

**SAVAGE**  
*Feast*

THREE GENERATIONS, TWO  
CONTINENTS, AND A DINNER TABLE  
(A MEMOIR WITH RECIPES)

**BORIS  
FISHMAN**

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## SOLYANKA (BRAISED CABBAGE WITH SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS) (V)

Time: 2 hours Serves: 6–8

*Solyanka (so-lee-AN-ka) is more commonly known as a soup, but this recipe makes a side dish so hearty, it'll easily work as a vegetarian main. Slippery jacks, the mushrooms my grandmother used in Minsk, aren't commonly available in America, but shiitakes are, and they make a very suitable substitute. For a more venturesome re-creation of that woodsy, just-picked taste—mushroom hunting is a religion in my part of the world—seek out a mix of shiitake, king trumpets, and hen-of-the-woods (maitake) mushrooms.*

2 pounds shiitake mushrooms, stemmed	1 large or 2 medium-size carrots, grated
2 tablespoons kosher salt, plus additional to taste	1 small to medium-size head green cabbage (2 pounds), cored and roughly chopped
6 bay leaves	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup tomato paste
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup vegetable oil	2 teaspoons sugar
1 large or 2 medium onions, chopped	$1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons allspice
6 garlic cloves, divided (3 diced and 3 put through a garlic press)	2 teaspoons ground coriander
	2 teaspoons caraway seeds

1. Pile the mushrooms into a big pot and cover with water. Add the 2 tablespoons salt and 3 of the bay leaves. Bring to a boil and boil for 15 minutes. Drain and set aside.
2. While the mushrooms are boiling, in a large, deep sauté pan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until golden brown. Salt to taste. Add the diced garlic and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds. Add the carrots and cook until nice and soft. Add the cabbage and remaining 3 bay leaves and cook, stirring occasionally, until wilted. Salt to taste.
3. Mix the tomato paste with  $2\frac{1}{2}$  cups water and a big pinch of salt. Add to the wilted cabbage along with the sugar, spices, and pressed garlic. Bring to a boil. Lower the heat and let gently simmer for 45 minutes with the lid slightly ajar.
4. Add the drained mushrooms and cook for another 10 minutes. Salt to taste.

*Let cool, and serve.*

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## STUFFED CABBAGE BRAISED IN RYE BREAD AND SOUR CHERRY JAM

Time: 2 hours   Serves: 6

*Why would anyone braise cabbage rolls in bread and jam? Well, we didn't have tomato paste and raw sugar in the Soviet Union, and this was my grandmother's way of lending a sour-sweet depth to a standard. The pork and jam are sweet; the Borodinsky (or similar sourdough rye) is earthy; and the cabbage, cool and vegetal, cuts through both. (The cooking time below will leave the cabbage al dente, so that you'll end up with a dish at once pillowy and toothsome.) This recipe uses brown rice, as its nuttiness goes well with the other ingredients, but feel free to substitute your rice of choice.*

1/2 cup brown rice  
Kosher salt  
1 medium head green cabbage  
1 1/2 pounds ground pork (or  
ground meat of your choice)  
1/2 large onion, chopped  
2–3 cloves garlic, minced

Black pepper  
1/2 loaf Borodinsky or other  
sourdough rye bread (5–6  
slices)  
1 13-ounce jar sour cherry jam  
Vegetable oil, for the pan(s)

1. You'll want your rice half-cooked before it goes inside the cabbage rolls. Bring 3/4 cup of salted water to a boil, add the rice, lower the heat to a simmer, and cover. You're boiling the rice in half the water it needs to cook fully, so keep an eye on it. The water should have boiled out in 15–20 minutes, or about half the time you'd need to cook it fully.
2. While the rice is going, fill a tall pot with enough water to cover the head of cabbage. Salt it well—1 tablespoon of salt per 12 cups of water. Bring the water to a boil. Meanwhile, cut the stem out of the cabbage head. When the water is boiling, drop the head in, flat part down. The cabbage will bob around, the top peeking out, but as long as there's enough water, that should be fine.
3. Within a minute or two, the outer cabbage leaf will be ready to come off. Use tongs to carefully peel it away from the *kachan*—that's Russian for “cabbage head”—and remove from the water. Pat dry with paper towels. Repeat until you have 20 leaves.
4. Using a small knife, slice off the part of each leaf rib that isn't level with the rest of the leaf. You're not cutting the rib *out* in a triangular cut; the rib stays in, and you're just shaving it down so the leaf is entirely flat, and easier to fold.

5. Mix thoroughly the pork, onion, garlic, and now somewhat cooled half-cooked rice. Season with salt and pepper.
  6. Using your hands or a spoon, deposit a clump of the pork mixture at the broadest edge of a cabbage leaf. Fold that edge over the meat, then flap over the right and left sides, then roll over again until you've run out of leaf—a cabbage burrito. Set aside and repeat for the remaining pork mixture and leaves. You could also divide the mixture among the leaves before folding any, to make sure you have enough.
  7. Tear the bread so that the pieces are no larger than a thumbnail and mix with the jam. Combine with 2 cups of water, and salt lightly.
  8. Choose a covered pan deep enough to hold the cabbage rolls in two layers, or use two pans to fit them in one layer. Coat the bottom of the pan(s) with a tiny bit of oil over medium-low heat and place in the cabbage rolls. Pour the jam mixture around and between the rolls. The top of the uppermost layer of rolls should be peeking out of the liquid.
  9. Cover, turn the heat down to low, and let braise for 30 minutes. Uncover and cook for another 30 minutes so some of the liquid can boil off.
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## SARDINES BRAISED IN CARMELIZED ONIONS AND TOMATOES

Time: 1 hour, 15 minutes   Serves: 4–6

*Half the time for this recipe goes to cleaning the fish. It's a lot simpler and more fun than it sounds. The trick is to use scissors instead of a knife.*

1 pound sardines (15–20 sardines)	5 vine-ripened or 3 juicy beefsteak tomatoes, cut into pieces the size of a fingernail
2 tablespoons vegetable oil	Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste
1 large onion, chopped	
1 large carrot, grated	

1. Rinse the sardines under cold water. Pat dry. Using scissors, cut away all the fins and tails. Then snip off the heads. This will create access to the body cavity; like the surgeon you always wanted to be, cut the fish open lengthwise far enough to get at the guts. (One side of the sardine will be noticeably thinner than the other. That should be the side facing up for the incision.) From here, you'll want to clear out all the innards—look for white and yellow slime—which would give the sardine a bitter taste. Remove the bone structure as well.
2. Heat the oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until golden brown. Then add the grated carrot and cook until softened.
3. Add the tomatoes, season to taste with salt and pepper, and lower the heat to medium-low. After the tomatoes have broken down and some of their liquid has evaporated (but some is left), add the sardines, stir gently to mix in, turn the heat to the lowest setting, cover, and let braise for 20 minutes.
4. Check for seasoning and add more salt and pepper if necessary—but mix it in gently: Whole sardines show up better on Instagram.

