

Everyone Loves a Dumpling

What's better than tender dumplings bobbing in a hot broth?

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I'm getting a cold. It hasn't actually arrived yet, but I can feel it hovering in the wings from the way every single one of my eyelashes hurts. I can also tell that it won't be a killer cold — not bronchitis or strep throat, just one of those annoying 24–36-hour bugs featuring sniffing, sneezing, muscle ache, and the sort of fatigue I find very hard to power through. So I'm going to succumb to it. I'm going to climb into bed, sleep, drink a ton of tea, binge watch something mindless on Netflix and indulge in comfort food for 24 hours.

Dumplings in any shape or form are the ultimate comfort food all over the world. Bobbing gently in broth, they soothe, comfort, and nourish, be they spicy wontons, meaty pelmeni, or fluffy knödel. But when I'm feeling particularly fragile, I pivot to my own version of "lazy vareniki" made with tvorog and leafy greens. These are basically dumpling filling without the dough casing, which can make them a bit misshapen, although it is totally possible to roll

them into pretty acceptable balls that hold their shape admirably. I love to use a whole panoply of dark leafy greens from kale to mustard greens, and, of course, my beloved beet leaves. This mixture gives the dumplings an extra peppery kick and is an excellent foil to the creamy tvorog base.

This is not only my “I’ve got a cold” meal, it’s my centerpiece for a very indulgent meals for guests. I’ve served them in tomato sauce, rolled them in brown butter and sage, or presented them just as they are with a sprinkling of cheese. But pairing them with a spicy, restorative broth is the only way to go when comfort food is the principal item on the menu. And what could be better for blocked sinuses than a horseradish-infused chicken broth with leeks and fresh herbs?

For the broth, freshly grated horseradish root is the key to a massive infusion of flavor, turning it into a fog buster for your sinuses and a balm for your soul.

No comfort food should tax the already exhausted mind and body, and these dumplings are reassuringly easy to make: the only tricky moment is determining when you’ve added enough flour. Not enough, and the dumplings really will be misshapen to the point of falling apart; too much flour and the dumplings will be gummy and stodgy. Test as you go, keeping your hands wet. Once you can shape the dumpling mix into a loose ball, you are good to go. A bit of a chill in the fridge helps them keep their shape, though if you end up with lumpy dumplings in the sickroom, this is no tragedy. The main thing is to get those dumplings into the broth and both of them into you.

So if you are feeling fragile, mix up some of these dumplings and drop them into a vat of this tangy, robust broth. Pair them with whiskey and you’ll soon be on the mend. I promise.

Ingredients

For the dumplings

- 5 cups (1.2 liters) of fresh leafy greens such as beet greens, Swiss chard, winter spinach, mustard greens, kale, or a combination of several
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 egg yolks
- 1-1/2 (350 ml) cups dry tvorog*
- 1 cup (235 ml) freshly grated parmesan cheese
- 1/3-cup (85 ml) fresh parsley
- 1/2-tsp nutmeg (freshly ground if possible)
- zest of one lemon
- 1 cup (235 ml) flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper

**If the tvorog is on the wet side, place it in a colander lined with a clean cloth or cheesecloth and let it drain for a few hours.*

For the Broth

- 1 leek, white part cleaned and thinly sliced
- 2 tsp olive oil
- 2 quarts (2 liters) chicken broth
- 1/3-cup grated (85 ml) horseradish root
- 1/3-cup (85 ml) fresh dill, finely chopped
- 1/3-cup (85 ml) fresh parsley, finely chopped
- Salt to taste*

**Chicken broth can be very salty, so leave the salt out until all the ingredients are in the broth, then taste and adjust to your desired saltiness.*

Garnish with more fresh dill and parmesan cheese.

Preparation

Make the dumplings

- Sauté the greens in the olive oil until they are limp and all the water has cooked out of them. Drain them in a colander and twist them in a clean towel to remove as much excess water as possible. Cool to room temperature.
- Place the tvorog in a food processor fitted with a steel blade. Add the nutmeg, lemon zest, salt, and pepper and process for 30 seconds until the mixture is smooth. Add the egg yolks and process until smooth. Add the cheese and pulse to combine. Then add the drained greens and parsley. Pulse until the mixture is well combined.
- Add the flour in small amounts, pulsing several times to combine until the mixture forms a thick, slightly sticky paste. Keep adding flour until you can form a ball out of the mixture that holds together. Note that you may not need the entire cup of flour to get to the desired consistency.
- Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Form the mixture into 12-15 dumplings slightly smaller than a golf ball. Set the dumplings on the prepared baking sheet, cover with plastic wrap and chill for at least an hour.

Make the broth

- Sauté the sliced leek in olive oil until limp and slightly golden. Add the chicken broth, cover, and simmer.
- While the broth is simmering, pulse the dill, parsley, and horseradish together into a grainy paste. Add this to the broth and simmer, covered for another 20 minutes.

Cook the dumplings

- Bring a large pot of well salted water to a rolling boil. Gently lower the dumplings into the water, taking care not to crowd the pot — cook in batches if you need to.
- Lower the heat to medium and cook uncovered until the dumplings rise to the surface of the pot.
- Use a slotted spoon to transfer them into the warm leek and horseradish broth. Garnish with fresh dill and grated parmesan cheese.