NORTH ATLANTIC SEAFOOD

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE WITH RECIPES



ALAN DAVIDSON

AUTHOR OF *The Oxford Companion to Food*

THIRD EDITION

Russian Fish Soups

A hearty soup is an essential part of a full Russian meal and reflects the love of quantity as well as quality in Russian eating habits. In 1813 Ivan Krȳlov, the Russian La Fontaine, devoted a fable to the Russian passion for huge amounts of soup and the title of this fable has become the common expression for anything excessive: Dem'yanova ukha. In the fable, the host entreats his guest to find room for a fourth helping of the fish soup, described as being 'covered with amber'. Russians do indeed attach importance to the colour of fish soups and take pains, by removing neither too much nor too little of the fat from the surface, to obtain the coveted 'amber sparkles'.

Russians also like their fish bouillon to be properly clear. In the nineteenth century Molokhovets advised her readers, in preparing a sturgeon soup, to clarify the bouillon by stirring in some pressed caviar, which was then discarded! (She also recommended adding Veuve Clicquot champagne.)

The recent and excellent Soviet book on *Fish Dishes*, written by an authors' collective including Academician A. A. Pokrovsky, contains recipes which are more practical, including the following fish versions of three of the most popular and traditional Russian soups: Solyanka, Schchi and Borshch.

Solyanka Rȳbnaya

Fish solyanka serves four

white fish, ¾ kg (1½ lb) cleaned
salt
butter, 45 g (1½ oz)
onions, 2, finely chopped
tomato purée, 2 tbs
pickled gherkins, 150 g (5 oz)
capers, 2 tbs
bay leaves, 1 or 2
black peppercorns, 3
stoned olives, 100 g (3½ oz)
½ lemon, peeled and thinly sliced
parsley, chopped

Cut the cleaned fish into portion-sized pieces; cover them with cold water and bring to the boil, removing any scum. Then add salt to taste and simmer until done. Remove the fish and keep the bouillon hot. Meanwhile fry the onion in the butter, without letting it take colour, and add the tomato purée to it. Slice the gherkins and add them to the bouillon, followed by the cooked onion mixture, capers, bay leaves and peppercorns. Let it boil gently for 10 minutes, then add the pieces of fish and bring it just back to the boil. To serve, place a portion of fish in each bowl with a couple of slices of lemon and some olives, pour the soup over these and sprinkle with chopped parsley.

The soup is even better if left to mature for 24 hours and reheated.