*Serve over your grain of choice or with a couple of rough hunks of bread.*

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## PAN-FRIED PIKE PERCH WITH CREAMY MASHED POTATOES AND CABBAGE SALAD

Time: 30–45 minutes Serves: 4

*Note: Pike perch, or zander, is as ubiquitous in Europe as it isn't in the States, so substitute another fish with meaty, flaky, sweet meat. Walleye comes closest (if you have a fishing rod and a lake, you're in luck), but a branzino or porgy would work fine as well. Or do as I do and throw yourself on the mercy of your local fishmonger.*

### SALAD

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup diced red onion	small pieces (the size of a pinkie nail)
2 tablespoons white vinegar, plus additional to taste	$\frac{1}{2}$ carrot, grated
1 teaspoon sugar, plus additional to taste	Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste
$\frac{1}{2}$ pound green cabbage ( $\frac{1}{4}$ of a medium-size head), cut into	Sunflower oil, for drizzling

### POTATOES

$1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds Idaho potatoes, peeled	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk
$\frac{1}{2}$ onion, chopped	1 tablespoon butter
1 bay leaf	2 garlic cloves, put through a garlic press
Kosher salt, to taste	

### FISH

2 medium-size whole fish (about 1 pound each), rinsed and patted dry	$\frac{1}{2}$ cup flour
Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste	Sunflower oil, for frying

### FOR THE SALAD:

1. In a small bowl, toss the onion with the vinegar and sugar.
2. Ball and squeeze the cabbage as you move it from your cutting board to a salad bowl, so it starts to release juices and flavor. (A good, well-mauled cabbage has a peppery, horseradish-like bite.) Add the carrot, the onion

mixture, and salt and pepper to taste. Taste for tang and sweetness and add more vinegar and/or sugar until you have the flavor balance you want.

3. If you don't mind a little bite, you can add up to 3 more tablespoons of vinegar. If a hint of sweetness doesn't throw you off in salads, add up to 3 more teaspoons of sugar. Drizzle with a little sunflower oil, mix well, and let sit, so the flavors can exchange information.

#### FOR THE POTATOES:

1. In a medium pot or saucepan, place the potatoes, onion, and bay leaf and cover, by one inch, with well-salted water. Bring to a boil and cook until a knife goes through the potatoes smoothly, about 25 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, in a small saucepan, warm the milk and butter over medium-low heat.

3. Drain the potatoes and return them to the pot, leaving the onion and bay leaf in the strainer. Mash the potatoes while adding the warm milk mixture, a little at a time. Mix in the pressed garlic and season with salt. Cover to keep warm.

#### FOR THE FISH:

1. Snip any fins off the fish using scissors, but leave the tails and heads—they add flavor. Salt and pepper generously, both outside and inside the fish. Sprinkle the flour on a plate and dredge each fish, on both sides, until well coated; pat off any excess.

2. In a large nonstick pan, heat a generous amount of sunflower oil over medium-high heat. When the oil has had several minutes to get very hot, add the fish—taking care not to get splattered by hot oil. Cook on each side for 3–4 minutes.

3. Serve all together. For extra sinfulness, pour a spoonful of the oil in which the fish cooked over the mashed potatoes. The crisp, tart cabbage salad should complement and cut the creaminess of the potatoes and the richness of the fried fish. And the smell of fried fish, that staple of sea-side places the world over, should give a hint of what it was like to walk into my aunt's kitchen after a long day pickling in the Black Sea. (For the record, unlike most of the recipes in this book, the Black Sea is blissfully undersalted.)



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## ROAST CHICKEN STUFFED WITH CREPES AND CARAMELIZED ONION

Time: 2 hours   Serves: 6

*My Aunt Lyuba is one of those fabled ex-Soviet women who can “cover” a multi-course table for a dozen guests in an hour without advance warning. This dish takes a little longer but is worth the trouble for an unusual, homey take on a roast chicken.*

4 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus  
additional for the pan  
1½ onions, chopped  
Kosher salt and black pepper, to  
taste  
1¼ cups milk  
¼ cup water

4 large eggs  
⅔ cup flour  
1 teaspoon sugar  
¼ teaspoon salt  
1 whole chicken, 5–6 pounds (a  
larger chicken means a larger  
cavity for stuffing)

1. Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a pan over medium-low heat. Add the onions and cook, stirring once in a while, until golden brown. Season with salt and pepper.
2. While the onions are cooking, make the batter by mixing the milk, water, and 2 of the eggs. Then whisk the flour in, little by little. Then add the sugar and ¼ teaspoon salt. And finally, add the 2 remaining tablespoons of vegetable oil, whisking well. Your batter should be pretty liquid.
3. Warm up a small (8- to 9-inch) crepe pan or nonstick skillet over medium-low heat. Add a tiny amount of oil (or cooking spray), give it a little time to warm up, and roll it around so it covers the whole pan. Raise the heat to medium.
4. Lift the pan off direct heat—otherwise the batter sticks too quickly—and add enough batter that it expands to the edges of the pan (around 2 tablespoons), swirling the batter until it forms as perfect a circle as possible. You want a thin crepe, so try to add as little batter as necessary to reach the edges of the pan after swirling. Return to direct heat.
5. After 2 minutes or so at medium heat, the crepe should be sufficiently browned underneath and crisp around the edges for you to be able to use a spatula or a fine-tipped wooden skewer to lift it. Now you have to flip it to the other side. The difficult truth is that there’s no better instrument than your fingers, if they can withstand the heat.
6. If the crepe tears, don’t worry: The first crepe always comes out sideways, as we say. You can “darn” the hole by pouring in a little new batter to fill it. Either way, this is a forgiving dish for ugly practice crepes—they

will end up out of view. After 2 minutes on the other side, the crepe should be ready; set aside and repeat with the remaining batter.

7. Stack the crepes on top of each other and cut into quarter-inch-wide vertical strips, and then cut those strips into thirds horizontally. Mix in a large bowl with the cooked onion, and then add the 2 remaining eggs. Mix thoroughly.

8. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. (The high heat will give the skin a nice crispness.) Rinse the chicken and pat dry. Season generously, inside and out, with salt and pepper. Then fill the cavity with the crepe-and-onion mixture, closing the skin flaps around it as much as possible. Lay the chicken down gently in an oven-worthy pan, breasts down so they absorb the dripping juice and the fat of the thighs. Cook for 10–12 minutes per pound, until the juices from a thigh run clear when pricked with a fork.



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## UNCLE TIMA'S BRAISED VEAL TONGUE

Time: 2 hours   Serves: 4

*The beauty of this recipe is that it requires no vigilance—cover the tongue with water, overload the liquid with spices, bring to a boil, and let simmer at a low setting for ninety minutes. (More if the tongue is bigger than the one used below.) Tongue might take a minute for American eaters, but give it a try and you'll see what Mexican taco makers and Slavs have known for a long time: There are few tenderer proteins. And it'll follow your lead: You can pile in whatever spices you want, after the essentials of bay leaf, garlic, and allspice. (You can also go with fresh versions—fresh dill, fresh parsley; you're creating flavor for the stock.) Veal tongue is more expensive than cow tongue, but not by much, and, for obvious reasons, it comes in smaller, more meal-friendly sizes.*

1 veal tongue (about 1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> pounds)	25 peppercorns
12 garlic cloves, peeled and cut in half lengthwise	1 tablespoon coriander seeds
2 tablespoons salt	1 tablespoon whole allspice
7 bay leaves	1 tablespoon caraway seeds
	1 tablespoon dill weed

1. Rinse the tongue under cold water. Put into a pot and cover, by 2 inches, with water. Add remaining ingredients and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, partly covered, for 90 minutes.
2. Stick a sharp knife into the tongue. If it goes through like butter, you're done.
3. Remove the tongue with tongs and run it under cold water. As soon as it's cool enough to touch, peel off and discard the pale casing.

