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Russian Study

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Dinners, fests are cultural lessons for Stetson students

food. In the Caucasus, it's actually cooked by the men."

When cut up and served as finger food, the chicken is dipped into a walnut sauce.

Plof, a rice and lamb dish from Central Asia, also comes with a tradition of manly outdoor cooking, Bradford said, although the version on PAGE 2D has been adapted to an indoor stove and utensils. For a few years, more than a dozen Uzbek students were in charge of making the Plof.

During the more than decade-long history of the Russian dinners at the university, native cooks have

SEE RUSSIAN, PAGE 2D

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Russian food is more than academic for the students and faculty of the Russian Studies Program at Stetson University in DeLand.

Michael A. Denner, director of the honors program for Russian Studies, and Susan Bradford, administrative assistant at the Russian Studies Center, are into it up to their elbows, figuratively, and at least up to their wrists, literally. Denner likes to make entrees such as Chicken Tabaka, which requires a frying chicken to be fairly flattened and grilled under a weight, and shashlik, or lamb kebabs, for several of the pro-

gram's annual events. Bradford is the salad maestro, finely chopping vegetables for Capital Salad and Russian Herring Under a Blanket.

Now, they are both contemplating the piles of bliny, variously described as little Russian pancakes or "yeasty crepes," that must be made in early March for a campus celebration of Maslennitsa.

It's the Russian counterpart of Mardi Gras or Shrove Tuesday. Culturally, the dinners or "ex-

travaganzas" the faculty prepares twice a year take in the whole of the old Russian empire, those countries that eventually became Soviet satellites or part of the union.

"Chicken Tabaka is Georgian or Armenian," Denner said over tea on a recent afternoon. "When Russians make it, they serve it with fried potatoes, cucumbers and tomatoes." When it's made in the Caucasus and Black Sea regions, it becomes "great outdoor



Chicken Tabaka

"Typically in the Caucasus (and when they do it outdoors in Russia), one uses whatever heavy thing is handy. I wrap a couple of large bricks in heavy-duty aluminum foil," says Michael A. Denner. "A 3.25-pound chicken consistently takes 30 minutes over hot coals." In Russia, where this dish often is made at home in a skillet, Chicken Tabaka is typically served with fried potatoes, raw tomatoes and cucumbers. "In the Caucasus and Black Sea region, where Chicken Tabaka originates (the Armenians and Georgians both say it's theirs), the chicken is often chopped into small pieces, eaten with fingers and thin bread (pita or other flatbread will work), and dipped in (Badza)."

Small, whole, frying chicken
1 Tbsp. butter

2 cloves garlic
Salt and pepper
Badza, optional

Cut backbone out of chicken (best ones are under 3 pounds), or have butcher do it. Spread chicken flat, and hit it with flat side of cleaver to flatten it further. Tuck wing tips under wings — to make compact, evenly thick chicken. Mix softened butter, garlic (finely minced or put through press), salt, lots of freshly ground pepper; rub all over chicken, both under and over skin. Marinate for 1 hour or so. Meanwhile, start hot charcoal fire in grill. When grill is ready, position chicken, skin side down, on grate and stack something heavy on chicken. Legs and wings protect breast from overcooking, and, since chicken is so heavily weighted, everything is same thickness and cooks at same rate. Cook, skin down, 12-14 minutes, until chicken is nicely browned. Flip over and cook additional 18-20 minutes, for total cooking time of 30-35 minutes, or longer, depending on size of chicken. Serve hot or warm or at room temperature, with Badza (recipe below), if desired.

Badza

1/4 lb. fresh, shelled walnuts
Garlic clove
1 tsp. ground coriander

1/2 tsp. hot paprika or cayenne
1-2 Tbsp. mild vinegar
Water or chicken stock, optional

In blender, combine walnuts, minced garlic, coriander and paprika or cayenne. Process until sauce is reduced to consistent paste. Add vinegar (such as white wine or rice wine); if sauce is still too thick for dipping, up to 1 cup water or chicken stock.

