

POLISH AMERICAN JOURNAL

A Monthly English-language Journal and Digest Serving
the Interests of over 10 Million Americans of Polish Descent

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Who Likes Pierogi?

Here's an interesting observation. Pierogi is probably the only Polish dish that seems to have its own patron saint. "Swiety Jacek z pierogami!", (St. Hyacinth and his pierogi!) is an old expression of surprise, roughly equivalent to the American "good grief!" or "holy smokes!" Nobody seems to know what the connection between these dumplings and the saintly 13th century monk was all about.

Standard Pierogi Dough. Sift about 2 1/2 c. flour onto breadboard. Sprinkle with 1/2 t. salt. Make a volcano-like crater in the flour mound and deposit 1 egg into it. Work ingredients into a dough, gradually adding about 1/2 c. cold water in a thin stream. (Some Polish cooks prefer lukewarm or even hot water.) Knead dough on floured board until firm and smooth, roll it into a ball, and let it rest 10 minutes or so beneath a warm inverted bowl. Take 1/3 of the dough at a time (leaving the rest beneath the bowl) and roll out thin. With glass or biscuit-cutter, cut dough into circles. Place a spoonful of filling on each circle slightly off center, fold in half, and press edges together with fingers, crimping to ensure a tight seal. Drop small batches of pierogi into a fairly large pot of boiling salted water, making sure not to crowd them. When boiling resumes, reduce heat to a slow boil and cook about 10 minutes. Test one to see how well dough is cooked. Remove to colander with slotted spoon and rinse lightly with cold water. Serve hot with topping of choice or let them cool and then fry them in butter to a nice golden brown. These dough recipes make 25-30 pierogi or roughly four servings.

Savory Cheese Pierogi Filling. Fill dough rounds prepared according to the above dough recipe with a mixture made by combining 1 lb. ground farmer cheese (or dry cottage cheese) with 1 whole egg, 1 extra egg yolk, and salt and pepper to taste. 1 t. sugar may be added (optional). If neither farmer cheese nor dry cottage cheese are available, drain and press out all moisture from ordinary creamed cottage cheese, which can be pulverized in a blender or ground. If filling is too wet, stir in some bread crumbs. Variations: Add 1-2 T. finely chopped chives to mixture and feel free to vary the taste with different spices like a pinch or two homemade herb pepper, hunter's seasoning, powdered caraway, crushed, dried mint leaves, etc.

Potato Pierogi Filling. Cook 1 1/2 lbs. peeled potatoes or potatoes in jackets (skins), and peel under cold running water. Mash well or put through ricer and set aside to cool. Meanwhile, lightly brown 2 finely chopped onions in 2-3 T. butter. Combine the potatoes with

the onions, 1 egg, 2 T. bread crumbs, and (optional) 2 T. chopped chives. Note: The egg and bread crumbs may be omitted. For non-fast days, the onions may be fried up with a heaping T. of diced bacon or salt pork.

Sauerkraut and Mushroom Pierogi Filling. Soak 1 oz. dried Polish mushrooms 2-3 hrs. in 1 1/2 c. water, then cook in same water until tender. Chop mushroom fine, return to water, and cook to reduce liquid. When you have no more than about 2 T. of almost syrupy mushroom liquid left, switch off heat and set aside. Rinse well in cold water 2 well-packed c. sauerkraut, drain in colander, press out excess moisture, chop fairly fine, place in pot, scald with boiling water to cover, and cook on med. heat 20 minutes. Meanwhile, simmer 1 finely chopped onion in 2 T. butter until transparent or slightly browned. To sauerkraut add the mushrooms and their liquid, the browned onions, and (optional) 1/2 t. sugar. Simmer on low heat under cover another 30 minutes or until tender, stirring frequently to prevent burning. When tender, uncover and allow moisture to steam away. Salt and pepper to taste then transfer to sieve, pressing out all moisture. If you like the sauerkraut very fine, you may run it through your meat grinder. 1-2 T. bread crumbs may be added to mixture.

Cabbage Pierogi Filling. Shred 1 lb. (small head) of cabbage, scald with boiling water to cover, bring to boil, and cook 3 minutes. Drain. Cover with boiling water again and cook on med. heat 20 minutes. Separately, in skillet simmer 1 chopped onion in 3 T. butter until tender, add cabbage to onions in skillet, stir to mix ingredients, salt and pepper to taste, and simmer under cover till tender. Uncover and simmer a while longer, stirring constantly until moisture evaporates. Transfer to sieve and press out excess moisture. Chop fine or grind. Besides salt and pepper, other seasoning possibilities include about 1 t. or so chopped dill, or 1/4 t. crushed caraway seeds.

Fresh Mushroom Pierogi Filling. Wash, slice or chop and simmer 16 oz. fresh, wild, or store-bought mushrooms in 4 T. butter, together with 2 finely chopped onions under cover about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Uncover and continue simmering until moisture evaporates and mushrooms begin to sizzle. Run mushrooms and onions through meat grind together with 1 stale, unsoaked kaiser roll. Add 1 egg to mixture, mix well, salt and pepper, add a little chopped parsley (optional), and firm up with a little bread crumbs if necessary. Variation: We feel adding 1 or even 1/2 oz. dried Polish mushrooms (pre-soaked, cooked and chopped as

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usual) greatly improves the flavor of this dish. Another possibility is to use 8 oz. of the white, store-bought mushroom and 8 oz. oyster mushrooms.