*Slice and serve with **Homemade Horseradish** or your condiment of choice.*

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## ROAST CHICKEN STUFFED WITH DRIED FRUIT AND APPLES

Time: 1 hour, 15 minutes   Serves: 6

12 dried apricots  
1 whole chicken, 5–6 pounds (a  
larger chicken means a larger  
cavity for stuffing)  
Kosher salt and black pepper, to  
taste

12 pitted prunes  
3–4 Granny Smith apples, cut  
into eighths and seeded

1. In a heatproof bowl, cover the apricots with boiling water and let soak until softened, about 20 minutes.
2. Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. (The high heat will give the skin a nice crispness.) Rinse the chicken and pat dry. Season generously, inside and out, with salt and pepper. Drain the apricots and stuff inside the cavity, along with the prunes. Close the skin flaps around the dried fruit as much as possible so it doesn't fall out during cooking. Lay the chicken down gently in an oven-worthy pan (make sure there's room in it for the apples—see step 3), breasts down so they absorb the dripping juice and the fat of the thighs. Cook for 10–12 minutes per pound, until the juices from the thigh run clear when pricked with a fork.
3. About 25 minutes before the chicken is done, scatter the apple slices in the pan around the chicken. Return to the oven for the remaining cooking time.



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## “SOVIET WINGS” BRAISED IN CARAMELIZED ONION, CARROT, AND TOMATOES

Time: 1 hour, 20 minutes   Serves: 2

2 turkey wings, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  pound each  
Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste  
9 garlic cloves, divided (3 put through a garlic press, 3 chopped, 3 halved)  
2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons olive oil

1 large onion, chopped  
1 large carrot, grated  
4–5 vine-ripened tomatoes, or 3 meaty, ripe, juicy beefsteaks, chopped  
1 tablespoon tomato paste  
2 bay leaves

1. Rinse the turkey wings and pat dry. If you wish, using a sharp knife, cut off the wing tips so they fit better in the pan. Season generously with salt and pepper.
2. In a small bowl, combine the pressed garlic and 2 teaspoons of the olive oil. Rub onto the wings and set aside.
3. In a large, heavy pot, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Salt to taste. Add the carrot and cook for 5 minutes, until softened. Add the chopped garlic and cook, stirring, for 30 seconds.
4. Add the chopped tomatoes to the pot and salt to taste. Cover, turn the heat to medium-low, and let cook for 5 minutes, so the tomatoes can start to throw off their liquid.
5. Add the remaining halved garlic to the pot along with the tomato paste, bay leaves, and 2 cups of water. Salt to taste. Add the wings, nestling them into the liquid.
6. Cook at a gentle simmer, uncovered, for about 30 minutes, turning the wings every 10 minutes. You may wish to poke some holes in the turkey skin and meat with a thin, sharp knife so the flavor soaks in.

*Serve over your favorite grain to soak up the broth.*

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## GRECHANNIKI (BUCKWHEAT BURGERS)

Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes   Serves: 6–8

1 $\frac{1}{3}$ cups buckwheat groats	$\frac{3}{4}$ pound ground chicken
2 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus additional for cooking the patties	$\frac{3}{4}$ pound ground pork
1 large onion, chopped	1 egg
1 large carrot, grated	$\frac{1}{2}$ bunch fresh dill, roughly chopped
Kosher salt, to taste	2 cloves garlic, put through a garlic press
1 tablespoon tomato paste, plus additional to taste	1 tablespoon ground coriander
1 bay leaf	1 tablespoon curry powder
Crushed red pepper, to taste	1 teaspoon black pepper
	$\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour

1. Inspect the buckwheat for black groats and remove. They're bitter.
2. Dump the groats into a fine-mesh strainer and rinse with cold water, riffing through them with your fingers.
3. In a pot, cover the groats with  $2\frac{2}{3}$  cups of water, add salt, and bring to a boil. Turn the heat down and let simmer, a lid on most of the way, till the water has evaporated, 15 to 20 minutes. Set aside to cool. Alternatively, you can cover the buckwheat with the  $2\frac{2}{3}$  cups of water and let it soak overnight—it will be “cooked” by morning.
4. Meanwhile, in a large, deep sauté pan, heat the 2 tablespoons of oil over medium heat. Add half the chopped onion and cook, stirring frequently, until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Add the carrot and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Salt to taste. Add 2 cups of water (or use vegetable or chicken stock if you prefer), the tomato paste, bay leaf, and crushed red pepper. Bring to a gentle simmer. Taste and add more tomato paste if you like and season lightly with salt. Turn the heat down to its lowest setting and cover the pan (to keep it warm while you prepare the patties).
5. Combine the chicken and pork in a large bowl. Add the cooled buckwheat, the egg, half the chopped dill, the remaining chopped onion, the garlic, coriander, curry, and black pepper. Season with a teaspoon of salt, or to taste. Mix gently until well combined.
6. Using your hands or a spoon, shape the mixture into small patties the size of mini-burgers. (You should end up with 30 or so.) Put the flour onto a plate and dredge the patties lightly on both sides, patting off any excess.

7. In a large pan, add enough oil to coat the bottom well, and warm over medium heat. Brown the patties, in batches if necessary, 5 minutes on one side and 3 on the other.

8. Place the patties into the pan with the braising liquid (the patties should be half-covered by the liquid) and cook, covered, over medium-low heat for 30 minutes, stirring gently every 10 minutes. If you would prefer a slightly thicker broth, dust in a little flour after the first 10 minutes, or cook uncovered so the liquid can boil down.

9. Crown with the remaining dill.

*Serve over your favorite grain: quinoa, couscous, bulgur wheat. The grains will soak up the braising broth.*



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## ROASTED PEPPERS MARINATED IN BUCKWHEAT HONEY AND GARLIC (V)

Time: 1 hour, 15 minutes   Serves: 4

*The pepper needs to be meaty—like a person.*

—Oksana

### PEPPERS

3 large red bell peppers  
6 cloves garlic, put through a  
garlic press

Kosher salt, to taste

### MARINADE

1/4 cup white vinegar  
2 teaspoons sugar  
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt  
1 teaspoon buckwheat honey  
(substitute another honey if  
you can't find buckwheat)

1 tablespoon sunflower oil  
(sunflower oil doesn't become  
solid in the fridge)  
Chopped fresh dill, to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Place the peppers, whole, into a pan and roast in the oven, turning them every 10 to 15 minutes. After 45 to 60 minutes, the skin should have a golden-brown crust and seem like it'll peel off easily.

2. Meanwhile, combine all the ingredients for the marinade in a bowl.

3. When the peppers are cool enough to handle, remove the skin and seeds. Do this over a bowl to catch the peppers' juices, and add them to the marinade.
4. Slice the peppers lengthwise—6–8 “leaves” per pepper—taking care to remove stray seeds.
5. In a container, layer the pepper slices, covering each layer with some of the pressed garlic and a generous pinch of salt. You should end up with 3 or 4 layers.
6. Pour the marinade gently over the pepper layers, making sure it penetrates all the way to the bottom. Gently spear the peppers in several places with a fork to get the marinade to penetrate better.
7. Generously sprinkle the uppermost layer with dill, and refrigerate for a day.

#### A STOVETOP ALTERNATIVE, WHICH USES A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT MARINADE

Time: 45 minutes   Serves: 4

##### PEPPERS

2 tablespoons vegetable oil	The cloves of $\frac{1}{2}$ a head of garlic,
3 large red bell peppers, sliced	peeled and minced
lengthwise into quarters and	Kosher salt, to taste
cleaned of seeds	

##### MARINADE

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup water	Juice of 1 medium lemon
$\frac{1}{3}$ cup white vinegar, plus	$1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons sugar, plus
additional to taste	additional to taste

1. In a deep sauté pan, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the peppers and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 15 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, combine all the ingredients for the marinade in a bowl, adjusting to taste. As Oksana says, “This dish is all about the contrast between sweet and tart, sugar and vinegar.”
3. Add the marinade to the pan with the peppers, throw in the garlic, season lightly with salt, and cover the pan. The lemon may turn the garlic blue, but it won’t affect the taste. Bring to a gentle simmer, tasting the marinade every 5 to 10 minutes; if it’s too vinegary, add a little sugar. If



you're running low on liquid, make more of the marinade according to the specifications above, or see the note at the end of the recipe.

