

A Taste of St. Petersburg: Herring and New Potato Salad Recipe

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When Peter the Great pitted his nascent naval prowess against Charles XII of Sweden, his stated aim was to win for Russia a “window on the west.” But the hidden agenda might just have been to secure Russia a reliable supply of herring.

The cuisine of Peter’s dream city, St. Petersburg, developed differently from that of the rest of Russia. Each aristocratic St. Petersburg palace boasted a French or Belgian chef. These talented men brought new ingredients and cooking methods to Russia.

From that time to this, herring has remained an essential part of the St. Petersburg — and Russian — diet. Herring is a favorite player in the extensive hors-d’oeuvre course that precedes Russian dinners, and no New Year’s Eve table is complete without “herring under fur coat,” a molded salad of herring, beets, potatoes, egg, mayonnaise and cheese.

Ingredients for the Salad

- 1 cup (240 ml) sour cream
- 1/2 cup (120 ml) Greek yogurt
- 2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tsp sea salt
- Several grinds black pepper
- 2 cups (500 ml) pickled herring
- 1 lb (500 g) new potatoes (the smaller the better!)
- 3 tbsp freshly chopped dill
- 1 pinch cayenne pepper

For the Mustard Seeds

- 1/2 cup (120 ml) whole mustard seeds
- 1 cup (240 ml) apple cider vinegar
- 3 tbsp coarse sea salt
- 2 tbsp brown sugar

Garnish

- 1 lemon, cut into wedges

Instructions

Make the Pickled Mustard Seeds

1. Place the mustard seeds, vinegar, brown sugar and coarse sea salt into a saucepan with a lid.
2. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer for one hour until the seeds have doubled in size.
3. Decant the seeds with the remaining liquid into a clean glass jar and let sit until it comes to room temperature before refrigerating.

Make the Salad

1. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil, then add the potatoes. Simmer for 6-7 minutes until the tip of a sharp knife goes in smoothly.
2. While the potatoes are cooking, whisk together the sour cream, olive oil, yogurt and lemon juice.
3. Tip the potatoes into a large bowl, then add three-quarters of the sour cream mixture, setting aside the remainder. Toss gently to combine and set aside. The potatoes will absorb the sauce as they come to room temperature. Let them sit for at least 45 minutes.
4. Drain the herring and toss with the potatoes. Taste and adjust the salt and pepper as needed (the herring is very salty, so don't add the salt until all the ingredients are combined).
5. Add the remaining sour cream mixture, if needed.
6. Arrange on a platter. Spoon the pickled mustard seeds on top and garnish with freshly chopped dill. Arrange the lemon wedges and serve at room temperature.

7. This salad makes an excellent starter and is the perfect accompaniment to chilled Russian vodka.

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