NOTHING BEETS BORSCHT

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MENU

Moscow Fish Stew
or Georgian Beef Stew
Cream of Apples

SOLYANKA

Solyanka literally means something made with salted foods. If you order *solyanka* in the Soviet Union, you will probably get a fish stew flavored with capers, Greek olives, and half-sour pickled cucumbers. Sometimes, however, you will get a meat stew, similarly prepared.

When I was in Leningrad I took a cab to my great aunt's home. The people who answered the door, however, were not my relatives, nor were they acquainted with them. They were very nice to me anyway and invited me into their apartment. It was a real hovel: a tiny apartment that housed a grandmother and mother, father, and baby boy, and others who were not present at that moment. But, no matter how poor, the Russians are always hospitable. That was one aspect of Russian culture I had read about but had never had the opportunity to see. They were lovely and warm people. We chatted, they offered me tea, they asked a lot of questions. . . . As a parting gift, they gave me a little set of recipe cards. On one side of each

card is a picture of the dish, on the other side is the recipe. That's where I got the *solyanka* recipe. And it's very good.

Solyanka is a quick and inexpensive luncheon dish, and for some reason it feels appropriate for a cold winter day. I have here two types of *solyanka*—a Moscow fish *solyanka* and a Georgian meat *solyanka.*

All the ingredients can be assembled ahead of time and put in the casserole and refrigerated or frozen, so that you can just put the dish on the stove and warm it up for a quick lunch.

MOSCOW FISH STEW
(*Moscovsky Solyanka*)

(4 SERVINGS)

1 large onion, chopped and sautéed
1 pound cabbage, shredded
2 pounds filleted halibut steak
½ lemon
2 half-sour pickled cucumbers
Salt and pepper
1 cup fish stock, clam juice, or water
4 ounces pitted black olives
1 ounce capers (2 tablespoons)
6 tablespoons tomato purée
2 to 4 tablespoons bread crumbs
4 tablespoons grated cheese (Gouda)
2 tablespoons butter

GARNISH: *black olives, sliced lemon, parsley*

If you haven't already done it, sauté the chopped onion in a large frying pan that has a cover, until lightly browned.

Add the shredded cabbage to the onions, mix, and cover the pan. Let steam over a very low flame for 15 minutes.

Cut the halibut into ¼-pound pieces or enough for individual servings and arrange them neatly over the onions and cabbage. Sprinkle with the juice of half a lemon.

Slice the two pickles (if you can't get half-sour pickles, use plain cucumbers), and arrange the slices over the fish. Salt and pepper to taste.

Pour 1 cup of stock over the fish and pickles. Cover the pot and simmer for 10 minutes. Then put 4 ounces black olives over the top of the pickles, sprinkle the capers over, and cover it all with the 6 tablespoons of tomato purée.

Cover the pot. Shake it a few times so that the tomato sauce will begin to penetrate the layers of vegetables and get to the fish. Simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. At this point you can put the dish aside until 15 minutes before you are ready to eat.

Sprinkle the top with bread crumbs, then cheese; dot with about 2 tablespoons butter. Bake, uncovered, in a 350° F. oven for about 15 minutes, or until the top is browned, the cheese melted, and the dish is warmed through.

Just before serving, decorate with lemon slices, pitted black olives, and parsley. Bring to the table in the pan.

GEORGIAN BEEF STEW
(*Groozinsky Solyanka*)

(6 SERVINGS)

Butter for sautéing and browning
1 cup chopped onions (2 to 3 small ones)
1 large clove garlic, minced
3 pounds beef (chuck), cut into 1-inch cubes, trimmed of fat and gristle
Salt and pepper
⅓ cup dry sherry
1 cup of 1-inch new half-sour pickles (often sold in jars), sliced
4 tablespoons tomato purée
1 or more tablespoons chopped fresh dill
4 tablespoons sour cream
1½ cups boiled rice (for serving stew with)

Melt the butter in a large frying pan. When it is foaming put the chopped onions and garlic in the pan and brown them.

When the onions are browned, add the cubed beef; season with salt and pepper. Brown the meat on all sides.

Transfer browned meat and onions to a 3-quart saucepan. Do not clean the frying pan! First pour the sherry into it, heat it for a few minutes until the sherry is bubbling, and then pour it over the meat, being sure to scrape in all the brown bits from the bottom of the pan.

Add the sliced pickles, tomato puree, and chopped dill to the meat. Mix the ingredients gently. Cover the saucepan and simmer over a small flame for about 1 hour and 15 minutes. Remove from flame.

Stir in the sour cream. Then put aside until ready to eat.

To serve, heat up the *solyanka* without letting it boil and serve on a bed of boiled rice.