4. When the liquid in the pan—the *yushka*—has turned cloudy, the marinade will be flavorful, but the peppers will probably need more salt: They can absorb a lot without becoming oversalted, thanks to all their moisture. Add more salt now and, as Oksana says, “don’t be stingy with it.”
5. After 30 minutes, the peppers should be fully soft without losing shape.
6. Let cool, transfer the peppers to a jar, and cover with the marinade.
7. Refrigerate overnight—they are a cool, refreshing side to starches or meat dishes.

*Note: If you end up with extra marinade in the first variant, it serves most suitably if the second ends up needing more liquid.*

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## OKSANA'S KASHA VARNISHKES (V)

Time: 20 minutes   Serves: 6

$\frac{2}{3}$  cup buckwheat groats  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  cup vegetable oil (preferably  
sunflower)  
1 large onion, diced

$\frac{1}{4}$  pound bowtie pasta  
4 cloves garlic, put through a  
garlic press  
Kosher salt, to taste

1. Inspect the buckwheat for black groats and remove. They're bitter.
  2. Dump the groats into a fine-mesh strainer and rinse with cold water, riffing through them with your fingers.
  3. In a pot, cover the groats with  $1\frac{1}{3}$  cups of water, add salt, and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer until the buckwheat cooks fully, about 15 minutes. The buckwheat should be dry rather than soupy when finished.
  4. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, 10 minutes or so.
  5. Cook the pasta in a pot of salted water. Drain and transfer to a large bowl. Add the buckwheat, the sautéed onion, and the garlic and stir. Salt to taste. If the mixture feels a little dry, add more oil.
  6. Give the ingredients time to get to know one another. This is definitely a second-day dish.
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## POTATO LATKES WITH DILL, GARLIC, AND FARMER CHEESE (V)

Time: 1 hour, 45 minutes   Serves: 4–6

*Every housewife must decide when to flip.*

—Oksana

$\frac{3}{4}$ pound farmer cheese	2 eggs
1 bunch fresh dill, chopped	1 tablespoon flour
6 garlic cloves, put through a garlic press and divided	1 tablespoon ground coriander, or to taste
Kosher salt, to taste	1 tablespoon ground caraway, or to taste
3 large Idaho potatoes, peeled and grated	Vegetable oil, for cooking the latkes
$\frac{1}{2}$ large onion, grated	

1. Mix the farmer cheese with the dill, half the garlic, and salt to taste. Set aside to let it warm up a bit while you prep the latkes. (This will make it easier to spoon out later in the recipe.)
2. Squeeze out most of the liquid from the potatoes and combine them with the onion, eggs, flour, spices, and remaining garlic. Season with salt. The mixture will keep letting off liquid, but that's fine: this will keep the latkes from being too dense.
3. Heat  $\frac{1}{8}$  inch of oil in a large nonstick pan over medium heat. Drop a tablespoon's worth of the potato-and-onion mixture onto the pan. Fill the pan with these proto-latkes, making sure to leave enough room between them to slide in a spatula and flip later.
4. After a minute or so—the bottom of the latke should seem like it's browning—carefully place a teaspoon of the farmer cheese mixture into the center of each latke and pat it down gently so it spreads, but not all the way to the edge of the latke. Running the spoon underwater or dipping it in a bit of oil beforehand will help the mixture move more easily. You can also use your hands to pat down the mixture while it's on the spoon before transferring it to the pan. Now cover the farmer cheese layer with another tablespoon of potato-and-onion batter.
5. The above two steps will take 2–3 minutes. When the bottom of each latke feels like it's getting ruddy—about 3 minutes more—flip to the other side.
6. Once the other side is equally brown (about 5 minutes), flip again, turn the heat down to its lowest setting, cover the pan, and cook for 2–3 minutes.

7. Remove the latkes, pour new oil, and repeat. You should end up with 20–25 latkes.

*Serve with sour cream or mushroom gravy (see **Cabbage Vareniki [Dumplings]** with Wild Mushroom Gravy).*

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HOMEMADE HORSERADISH (V)

Time: 1 hour, 20 minutes   Serves: a very large and horseradish-happy party

*If I was grating this horseradish at home,  
you'd hear me weeping from across the house.  
—Oksana*

2 medium to large beets  
1 stalk horseradish, peeled  
9 percent white vinegar, to taste

Sugar, to taste  
Kosher salt, to taste

1. Cover the beets with water and bring to a boil in a pot with the lid mostly on. Boil until a small knife goes through easily. (About an hour—you may have to top up the water now and then.) After they have cooled, run them under cold water—the skin will come off in your hands.
2. Grate the horseradish and beets as finely as possible. A fresh horseradish will “smoke” hard enough to make onion-crying seem pleasant by comparison, so proceed incrementally. The measurements above are just a guideline: They’re good for a horseradish with a kick. If you want your eyes to well up every time you taste it, cut down on the beet.
3. Combine the horseradish and beets with vinegar, sugar, and salt. A typical Oksana ratio: 5 tablespoons of 9 percent vinegar, 3 teaspoons of sugar, and a pinch of salt. (“Salt will take away the flavor, so no more than a pinch.”)

*This should produce about 3 cups. Grated horseradish evaporates, so keep the lid on, and every time you have some, add a bit more freshly grated horseradish to keep up the concentration and flavor.*

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## OKSANA'S LIVER PIE

Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes   Serves: 8

*It's good, but you won't kiss anyone after.*

—Oksana

1 pound chicken livers  
1 medium onion, chopped  
4 eggs  
3 heaping tablespoons flour (or  
less, if you like very thin  
crepes)  
6 tablespoons corn or sunflower  
oil, plus additional for  
cooking the crepes

Kosher salt and pepper, to taste  
4 heaping tablespoons  
mayonnaise  
3 cloves garlic, put through a  
garlic press  
1 bunch dill, finely chopped

1. Clean the livers—rinse, and cut off any film stuck to them—and pass the liver and onion through a meat grinder set to a fine grind, or pulse in a food processor until the mixture turns liquid.
2. Combine the liver mixture with the eggs, flour, oil, and salt and pepper. You're making batter for *bliny*, or crepes. "The first *blin* always comes out sideways," as Ukrainians say about far more than *bliny*.

*A little batter hides all our sins.*

—Oksana

3. Warm a small (8- to 9-inch) crepe pan or nonstick skillet over medium-low heat. Add a tiny amount of oil (or cooking spray), give it a little time to warm up, and roll it around so it covers the whole pan.
4. Lift the pan off direct heat—otherwise the batter sticks too quickly—and add enough batter that it expands to the edges of the pan, swirling the batter until it forms as perfect a circle as possible. You want a thin crepe, so try to add as little batter as necessary to reach the edges of the pan after swirling. Return to direct heat.
5. After 3 minutes or so (2 if the crepe is thinner), the crepe should be sufficiently browned underneath and crisp around the edges for you to be able to use a spatula or a fine-tipped wooden skewer to lift it up. Now you have to flip to the other side; the difficult truth is that there's no better instrument than your fingers, if they can withstand the heat. If the crepe is a bit thicker, a spatula will do the job. (As in the recipe for whole chicken stuffed with crepes, don't worry if you tear the crepe: You

can “darn” the hole—“reanimating,” Oksana calls it, as if the crepe is a flatlined patient—by pouring a little new batter to fill it). After 2 minutes or so on the other side, flip again for a final 30 seconds, and set aside.