Meat Pierozki Filling. Grind 1 lb. or so boiled or roast beef or equivalent amount of assorted, cooked leftover meat. Simmer 2 finely chopped onions in 2 T. butter until slightly browned. Soak a stale kaiser roll in 1/2 c. milk until soggy and grind together with the onions. Combine ingredients well, salt and pepper to taste, and sprinkle with MSG. Other seasoning possibilities include a sprinkle of garlic powder, paprika, and/or marjoram, a dash of beef seasoning or hunter's seasoning. Note: Polish dumplings or dough-pockets filled with meat are usually called pierozki (little pierogi) because they are somewhat smaller in size. Use a juice glass or smaller biscuit-cutter to cut out the rounds of dough.

Fish Pierogi Filling. Simmer 2 finely chopped onions in 2-3 T. butter until slightly browned. Run the onions and 3/4-1 lb. fried or otherwise cooked fish fillets through grinder. Into mixture work 1 beaten egg and 2 T. or so bread crumbs--enough to get a filling that is not too moist. Sprinkle in 1-2 T. chopped dill and salt and pepper to taste. Variation: Boneless smoked fish may be used instead.

Pea or Bean Pierogi Filling. Soak 1 c. navy beans, lima beans, or dried yellow peas in 5 c. water overnight, then cook in same water until tender but not disintegrated. Drain in colander and allow to cool. Brown a heaping T. diced bacon, remove nuggets, and lightly brown 2 chopped onions in drippings. Grind the beans or peas and combine with browned onions and bacon nuggets. Season with salt, pepper, savory, and/or marjoram. Note: The beans or peas may also be prepared with mushrooms.

Blueberry Pierogi Filling. Wash, drain, and drip dry 1 pt. blueberries. Some cooks sprinkle the blueberries with sugar before filling pierogi, but that makes the filling quite runny. We feel it is better to fill them with just the blueberries and then sprinkle the cooked pierogi with powdered or granulated sugar on serving platter. This is a great summertime favorite, the more so that the small wild blueberries found in Poland's forests are far tastier than the commercially grown variety available in America. Note: Your blueberry pierogi will be less runny if you sprinkle the berries with 1-2 T. flour or potato starch.

Cherry Pierogi Filling. Remove stems, wash and pit 1 lb. or so sweet or sour cherries. Place in colander and gently press out some of the juice, taking care not to damage fruit. Fill pierogi with 3-6 cherries each, depending on the size of your dough rounds. Sprinkling cherries with flour or potato starch will help take up some

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of the juice and make your pierogi less runny. Variation: If fresh fruit is not available, canned cherry-pie filling or cherry preserves containing whole cherries may be used instead. Place 2 c. pie filling or preserves (or 1 cup of each) in a pot and heat to just below boiling. Drain and sieve, and when dripping stops, use the fruit to fill pierogi.

Prune Pierogi Filling. Soak 2 c. or so prunes overnight in water to cover. Add 1-2 sugar and 1 T. lemon juice. Cook on low heat until tender. Remove pits, place prunes in sieve, and press out excess moisture, then fill pierogi.

Apple Pierogi Filling. Peel and coarsely grate 5 cooking apples. Sprinkle with a heaping T. powdered sugar and a dash or two of cinnamon.

Date Pierogi Filling. Grind 12 oz. pitted dates and 4 oz. blanched almonds. Cream 2 1/2 T. butter with 2 hard-cooked egg yolks (sieved) and 1 raw egg yolk. Combine with date-almond mixture and flavor with 1 T. rum or 1/2 t. rum extract.

Poppyseed Pierogi Filling. Scald 1 c. poppyseeds with boiling water and cook covered on very low heat until poppyseeds fall apart when rubbed between fingers. Drain well and run through grinder 2-3 times. Mix with 1/2 c. powdered sugar, 1/2 c. soaked, drained raisins, 1/2 c. ground or finely chopped walnuts, 1 beaten egg, and 1/2 t. grated orange rind. Note: Canned poppyseed filling, "doctored" with the above ingredients, may be used when there isn't time to make if from scratch.

Fried Pierogi. Spread 2 c. flour along the bottom of a large, dry skillet, sprinkle with 1 t. salt and heat, stirring frequently, until flour is lightly browned. Remove from heat. Slowly stir in just enough boiling water to bind the flour into a dough, return to heat, and mix well until dough comes away from skillet. Set aside to cool. Roll dough by hand on board into a long, narrow, even roll. Slice roll into 1/2-inch rounds one at a time, flatten between palms into a small pancake, fill with a spoonful of savory cheese filling of choice, fold over, and pinch edges together. Fry in 1 c. hot lard, vegetable shortening, or oil to a nice golden brown on both sides, drain on absorbent paper and serve immediately, topped with liquified sour cream.

Lazy (Unfilled) Cheese Pierogi. Grind 1 lb. (or slightly more) farmer cheese. Add 3 lightly beaten raw egg yolks and 2 T. soft butter. (Butter may be omitted if you're cutting down on fat.) Mix ingredients into a uniform mass and fold in 3 stiffly beaten egg whites. Stirring constantly, work in 1 c. flour, add 1/2-1 t. salt, and

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mix lightly. Turn dough out onto lightly floured board and roll by hand into a long 1-inch roll. Even up sides and flatten top with a wide-blade knife and cut at an angle into 1-1 1/2 inch pieces. Drop the dumplings in batches into boiling salted water so as not to crowd them in pot. After they float up, cook them at a slow boil about 3 minutes. Remove with slotted spoon and serve immediately with melted butter or Polonaise topping.

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