water.

Elder

What a unique, intense and sophisticated taste this is – perfect for the heat of summer. As if, with the refreshment and invigoration you also get a frothy, Oriental dessert and a mysterious call to some hidden place...

Elder (*Sambuci flos*) is a deciduous bush. It grows in light, warm and humid places, on the edge of forests, and beside streams and roads. It blossoms profusely in May or June: its large clusters of white or yellowish flowers are larger than two palms cupped together, and its scent is very heady. In the villages, jam is made from the berries of the elder (round, shiny, purply-black stone fruits with red juice), which is picked when it is completely ripe. It is used as a laxative. And a drink is made from dried elderberries for colds, fevers, flu and various coughs. In folk medicine it is also used to bolster milk production upon giving birth.

An old method of preservation is threading the flowers with string, like tobacco. These strings are then hung to dry in the shade and in a draught.



Vodnjica – Juniper berry juice

1kg/2lb 3oz wild apples (crab apples), 200g/7oz juniper berries, 200g/7oz sloes, 200g/7oz barley or oats, 5 litres/9 pt water, 200g/7oz sugar

Wash all the ingredients and remove the apple stalks and pips and cut the apples in half. Arrange the ingredients in a glass dish or barrel, add sugar and pour over the cold water. Cover with cheesecloth and leave for 21 days for the fermentation to finish, after which it can be drunk.

Domesticated wild fruits

It is hard to say just how old the recipe for vodnjica is. Since barley is involved here, somehow it all smells like the first step in searching for that liquid gold called beer. Apart from this one, there are also other combinations of wild fruit used for soaking in water and fermenting, and it is interesting that both forest apples and juniper and sloes are considered medicinal plants. Vodnjica is without doubt a high-quality drink. Let's take a closer look at those gifts from beech and pine forests and clearings: the wild-apple vinegar is already legendary; the blue juniper is celebrated by its inclusion in juniper brandy - in cooking it is used as a flavouring and a preservative; the sour sloe is beneficial for various complaints - every part of it is used for medicinal purposes.

So there you go - you can find all sorts of interesting things in this low-spreading bush, besides rabbits. Apart from their use in their fresh state, apples can be cut into slices, dried and threaded on a string, and at one time villagers used to dry the berries of juniper and sloe in the attic in the draught.



Black pinecone juice

15 young pine cones from the black pine, 1kg/2lb 3oz sugar, 1½ litre/2½ pt water

Wash the pine cones and submerge in lukewarm water and leave to stand for 24 hours. The following day, strain the water, add sugar and bring to the boil. When it has boiled, add the pine cones and simmer at a low temperature until the pine cones soften. When they are cooked, pour the liquid into glass bottles.

Katun speciality

Many people in urban surroundings in Montenegro have never heard of this juice, let alone tried it. And it was a revelation for us as well. It is not available for sale, it is not available in the villages. We realised that the secret of this juice was kept in the katuns. And where else would it be made but at high altitudes, where there are no trees except conifers.

So, if your path leads you up high, to the land of the katuns, every hostess will definitely offer you this juice. Its unusual Bordeaux colour, from pine cones that are brown, will certainly surprise you. And the taste of this juice is a breath of fresh mountain air. Some hostesses nowadays bring pine cones from the mountains, put them in the freezer, and make juice when the household wants it, and its aroma is almost unchanged.



Fresh fruit compote

200g/7oz apples, 200g/7oz pears, 200g/7oz quinces, 200g/7oz sugar, 1 litre/1.8 pt water

Peel the fruit, remove the pips, cut into large cubes, wash, cover with water and leave to boil for 30 minutes. Before the end add the sugar and boil for another few minutes.

In the form of compotes

Fruit, which is abundant in the autumn, is preserved in various ways. In dark and cool places in the basement, in the attic, and usually in the hay, in the form of juices, preserves and jams, and by drying them. And as compote it can keep for a very long time if it is well sealed and sterilised. Then it is usually made from one type of fruit - plum, cherry, pear... Once compote was a substitute for sweets, and we have already said that sweets were not made that often. It would not be a bad thing if that custom returned today - is there anything healthier than being sweetened with fruit!





Ošaf

400g/14oz prunes, 1 litre/1.8 pt water

Wash the prunes and pour over the cold water. Then boil for 10 minutes. Sugar can be added to taste.