6. While the crepes are cooking, mix the mayonnaise, garlic, and most of the dill. (Save a little for garnish.) The creaminess of the mayonnaise works well with the tang of the garlic, the earthiness of the dill, and the taste of liver in the batter, but of course, the filling can include, or exclude, whatever you like.

7. Spread each liver pancake with the mayonnaise mix, layering the pancakes on top of one another until you have a stack you can cut into like a pie. (You may wish to make sure you have enough filling by laying out all the crepes and dolloping even amounts of filling onto each before proceeding with the stacking.) Decorate the uppermost layer generously with dill. Consistency and flavor are best after two hours in the fridge. Good both cold and warmed up.



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## WAFFER TORTE WITH CONDENSED MILK AND RUM OR VANILLA EXTRACT (V)

Time: 40 minutes   Serves: 8–12

*It's the torte that never makes it to the fridge.*

—Oksana

$\frac{2}{3}$  cup golden raisins  
2 14-ounce cans 8.5-percent-fat  
sweetened condensed milk or  
dulce de leche (or a mixture)  
2 sticks (1 cup) unsalted butter,  
softened to room temperature

Pure rum extract, to taste (if you  
can't find one free of artificial  
flavors, substitute vanilla  
extract)  
Juice of 1 lemon  
8 tort wafers

*Sources: You can find 8.5 percent condensed milk at [RussianFoodDirect.com](http://RussianFoodDirect.com). (American condensed milk tends to have a lower fat content, but you need thickness here so the frosting doesn't run.) If wafer sheets prove hard to find, Amazon can help.*

1. Cover the raisins with boiling water and soak for about 20 minutes to soften them.

2. Meanwhile, using a whisk or an immersion blender, mix the condensed milk with the softened butter and rum extract. Proceed gingerly with the rum extract—too much will make the torte bitter. This means you have to taste the filling after every addition. You're welcome.

3. Drain and add the raisins and the lemon juice.

*Note: Acid like lemon juice can cause dairy to separate, but it's more of an issue with milk than butter, and it's less likely to occur here if you're using the immersion blender, as opposed to hand-whisking. But if you see modest clumping, don't worry—it won't affect the taste, and it will not be very visible in the result. That indelible kislinka (hint of sourness) in a sweet dish is a Ukrainian cook's first priority in such matters.*

4. Brush the bottom of a wafer round with water so that it stays in place. (Don't run the bottom of the wafer round under water, as that'll get it too wet and begin to ruin its shape. Just brush it.) Place it on a plate wide enough to clear the wafer round by about two inches. Spread the remaining rounds out on a counter.

5. Reserve a scoop of the filling for covering the sides of the assembled torte. Divide the remaining filling among the 8 wafers. Spread the filling close to but not all the way to the edges of the wafer rounds. Make sure to get some raisins, which will have sunk to the bottom of the mixture, into every dollop.

6. Stack the rounds on top of one another and work your last scoop around the sides.

*Refrigerate overnight to help the torte set. Decorate the top layer with your fruit of choice—strawberry halves add nicely to both the taste and the color.*



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## UKHA—HIS AND HERS

Time: 1 hour each   Serves: 6–8

*Two nearly identical recipes, with quite different outcomes. The salmon, though meatier, should produce an impossibly delicate, almost refreshing broth in Arkady's version—if it comes out right, you'll want to sip it cold. The pike, in Ok-sana's, though tender, lends a stronger taste. (The salmon is also less bony.) The short boiling time means your vegetables should stay firm and flavorful—this is also the reason to cook the carrot whole and dice it only at the end. No Russian would think of eating ukha anything other than piping hot, but there's no reason this soup can't bring the temperature down on a hot day.*

### HIS

1 large carrot, peeled  
1 medium onion, peeled  
2 celery stalks, diced  
4 Idaho potatoes, peeled, 2 diced  
and 2 left whole

1½ pounds salmon steak  
Kosher salt, to taste  
3 garlic cloves, halved  
½ bunch parsley, chopped

1. Bring 10 cups of well-salted water to a boil and throw in the carrot, onion, celery, and potatoes. Return to a boil, lower the heat to medium, cover most of the way, and let cook for 20 minutes.
2. In the meantime, rinse the salmon and pat dry. Using a sharp knife, cut into 2-inch pieces. This will expose some bones; pull them out with your fingers or tweezers. Season with salt and set aside.
3. When the water and vegetables have been going for 20 minutes, lower the heat to the lowest setting and add the salmon and the garlic cloves. With the lid slightly ajar, cook for about 30 minutes, until the salmon looks done.
4. Remove and dispose of the onion. Remove and dice the carrot, and return it to the broth. Remove the two whole potatoes, mash them, and return the mass to the broth, stirring it in gently. Taste for salt and crown with the fresh parsley.

### HERS

1 parsley root, peeled, with  
greens (or substitute 1  
parsnip)  
1 large carrot, peeled  
1 medium onion, peeled  
3 Idaho potatoes, peeled and  
diced

1 medium-size (about 1 pound)  
pike, or similar fish  
Kosher salt, to taste  
3 garlic cloves, halved  
½ bunch parsley, chopped



*Sources: You'll be able to find wild pike online from retailers such as Citarella.com; workable substitutions are walleye, branzino, and porgy, in order of preference. Pike is quite bony, so unless you enjoy picking out bones the way a Slavic person does, you might fish the pieces out after cooking and enjoy the pike mainly as a flavoring agent.*

1. Bring 10 cups of well-salted water to a boil and throw in the parsley root, carrot, onion, and potatoes. Return to a boil, lower the heat to medium, cover most of the way, and let cook for 20 minutes.
2. In the meantime, rinse the pike, snip off the fins and tail (scissors are handy), cut off the head, and cut up the rest into 1½-inch pieces. Season with salt and set aside.
3. When the water and vegetables have been going for 20 minutes, lower the heat to the lowest setting and add the pike and the garlic cloves. With the lid slightly ajar, cook for 20–30 minutes, until the pike looks done.
4. Remove the parsley root, dispose of the wilted greens, cut the root into disks, and return the disks to the broth. Remove and dice the carrot and return to the broth. Remove and discard the onion. Taste for salt and crown with the fresh parsley.



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## OKSANA'S BORSHCH (V)

Time: 1 hour, 10 minutes   Serves: 8

*The beet must not lose its color.*

—Oksana

3 medium beets	1 medium onion, chopped
12 cups water	2 large carrots, peeled and grated
3 medium Idaho potatoes, peeled and cubed	1 heaping tablespoon tomato paste
1 medium parsnip, peeled and sliced into disks, the larger slices halved	4 large garlic cloves, put through a garlic press and divided
1/4 head cabbage, roughly chopped	1 1/2 teaspoons ground coriander
1 jalapeño, seeded and minced	1 1/2 teaspoons curry powder
1 1/2 tablespoons kosher salt, plus additional to taste	2 tablespoons white vinegar or lemon juice
3 tablespoons vegetable oil	1 teaspoon sugar
	1 bunch dill, chopped
	sour cream to taste (optional)

### THE DAY BEFORE:

1. Cover the beets with water and bring to a boil in a pot with the lid mostly on. Boil until a small knife goes through easily. (About an hour—you may have to top up the water now and then.) Leave the skin on and refrigerate. This step helps the beet keep its color and not blanch when it's cooking the next day.

### THE DAY OF:

1. Bring the 12 cups of water to a boil, then lower the heat to medium and add the potatoes, parsnip, cabbage, jalapeño, and 1 tablespoon of the salt. Cover, with the lid slightly ajar, and cook for 30 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a sauté pan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until golden brown. Add the carrots and sauté until fully cooked. Add the tomato paste and half the pressed garlic and cook for another minute. Set aside.
3. Peel the beets under running water—the skin should come off in your hands—and cut them into small pieces.

