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3 Perfect Pancakes for Celebrating Russian Maslenitsa

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In a tradition similar to the Catholic Carnival celebrations, Maslenitsa is a time for revelry and indulgence as Russians steel themselves for roughly 40 days of Lent, when Orthodox Christianity stipulates that followers should abstain from meat, fish, dairy products and eggs.

For Russians celebrating Maslenitsa this year, from February 16-22, celebrations might include *medovukha* honey wine, a trip to a local park for concerts and festivities, and, of course, pancakes.

Almost everyone knows the traditional *Russian blinis* (if you don't, check out our Christmas Meets Crisis menu.)

Less known, but equally delicious, are three other versions of Russian pancakes: draniki, oladi and sirniki.

Below: the perfect excuse for an all-day pancake fest.

Potato Pancakes (драники)

The Russian latke, if you will, draniki are said to have their origins in Belarus and are the perfect antidote for a cold winter — fried and filling.



For MT

Ingredients:

4 large potatoes, washed and peeled

1 egg

2 tbsp flour

Salt and pepper, to taste

Vegetable oil, for frying

Makes about 20.

1. Coarsely grate the potatoes and put them in a large bowl. Add the egg, flour, and salt and pepper and stir with a wooden spoon.

2. Pour the vegetable oil into a deep frying pan, to a depth of about 1 centimeter, and let it heat until a piece of potato dropped into the oil sizzles.

3. Form little potato pancakes of about ¼ cup each and drop into the oil, frying for about 2

minutes on each side.

4. Serve immediately with sour cream or applesauce.

Strawberry Fritters (оладьи)

If Russian blini are closely related to French crepes, then these fritters are like more old-fashioned American pancakes, made with yeast and fried in plenty of oil.

This recipe uses strawberries, but nearly any fruit can be substituted. Apples go over particularly well. This recipe comes courtesy of the wonderful "A Taste of Russia" cookbook from food writer and academic Darra Goldstein.

Ingredients:

1 tsp (1/2 package) active dry yeast

1 cup (235 ml) lukewarm milk

2 tbsp sugar

2 cups (250g) flour

Pinch of salt

2 eggs, separated

2 tbsp room-temperature butter

1 cup (150g) sliced strawberries

Vegetable oil, for frying

Icing sugar, if desired

Makes about 2 dozen pancakes.

1. Dissolve the yeast in the milk, then add the sugar and 1 cup of flour. Cover and let rise for 1 hour.

2. Stir in the egg yolks, butter, remaining flour and salt. Cover and let the batter rise for a further hour.

3. Beat the egg whites until they are stiff and fold into the batter.

4. Heat the vegetable oil in a large frying pan and drop the batter by the tablespoonful into the hot oil. Cook until puffy and golden, flipping once. Each fritter should take only a few minutes.

5. Dust with icing sugar and serve immediately with sour cream or honey.

Sweet Cheese Pancakes (сырники)

The key for making nice sirniki is to use tvorog (farmer's cheese) that is fairly thick and creamy, with a fat content above 9 percent. That way the mixture won't be too wet (will fall apart) or too dry (will crumble). If you don't have easy access to tvorog, ricotta and goat's cheese both work too.



For MT

Ingredients:

1 3/4 cups (400g) tvorog

1 egg

1 tsp vanilla sugar or 1/2 tsp vanilla extract

4 tbsp sugar

Pinch of salt

1/3 cup (50g) raisins (optional)

1/2 cup (50g) plain flour

Vegetable oil or butter, for frying

Makes about eight.

1. Mash the tvorog with a fork and beat in the egg, sugar, vanilla sugar, salt and raisins (if using) until uniform. Sift in the flour and stir well.

2. Gently sift in the rest of the flour until you have a dryish mixture.

3. Dust some flour onto a large plate, take 1/4 cup of the batter and shape it into a ball. Pat it into the flour, until you have a thick pancake shape, and repeat with the remaining batter.

4. Heat about 1 tbsp of oil or butter in a frying pan until hot, then start frying your sirniki. Put a lid on the frying pan, fry for two minutes, flip and cook for another minute. They should be nicely browned on both sides.

5. Serve immediately with sour cream and condensed milk.

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