

THE WEEK- 01/26/18
LEISURE Food & Drink

Russian borsch: Made the way a mother would



Lella Cyd, Madelyn Reese/Las Vegas Review-Journal

If you ever open your own Russian restaurant, “be prepared for a lot of opinions about what makes for a good borsch,” said chef Bonnie Frumkin Morales in *Kachka* (Flatiron Books). That’s been our experience at Kachka: We get a lot of furrowed brows whenever it briefly disappears from our menu, and, because we’re in Portland, Ore., not Russia, a lot of expressions of shock that borsch has meat in it. And that, at least in Russia, it’s spelled without a final ‘t.’

I—“like every good Russian”—learned to make borsch from my mom, and except for a few tweaks, the recipe below is pretty much hers. “Of course, in my opinion, it’s the best version out there.”

Recipe of the week

Short rib borsch

¼ cup canola or peanut oil
2½ to 3 lbs bone-in beef short ribs
1 medium yellow onion, halved and sliced into thin half-moons
2 large red beets, scrubbed thoroughly
2 quarts beef stock
2 large Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into ¾-inch dice
1 carrot, peeled and coarsely grated

Heat a large stockpot over high heat and add oil. Season short ribs all over with kosher salt. When pot is hot, add ribs and brown to a dark sear on all sides, working in batches. (Make sure the sear on the pot’s bottom doesn’t burn.) When all ribs are browned, set them aside.

Discard excess grease from pan and reduce heat to medium. Add onion and sauté, stirring occasionally, until caramelized (about 30 minutes). Add beets and beef stock. Bring stock to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer until beets are half cooked, about 1 hour. Carefully remove beets from pot and set aside to cool. Return short ribs to pot and cook at gentlest simmer, uncovered, for 3 to 4 hours, until they are falling-apart fork-tender. Taste about halfway through cooking; add salt as needed.

When beets are cool enough to handle, peel with a paring knife and then grate coarsely, using a box grater.

When short ribs are fully cooked, taste soup; add salt as needed. Remove ribs using a slotted spoon. Add potatoes to soup and simmer until just cooked through, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, pull meat off short ribs, removing any connective tissue. Chop meat into bite-size chunks. When potatoes are cooked, stir meat and grated beets and carrot into pot. Turn off heat and allow pot to cool—as it cools enough to go in the refrigerator, the vegetables will keep cooking. Refrigerate overnight.

The next day, remove fat from top of borsch. Reheat borsch and ladle into bowls. Add garnishes: a dollop of *smetana* or sour cream, sliced scallions, and chopped fresh dill. (To me, it’s not borsch until spicy mustard is also mixed in.) Serves 6 as a main.

Health & Science

Brain-boosting beets



Beets may have a protective effect on the brain that could help ward off Alzheimer's disease, new research suggests. Scientists at the University of South Florida found that betanin, the compound that gives the root vegetable its rich red color, could help prevent protein pieces called beta-amyloid from forming harmful plaque in the brain—a hallmark of the neurodegenerative disease. This plaque usually occurs when beta-amyloid binds to metals in the brain such as iron and copper; these metals cause the protein to form clumps that can trigger inflammation and oxidation, which destroys nerve cells. In a series of experiments, the researchers found that when beta-amyloid bound to copper was exposed to betanin, oxidation dropped by up to 90 percent. "This is just a first step," co-author Li-June Ming tells the *New York Daily News*. "But we hope our findings will encourage other scientists to look for structures similar to betanin, [which] could be used to synthesize drugs that could make life a bit easier for those who suffer from this disease."

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