AFTER THE SOUP HAS BEEN GOING FOR 30 MINUTES:

1. Add the coriander and curry. (Oksana always adds them toward the end, so their flavor keeps.) When I asked her what a Ukrainian might think of curry in her borsch, she said, “We’re Americans, aren’t we?”
2. Add the onion mixture to the soup, deglazing the pan with a little water and adding that to the soup as well. Add the beets and the remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoon salt and turn the heat down to low.
3. Check the taste. Does the soup need salt? For a little acid, add the vinegar or lemon juice. (Oksana uses vinegar.) Add the sugar, the remaining garlic, and a generous helping of the dill.
4. Taste again. At this stage, Oksana usually adds a little more salt—“The day after it’s made, borsch always tastes like it needs salt.”
5. Turn the heat to high; at the first sign of boiling, shut it off or the beets will start to lose color.

*Leave for the next day—the flavor will concentrate overnight. When reheating, reheat only what will be served, as repeated boiling will blanch the beets. Serve with a dollop of sour cream.*



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**BANOSH (POLENTA) WITH  
MUSHROOMS AND SHEEP’S MILK FETA (V)**

Time: 25 minutes   Serves: 4

Banosh comes from the Carpathians, the prettiest unknown mountains in Europe and home to the Hutsuls, pastoral highlanders who still take their sheep flocks to high pasture for summer grazing. Banosh was their bacon and beans. Cornmeal traveled easily, and the sheep were right there—summer was a good time for milk production, the lambs just having been born—as were the porcini. By Hutsul tradition, the men had to cook all sheep-related dishes, including banosh, which had to be prepared in a cast-iron pot over an open fire so the dish would be “impregnated” with smoke. (It’s nice when men take over the kitchen, but you see how they start talking among themselves.)

Banosh was an autumn dish in Oksana’s household. “After we got the wild mushrooms from the woods,” she says, “I threaded a thick, sturdy needle with fat yarn and then ran it through the mushrooms, one by one. You hang it over the stove, cover gently with cheesecloth so the flies don’t get at it, and after 2–3 days of cooking one thing or another, you’ll have dried mushrooms.”

*If you can find dried porcini, as in the recipe for **Cabbage Vareniki (Dumplings) with Wild Mushroom Gravy**, use the same amount (around 1.5 ounces dried) and soak them in hot water, as that recipe specifies. Otherwise, ordinary button mushrooms will do—this dish packs plenty of flavor.*

1 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>4</sub> cups milk	Ground coriander, to taste
2 cups sour cream	Curry powder, to taste
<sup>2</sup> / <sub>3</sub> cup fine cornmeal	Paprika, to taste
Kosher salt, to taste	1 clove garlic, put through a
Sugar, to taste	garlic press
1 tablespoon vegetable oil	Handful of chopped dill
8 ounces mushrooms, sliced	Sheep's milk feta cheese, for
1 bay leaf	serving

#### POLENTA

1. Combine the milk and the sour cream in a large pot, stir until the sour cream has blended with the milk, and heat over medium heat until boiling, stirring frequently to prevent scorching.
2. Lower to a simmer—"it needs to breathe"—and pour in the cornmeal little by little, stirring as you go, to prevent clumping. (Oksana insists that only a wooden stirring spoon is right for the task, per Hutsul tradition, but a whisk does the job fine, too, in addition to giving the mixture more fluffiness.) Cook, stirring, until quite thick, 10–15 minutes. Season to taste with salt and sugar.

#### MUSHROOMS

1. Heat the oil in a sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms, bay leaf, and salt to taste and sauté until the mushrooms have let off their liquid and it has evaporated. Add the coriander, curry, and paprika (the piquancy of the paprika works well with the sweetness of the mushrooms) and sauté until the mushrooms are browned.
2. Stir in the garlic, and sprinkle with dill.
3. Serve the mushrooms over the polenta and crumble some feta on top.

*Skip the feta and mushrooms and you have a fine breakfast base. The tang of the sour cream also begs for the sweetness of something like pork, so consider topping with your favorite cut. Or just buy extra rib tips when you're making **Braised Rib Tips with Pickled Cabbage** (recipe follows).*

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## BRAISED RIB TIPS WITH PICKLED CABBAGE

Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes   Serves: 6

1/2 cup vegetable oil	12 pitted prunes, chopped
2 pounds pork rib tips	3 garlic cloves, put through a garlic press
1 large onion, chopped	1/2 bunch dill, chopped
1 pound sauerkraut	2 tablespoons chopped parsley
1/2 pound fresh cabbage, roughly shredded (optional)	

*Note: If the sauerkraut is too sour for your taste, rinse it under cold water or add the 1/2 pound of fresh cabbage. As for the rib tips—the triangular ends that come off spare ribs if a butcher is trying to make the ribs more neatly rectangular—Oksana uses them because they are inexpensive and tasty; other cuts work well, too.*

1. Heat the oil in a deep cooking pot over medium heat. Add the rib tips, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until browned, 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Turn the heat to low and cook for another 20 minutes, covered, stirring once in a while to make sure they're not sticking.
3. Add the onion to the pork. Raise the heat to medium-low and cook the onion for 10 minutes.
4. Add the sauerkraut/cabbage to the pork and onion. Oksana doesn't mix the ingredients at first. (The liquid from the cabbage should help things along.) Cover and keep at medium-low heat. After 5–10 minutes, gently mix the contents. Cover and cook for another 20 minutes. No salt or pepper necessary—the dish is getting all the flavoring it needs from its ingredients.
5. Add the prunes, garlic, dill, and parsley and cook for 5 minutes more.



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## “SAND” CAKE (COCOA-LEMON LAYER CAKE) (V)

Time: 45 minutes   Serves: 12

*The “sand” in the name of this “special-occasion” cake refers only to the Ukrainian word for the way shortbread pastry sheets crumble—not the texture you’ll have in your mouth! After the filling soaks in, you’ll be reminded that it’s not so far from Ukraine to Vienna: It’s a delicate and airy improvement on any slice of Napoleon cake you’ve ever had.*

1/4 cup flour	1/4 cup lemon juice
1 tablespoon cocoa powder	2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 cups milk, divided	6 prebaked shortbread pastry
3/4 cup sugar	sheets (approximately 9 by 7
3/4 cup butter	inches)

*Note: Shortbread pastry sheets—pesochnye korzhi (peh-SOTCH-knee-yeah kor-ZHI)—are commonly available in Eastern European food markets, but if there isn’t one near you, make them yourself using the recipe below. They should have the consistency of butter cookies—shortbread—rather than pie crusts.*

*Note: The milk mixture will take a while to cool after step 4, so you may wish to schedule something else to use up the time.*

1. Whisk together the flour and cocoa powder. Whisk in 1 cup of the milk until smooth. Doing all this in a graduated measuring cup with a pour spout will make step 3 easy.
2. In a small pot, bring the remaining 1 cup of milk to a boil.
3. When the milk comes to a boil, reduce the heat so it doesn’t scald, and pour in the flour mixture slowly, in a thin stream.
4. While continuously stirring with a wooden spoon, turn up the heat and bring the mixture to a boil. Lower the temperature and simmer for 2 minutes, making sure to keep on stirring.
5. Remove from the heat and let cool completely to room temperature. You can accelerate the cooling by placing the pot in a wider container filled with ice water.
6. Using an electric mixer or a food processor, cream the sugar and butter until fluffy. Slowly mix in the lemon juice and vanilla.
7. Once the thickened milk has cooled, add it to the butter mixture one tablespoon at a time, using the mixer.