Piroshki

Russian Meat Pies

Makes about 36 pieces. "I use White Lily flour for really tender dough," says Susan Bradford.

2 tsp. yeast
1 cup warm milk
2 eggs
2 Tbsp. sugar
4-4 1/2 cups sifted flour
1 cup butter or margarine

1/4 tsp. salt
Filling
Additional butter or margarine
Sour cream

In bowl, mix yeast with warm milk. Let sit for at least 5 minutes. Meanwhile, in small bowl, combine eggs and sugar. Sift flour into large bowl; add yeast-milk mixture, egg mixture, melted margarine or butter (2 sticks) and salt; mix well. Mix or knead until dough becomes elastic but does not stick to your hands. Cover with cloth; place in refrigerator for 1 1/2-2 hours, until dough has doubled in size. Heat oven to 350 degrees. On floured work surface, cut dough into quarters. Cut into smaller portions, about size of donut hole. Roll or press out on floured surface; put about 2 tablespoons meat Filling (recipe below) in center. Pinch sides of dough around filling; place seam side down on lightly greased cookie sheet. Let sit 10 minutes; place on center rack of oven. Bake at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes until golden brown on top. Immediately after removing from oven, brush lightly with melted butter or margarine. Serve warm with sour cream on side.

Filling

Dried dill may be substituted.

2 medium onions
1 clove garlic
6 Tbsp. butter
1/2 lb. mild Italian sausage

1 lb. lean ground beef
4 hard-cooked eggs
Fresh dill

In large skillet, saute chopped onions and chopped garlic in 3 tablespoons butter; set aside. Brown meats, sausage first, until well cooked but not dry. Drain off grease, except for enough to lightly coat bottom of skillet. Turn off heat; add onions and garlic. Cool completely. Add chopped eggs, 3 tablespoons softened butter and fresh dill to taste. Mix well.



News-Journal photos/CHAD PILSTER



Amber Sherwood, above left, a Russian studies major from Lake Worth, helps with preparation while Susan Bradford explains the foods to Joy Chaisua, second from right, a political science major from Thailand, as host Polly Steeves adds a final touch. At left, a samovar waits on the Steeves' porch.

RUSSIAN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1D

added specialty dishes on several occasions. Until 2003, Anna Glavnova, from Moscow, was a professor in the program, and the herring recipe and one for Borscht are part of her legacy.

The Russian Studies Program actually began in 1958 at Stetson, with a Russian language program. This year, 20 students of the 2,000 total at the university pursue a major in Russian studies, which now also covers culture, literature and film.

Nothing could be a more potent cultural symbol than the samovar. Denner admires the one traditionally used for the biannual "extravaganza" at the on-campus home of Polly and Paul Steeves (he's a Russian historian, the director of the Russian Studies Program and the cook who's always in charge of the Borscht).

"This is a really cool samovar," Denner said as he looked at a photo. "This one's interesting because it's not electric." It has a steel tube inside its main compartment that is filled with burning coals, to heat the water that surrounds it. The "teapot" on top holds zavarika, a concentrated infusion of tea. The zavarika and hot water are mixed as desired for each serving.

The smoke from the coals gently flavors the water



Chicken Tabaka may be made on the stovetop in a skillet or on a grill.

and the zavarika as it wafts through openings in the tops of the vessels. "You can really taste the difference," he said.

Although a samovar isn't used on a daily basis in the Russian Studies Center, Denner and Bradford maintain a Russian attitude about tea. "We always have tea here," Bradford said.

It's a bit of a jaunt to retain authenticity with some of the meal's other elements. A fermented pickle, which is used in the Capital Salad, can be purchased at a Russian grocery in Palm Coast, the I and L European Deli. And a certain kind of pickled herring in wine sauce, "with a blue and white label," is worth seeking, to make Herring Under a Blanket that's not too strong.

The ingredients may be simple, but the prep work, particularly for salads, takes care. "One of the secrets is that everything is chopped," Bradford said. This precision wouldn't be considered a bother by traditional Russian cooks. "They have time."