The harbinger of winter

Compote can be made from any fruit, but the one that always reminds of winter is this one -prunes. Dried plums have a characteristic aroma, which can be both sweet and sour, with hints of smoke in the background, even though plums are not dried in smoke. And all these aromas come to the fore in compote. Ošaf, as it is called here, is very healthy, and for this reason it is made most often during winter. It is particularly good for digestion, and every elderly lady will tell you that if you suffer from digestive problems, before you visit the doctor, try prunes. If you don't like them very much, you'll definitely like them in compote.





Homemade teas

The use of plants in medicine is part of the culture of the people of this region. During the Middle Ages knowledge of medicinal herbs was preserved and applied in monasteries and monastery hospitals and in our folk songs fairies healed heroes with herbs. Dr Jovan Tucakov, who studies folk medicine and pharmacy, has concluded "that perhaps there is nowhere like this place, where there are so many traces of ancient medicine, which has been jealously preserved and passed on for centuries from generation to generation".



Rosehip tea

This is what used to be cooked “all day” on a wood-burning stove, and then placed “next to the stove” and drunk during those days when outside the frost and chill were still biting! It is a simple-to-make, but extremely healthy tea that is prepared from dried rosehips.

Thyme tea

Pour 200ml/7 fl oz boiling water into a bowl with a teaspoonful of dried thyme. Cover the bowl and leave to stand for 15 minutes. Strain and drink.

Whoever has breathed in the scent of this medicinal herb while it is slowly drying on the gentle mountain breeze definitely could not fail to try thyme tea. This is one of the most medicinal herbs that can be found in this area. It is well known as a natural remedy for coughs, for strengthening one’s immunity and against aches and pains. It has a calming effect on the nerves, although this won’t be necessary for you because you will be completely at peace while you stay in the Montenegrin mountains.

Oregano tea

Pour 200ml/7 fl oz boiling water into a bowl with a teaspoonful of wild oregano. Cover the bowl and leave to stand for 15 minutes. Strain and drink.

Wild oregano is one of the many wild medicinal herbs which grow in this region. The tea has a pleasant taste and has a wide application, but is mostly used for problems with the digestive system - especially diarrhoea - and with the respiratory organs.

Every year the National Tourism Organisation (NTO) of Montenegro is working more and more on making the country's tourist offer more complete with local products and domestic cuisine, and is trying to put local gastronomy at the focus of Montenegro's tourist offer. For this very reason, the NTO is partnering with the Regional Development Agency for Bjelasića, Komovi and Prokletije in this project, in order to obtain support for local activities from the national level, to encourage cooperation between producers and caterers, and to promoting Montenegrin products and the traditional cuisine. This all contributes to strengthening the competitiveness of our tourist offer, and to satisfying our guests, caterers and agricultural producers.

This year, in partnership with the Ministry of Sustainable Tourism, the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro and the Investment Development Fund, the National Tourism Organisation has launched the campaign "Domestic Tastes", with the slogan "Good, Better, Homemade". This campaign and the project "Local Gastronomy" within the tourist offer of Montenegro and Albania, as well as countless other activities, are a reflection of our commitment to creating scope in the hotel and catering sector for domestic products and traditional cooking.

Our mountain areas, apart from winning you over

with their beauty, are rich in their diverse cuisine. This publication presents to you traditional dishes characteristic of the northern region of our country, the culture of eating, but also elements of the traditional way of life, habits, customs and beliefs in this area.

We would like to thank the rural households, hotels and restaurants which participated in this project and which have gone through a series of training programmes in preparing traditional dishes. Through including domestic products and local recipes they will participate in preserving the cultural heritage represented in the local gastronomy and, in this way, will also improve the quality of their offer. We would like to urge and encourage all the others to commit themselves to completing their offer by including local products and specialities. Because if we want a good and quality offer, our recommendation is - GOOD, BETTER, HOMEMADE!

We hope that you will enjoy this cookbook, this study of the beautiful Montenegrin mountains, but particularly the quality and tasty products and dishes characteristic of these areas!

Željka Radak-Kukavičić,
Director of the National Tourist Organisation of Montenegro



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www.montenegro.travel

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