*Note: Acid like lemon juice can cause dairy to separate, but if you see clumping, don’t worry—it won’t affect the taste or be visible in the final result.*

8. Crumble one of the pastry sheets using a rolling pin. Spread the rest out on a countertop. Reserve some of the filling for covering the sides of the cake, and divide the rest among the pastry sheets. (Or “go with God,” as Oksana says—eyeball how much is right for each sheet as you go without first spreading them out.) Spread the filling almost to the edge of each layer, stack the layers one on top of the other, and coat the sides with filling using a spatula. Then cover the uppermost layer and sides with the crumbs from the crushed sheet.

*Note: The cake needs to sit so it can soak up the filling and won't crumble when you cut into it. Overnight is best. Oksana “puts it on the balcony, and by the morning it's ready.”*



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**PESOCCHNYE KORZHI**

Time: 2 hours (including 1-hour wait)    Makes: 6 rounds

2 sticks (1 cup) butter, softened  
1 cup confectioners' sugar  
1 egg yolk  
1 whole egg

2 cups flour  
1/2 teaspoon baking powder  
1 pinch salt

1. Using an electric mixer or a food processor, cream the butter and confectioners' sugar until smooth.
2. Add the yolk and mix until fully incorporated, then add the whole egg and mix until smooth.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Beat into the butter mixture with a wooden spoon. Depending on the size of the eggs, you may need more or less flour. The result should be soft and a little sticky.
4. Wrap the dough in plastic wrap and leave in the fridge for an hour.
5. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.
6. Divide the dough into 6 pieces. Roll each one into a thin disk between sheets of parchment paper.

7. Cut around the edges of each pastry disk to make a smooth edge. Circles work as well as rectangles; if so, each one should be uniform in diameter (about 7 inches).

8. Divide among 2 baking sheets, with the bottom parchment intact. Place on the middle oven rack and bake until the edges become golden, approximately 15 minutes, switching the position of the baking sheets halfway through.





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## CABBAGE VARENIKI (DUMPLINGS) WITH WILD MUSHROOM GRAVY (V)

Time: 2 hours   Serves: 6

*Patsyuk opened his mouth, looked at the vareniki, and opened his mouth wider still. At that moment, a varenik popped out of the bowl, splashed into the sour cream, turned over on the other side, leaped up, and flew straight into his mouth. Patsyuk ate it up and opened his mouth again, and another varenik went through the same performance. The only trouble Patsyuk took was to munch it up and swallow it.*

—GOGOL, “The Night Before Christmas”

*If you want to see Ukrainians in August, head to the countryside—everyone’s picking mushrooms. “Quiet hunting,” they call it. The prize is the humbly named “white mushroom,” but don’t mistake it for the mild, button-like mainstay of American supermarkets. The Ukrainian white mushroom is what the French call cèpes, and the Italians porcini: nutty, creamy grandes whose sight and aroma stir something Proustian in every European. In the States, they’re more commonly available in dried form, which you want anyway, as it’s more pungent than the fresh version.*

*This vegetarian dish shows up on many Ukrainian tables during Advent (Saint Philip’s Fast in Ukraine), when meat is proscribed. You won’t miss it after you taste the mushrooms in this gravy.*

*Note: It’s worth making this dish in alternating steps, as below, since several of the steps require somewhat lengthy cooking times and there might as well be two things going at once.*

### FILLING

1½ pounds sauerkraut	Kosher salt and black pepper, to
2 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus	taste
additional if necessary	3 garlic cloves, put through a
2 onions, diced	garlic press

### MUSHROOM GRAVY

1½ ounces dried porcini	2 tablespoons vegetable oil
mushrooms (a bit over 1 cup)	1 onion, diced
1 medium carrot, diced	2–3 tablespoons flour
2 bay leaves	1–2 garlic cloves, put through a
10 whole peppercorns	garlic press
Kosher salt	

#### DOUGH

3½ cups flour	½ teaspoon salt
1 egg	⅔ cup warm water

#### TO FINISH

1 tablespoon vegetable oil	1 bunch fresh dill, chopped
2 garlic cloves, put through a garlic press	

#### FOR THE FILLING:

1. In a large pot, bring around 6 cups of unsalted water to a boil (sauerkraut is well salted). Add the sauerkraut with its juices. After returning to a boil, cover, lower the heat to medium, and simmer for about 20 minutes, or until soft. Drain. When the sauerkraut is cool enough to handle, squeeze out any remaining water. Transfer to a cutting board and chop finely.
2. While the sauerkraut is boiling, heat the oil in a large pan. Add the diced onions and sauté until golden brown. Salt to taste. Transfer half of the onions to a bowl and set aside for use later.
3. Add the chopped sauerkraut to the pan with the remaining onion and season to taste with salt and pepper. Stir in the garlic, adding oil if necessary. Sauté over medium-low heat to get rid of remaining moisture, about 15 minutes. Set aside to cool.

#### FOR THE GRAVY:

1. Cover the mushrooms with 2 cups of hot water and let soak for 20 minutes.
2. Remove the mushrooms from the liquid and rinse under running water to remove any grit. Strain the mushroom liquid through cheesecloth or a couple of paper towels lining a strainer and reserve. Finely chop the mushrooms.
3. In a medium pot, combine the mushrooms, their strained liquid, the carrot, bay leaves, peppercorns, and 2 cups water and bring to a boil. Season lightly with salt. Turn down to a simmer and cook uncovered for about 40 minutes, or until the mix has just a little liquid left. Season with salt to taste.
4. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a medium pan and sauté the last diced onion over medium-high heat until golden.
5. Lower the heat to medium, mix in the flour (add a third tablespoon if you want thicker gravy), and continue cooking until the flour has disappeared and the mixture is golden brown again. Add ¼ cup warm water, little by little, and mix vigorously with a wooden spoon in order to beat out any lumps.

6. As soon as the mushroom mixture has finished boiling down, stir it into the pan. The result should be semi-liquid—thicker than a soup, thinner than a stew. Stir in the garlic. Cover to keep warm.

#### FOR THE DOUGH:

1. While the onion and cabbage are getting to know each other, mix the flour, egg, salt, and water to create a soft dough. There are two ways to carve out the individual dumpling pockets you'll need. You can use your hands to roll the dough into one very long log, cut it into two-inch chunks, and roll each into a small coaster-size pocket-to-be (about 2 inches in diameter). You can also roll the original mass of dough into a giant pancake and carve pockets by pressing the rim of an upside-down glass into the dough. Bunch the excess dough, roll out, and repeat. Make sure the dough is thin enough to produce about 35 circles, each with a diameter of 2 inches.

#### TO FINISH:

1. Drop 1 teaspoon—no more—of the cabbage-and-onion mixture onto each dough circle and flatten with the back of the teaspoon. To close the dumpling: Cradling the dough from below, close the circle in half around the cabbage-and-onion mixture, pinching the now semicircular edge of the dumpling as flat as possible, so that the cabbage-onion mixture is bulged up in the middle. Now fold the edge over itself starting from one end, so that the semicircle ends up looking scalloped. (The dumpling should resemble a crescent moon with scalloped edges.) You may wish to sic the job on smaller people with more nimble fingers, a.k.a. children.

2. Fill a large pot midway with water and one teaspoon of the oil. Add salt and bring to a boil. When the water is boiling, drop in about half the dumplings. They will rise to the surface in a minute or two, and need 2 or 3 minutes more at the top—a total of 5 or so minutes. Scoop them out with a slotted spoon, getting rid of as much water as possible before dropping them into a shallow bowl. Toss with another teaspoon of the oil to prevent clumping.

3. Mix the last 2 garlic cloves into the caramelized onion that was set aside. Cover the dumplings with half of this mixture and mix gently. Add dill to taste.