Marinated Mushrooms

Makes about 20 appetizer servings. From Nadine Kalikin.

3 lbs. fresh mushrooms
2 Tbsp. salt
2 Tbsp. monosodium glutamate seasoning
4 Tbsp. sugar
1/4 tsp. black pepper

1/4 tsp. oregano
1 onion
2 ribs celery
1 cup vegetable oil
2 cups wine vinegar
1/2 tsp. garlic powder

Trim and clean mushrooms. In large, nonreactive container, combine them with salt, seasoning (such as Accent), sugar, freshly ground pepper, oregano, sliced onion, sliced celery, oil, vinegar and garlic powder. Stir to gently but thoroughly combine. Cover and refrigerate 3 days.

Capital Salad/Salad Olivier

Russian Vegetable Salad

Makes about 6-8 side-dish servings. The chopping of the vegetables is the secret of a really good salad. Chop them into very small squares after the boiled vegetable are cold — about the same size of the green peas. Chopped chicken, ham, or beef may be added to this salad.

2 large red potatoes
3 carrots
1 medium onion
Red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper
1 can cooked small, green, sweet peas

6 large Russian pickles
5 hard-cooked eggs
Fresh or dried dill
Mayonnaise
Fresh cucumber

Boil peeled potatoes and carrots until tender but not mushy. Drain and allow to cool. Meanwhile, in bowl, marinate finely chopped onion in red wine vinegar, seasoned with salt and freshly ground pepper, for 10 minutes. Add potatoes (cut into small dice); let sit for 1/2 hour. Add diced carrots, drained peas, chopped pickles (use dill pickles if Russian pickles are not available) and 4 eggs (chopped). Season as desired with fresh or dried dill; gently mix in mayonnaise, as desired, for potato salad consistency. Let sit in refrigerator overnight; before serving, slice and place last cooked egg on top and decorate with cucumber slices around sides. Sprinkle with fresh dill.

Russian Herring Under a Blanket

From Anna Glavnova.

Olive oil
1 medium onion
1 large jar salted herring
Fresh lemon
2 medium boiled potatoes
Mayonnaise

2 boiled carrots
2 hard-cooked eggs
4 small or 2 large cooked beets
Assorted herbs

Assemble on plate or platter, in layers: small amount of olive oil, finely chopped onion, finely chopped herring (squeezed with small amount of lemon juice), potato (peeled and shredded), thin layer of mayonnaise smoothed with knife, carrot (peeled and shredded), chopped eggs (reserve one yolk to garnish top), thin layer of mayonnaise (smoothed with knife), shredded beets and final layer of mayonnaise, as desired, smoothed with knife. Shape with spatula to desired form. Decorate with chopped egg yolk and garden herbs. Can be made 1 or 2 days before serving. Keep in refrigerator.

Anna's Borscht

Makes 20 servings, as soup course. From Michael A. Denner.

1 lb. chuck roast or round roast
2 large carrots
2 large onions
2 ribs celery
1 large potato
Vegetable oil

3 small beets
1 large fresh tomato
6 oz. tomato paste
Hot red pepper sauce
Salt and pepper
1/2 head cabbage
4 cloves garlic

To make bouillon: In large pot, cover beef with 10 cups water; simmer with 1 carrot, 1 onion and some celery, all trimmed and cut into chunks. Remove carrot, onion and celery after meat has become tender. Add potato (peeled and diced) and remaining carrot and onion (both shredded). To make borscht: Add small amount of oil and bouillon (juice) from stewed beef. Add shredded beets; simmer until tender. Add tomato (skinned and chopped), tomato paste and 2-3 shakes of hot sauce (such as Tabasco). Season with salt and freshly ground pepper. Pour carefully into beef bouillon. Remove cooked beef and carve into cubes. Add shredded cabbage. Simmer until cabbage is tender. This will only take a few minutes. Add crushed garlic and remove immediately from heat. May be made 1 day before serving.