4. Repeat for the remaining dumplings.

5. Reheat the gravy on low to medium heat if it needs it. Serve it over the dumplings.

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## PUMPKIN PRESERVES (V)

Time: 30 minutes, plus 3–4 heating sessions of 20–25 minutes,  
with cooling periods in between

*Ukraine reaches as far south as Provence—or used to, when it had Crimea—so the Mediterranean vegetables and fruit are in ample supply there: eggplant, melons, pumpkins. The lattermost show up in soups and preserves, and as oil infusions. With pumpkins, it's color that matters, not size—the brighter the orange, the riper and sweeter the pumpkin. There's something pleasingly koan-like about this recipe—extremely simple and subtle at once: The syrup has to thicken without turning the pumpkin and fruit cubes floating in it to mush.*

2 pounds pumpkin  
1 lemon

1 orange  
2 pounds sugar

1. Peel the pumpkin and cut into small cubes—each piece no larger than a fingernail.
2. Deseed the lemon and the orange and cut (with the rinds intact) to the same size.
3. Combine pumpkin, lemon, and orange with the sugar. Stir gently. Leave overnight in the fridge, covered by a napkin or paper towel.
4. By the next day, the sugar will have interacted with the pumpkin, lemon, and orange to let off liquid. Bring the mixture to a boil, then immediately turn the heat down to medium-low and simmer for 15 minutes. Stir infrequently and gently—stirring breaks up the cubes and hastens their breakdown into paste, which means you will end up with jam instead of preserves.
5. Turn off the heat and let cool *completely*. The goal is to thicken the liquid (by full cooling) without turning the fruit and pumpkin cubes into puree (by stirring too hard).
6. Reheat the mixture the same way—bring to a boil, then let simmer for 15 minutes, stirring gently—until the liquid has turned viscous. Again, allow to cool completely.

*Oksana reheats—and lets cool—the mixture three times, and ends up with a quart of preserves. Then the teapot gets filled and the tea biscuits come out.*

*Note: The sugar in the preserves will inhibit bacteria, so storage in a sterilized jar isn't required.*

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## SOUR CREAM-BRAISED RABBIT WITH NEW POTATOES

Time: 1 hour Serves: 4–6

*New potatoes are sweeter and make a great counterbalance to the tang in the sour cream and the vinegar used to soak the rabbit.*

1 medium rabbit (about 2 pounds), cut into 8 pieces	1 large onion, chopped
3 tablespoons white vinegar	1 large carrot, grated
1/4 cup vegetable oil	1 1/2 cups sour cream
1 1/2 teaspoons ground coriander	2 garlic cloves, put through a garlic press
1 teaspoon ground caraway	12 small new potatoes
Kosher salt and black pepper, to taste	Fresh dill, roughly chopped
	Fresh parsley, roughly chopped

*Note: If rabbit is scarce where you are, substitute chicken parts.*

1. Cover the rabbit with water and add the vinegar to remove gaminess. Let stand 2–3 hours.
2. Drain the water without rinsing the rabbit. Heat the oil in a medium-size nonstick pot over medium-high heat. Add the rabbit and sear for 3 minutes per side. Add the coriander, caraway, salt, and pepper, and cook for another minute on each side. Transfer the rabbit to a plate.
3. In the same pot, sauté the onion until golden brown. Then add the grated carrot and cook fully, adding salt to taste. Return the rabbit to the pan and cover with the sour cream, but no need to mix it in just yet; it will soak in. Turn the heat down to low, cover, and cook for 5 minutes.
4. Now, the sour cream having softened, mix all the ingredients gingerly. Add the pressed garlic and cover again.
5. While the rabbit is braising, boil the new potatoes—skin on—in salty water.
6. How much time the rabbit needs varies depending on age and toughness. Every 5–10 minutes, swish the liquid around carefully so the sour cream doesn't stick to the pot and burn, and test the rabbit with a fork. If you're low on liquid, add water, sour cream, or a mixture of the two. Taste the braising liquid from time to time to see if it needs salt, pepper, or spices. The rabbit should need no more than 30–40 minutes braising at low temperature.
7. When the rabbit is ready, add the dill and parsley, quarter the potatoes, and serve alongside each other or mixed.

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## PICKLED WATERMELON (V)

Time: 30 minutes (and 2 days)   Serves: 40 Americans or 2 Ukrainians

*The Ukrainian palate adores the contrast of tart and sweet, which shows up at its purest in recipes for pickled fruit. Sounds strange, perhaps, but biting into a cranberry fished out of a jar of pickled cabbage, or a pickled apple, in the dead of winter is the closest I've come to enjoying the services of a time machine. The watermelon in this recipe comes out sweet, garlicky, and earthy with dill all at once. Don't forget to drink the brine—especially after a hangover.*

$\frac{1}{3}$ of a small (pinkie-size) jalapeño pepper, scissored into rings	1 tablespoon sugar
The cloves of 1 head of garlic, divided	1 medium watermelon (about 2 pounds), rind removed and flesh cut into 1-inch cubes
2 tablespoons kosher salt	1 bunch fresh dill

1. Cover the bottom of a nonreactive container with half of the dill and the jalapeño rings.
2. Slice 5 of the garlic cloves in half and toss those in as well. Add 4 cups of water and the salt and sugar.
3. Scatter the watermelon in the container. Put 2 of the garlic cloves through a garlic press and add. Scatter in the remaining garlic cloves. Mix gently with your hands to make sure the garlic, salt, and sugar are well distributed. The watermelon should be peeking out of the water. Over the next day, it will “give” its own liquid and submerge.
4. Cover with the rest of the dill.
5. Let stand unrefrigerated for a day, and then refrigerate for another day.

*Keep refrigerated while you consume. It should keep for a week.*

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## “HOUSEPAINTER” SYRNIKI (SEER-NEE-KEE) (V)

Time: 30–45 minutes Serves: 4

Syr is “cheese” in Russian, but the cheese in question here is farmer cheese—the densest and least watery you can find. These sweet little pucks will be good cold or hot, at midnight or noon, but there’s nothing like them fresh out of the pan for breakfast.

1 pound farmer cheese	2–3 tablespoons sugar
2 eggs	Raisins, to taste
4–6 tablespoons flour, plus additional for dusting	2 teaspoons vanilla extract
	Sunflower oil

1. Mix the farmer cheese with the eggs, 4 tablespoons of the flour, 2 tablespoons of the sugar, the raisins, and the vanilla. If the mix could use a little thickening, add up to 2 tablespoons more flour. If you like a sweeter taste, add the additional tablespoon of sugar.
2. Dust a cutting board or kitchen counter with flour. With your fingers, scoop up some of the cheese mixture and ball it in the palm of your hand into a sphere the size of a golf ball. Drop it into the flour and pat it down so that it starts to resemble a small hockey puck. Lift it gently and flip so the other side can get floured. Shake off excess flour, if any, and set aside. Repeat for the remaining cheese mixture. You should get 16 pucks.
3. Now do the flouring again. Ball each puck back up—it should be easier now, as it’s covered with flour—and re-flour in the way described in step 2.
4. Set a nonstick pan—or two nonstick pans, if you want to save time—over medium-low heat. Place a generous amount of sunflower oil in the pan (the pucks should be able to slide around in it) and, once it’s had a minute or two to warm up, place the pucks in carefully. Ideally, your pans will each fit 8. Brown for about 6 minutes on each side. Keep an eye on the oil—the pucks will burn quickly if there isn’t enough.

*Let cool and serve on their own, or with a dollop of your favorite jam, yogurt, or even sour cream.*

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Sardines Braised in Caramelized Onions and Tomatoes

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