

CHRISTMAS RECIPES

WIGILIA RECIPES

Tradition calls for twelve courses to be served during Wigilia. All the dishes are meatless and should be made from foods that come from the four corners of the earth: forest, sea, field, and orchard. Polish cooks over the centuries had to be very resourceful, working within these limitations, and it is a tribute to their creativity that they came up with such a rich variety of recipes based on root vegetables, dried mushrooms and dried fruits, potatoes and cabbage, local fish, and flour-based pastries and dishes, such as kluski and pierogi.

These recipes are loved by Poles everywhere and in spite of the fact that Christmas Eve is no longer a day of fast and abstinence and even though fruits and vegetables as well as imported seafood are now widely available, on this day the traditional recipes are lovingly prepared in kitchens all across Poland and around the world. A sampling of these recipes follows.

Polish Mushroom Soup "Zupa Grzybowa"



16 ounces fresh mushrooms (portabella mushrooms preferred)
2 ounces dried mushrooms (optional)
1 large onion
4 tablespoons butter
juice of 1/2 lemon
1/4 cup water
6 cups rich mushroom, vegetable, or beef broth
1 cup sour cream
3 tablespoons flour
salt and pepper to taste
1/4 cup fresh dill, chopped

If using dried mushrooms, soak them in hot water for two hours. Drain, squeeze out excess water, and chop finely. Wash and coarsely chop fresh mushrooms. Sauté onions in butter over medium heat for 5-7 minutes until softened add mushrooms and sauté for another 15 minutes. Add lemon juice and water and cook covered for another an additional 5 minutes.

Transfer mushrooms to a soup pot, add the broth, and bring to a low simmer. Blend the sour cream with the flour and mix well. Gradually add 1 cup of the hot soup to the sour cream and mix until smooth. Pour the sour cream mixture slowly to the pot, stirring constantly. Simmer for five minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve garnished with chopped dill.

Easy Beet Soup "Barszcz"



3 or 4 cans of whole beets
2 cans of vegetable, mushroom, or beef broth
2 cups of water
4 cups of tomato or vegetable juice
juice of 1/2 lemon
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1 teaspoon salt

Strain the beets and set aside. Combine beet juice, broth, water and tomato or vegetable juice in an enameled or stainless steel soup pot. Bring to a gentle boil -- do not let the soup boil for more than a minute or it will lose its clear red color. Grate the beets from one or two cans into the soup. (Reserve the remaining beets for a salad). Add lemon juice and seasonings to taste. Reheat before serving, making sure not to bring to a boil. Place 5 or 6 uszka dumplings in each bowl before serving and pour barszcz over them (uszka recipe follows).

Mushroom Dumplings "Uszka"



For the stuffing:

16 ounces fresh mushrooms, finely chopped
1 stick butter
1 medium-sized onion, finely chopped
white of one hard-boiled egg, finely chopped
2 tablespoons breadcrumbs
1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
Salt and pepper to taste

Sauté the mushrooms and onions in the butter for 10-15 minutes. Add bread crumbs, finely chopped egg white, and parsley. Mix well and add salt and pepper to taste.

For the dough:

1 egg yolk
2 cups of white flour, sifted
1/2 cup lukewarm water

Mix the flour with the egg yolk, adding water slowly and working it into the dough until a soft mass is formed. Keep kneading until the dough no longer sticks to your fingers. Roll dough into a ball and cover with flour. Place in a bowl covered with plastic and refrigerate for an hour.

Roll out a third of the dough into a thin layer on a floured surface and cut into 1 1/2 inch squares. Place a spoonful of the mushroom filling in the center of the square of dough, fold in half to form a triangle, and press the edges tightly to close. Then bring two corners of the triangle together and press tightly. Place dumplings on a floured dishcloth and cover with another cloth until ready to cook. Repeat with rest of dough. Cook dumplings in batches in boiling, salted water for 5 minutes, until they float to the top. Take out with slotted spoon and toss in melted butter. Serve immediately with barszcz or refrigerate and reheat gently before serving.

Fish in Aspic **"Ryba w Galarecie"**



1 large carp, cleaned
1 tablespoon gelatin
4 cups vegetable stock
2 tablespoons water
4 peppercorns
1 egg white
3 bay leaves

Remove head from fish. Cook head and spices in vegetable stock for half an hour. Strain the stock and set aside. Place whole fish in a shallow roaster or fish pan. Cover with strained stock and simmer for half hour until tender. Remove fish and place on a serving platter. To clarify stock, add slightly beaten egg white to the stock and bring to boiling point, stirring lightly. Strain through cheesecloth. Dissolve gelatin in two tablespoons water in a large bowl; add stock. Pour over the cooled fish. Chill thoroughly until firm. Garnish with carrot rings, hardboiled eggs, and lemon slices.

Rolled Herring **"Rolmops"**



4 pickled herring filets, each cut into 3 thin pieces
pickling juices from jar reserved
dill pickles quartered and cut into one-inch pieces
pickled onions
dill or parsley for garnish

Place a piece of pickle and a pickled onion at one end of a herring piece. Roll the herring tightly and skewer with a toothpick to hold the roll together. Before serving, drizzle rolls with some of the pickling juice from the herring jar, insert a few small sprigs of fresh dill or parsley into an open end of each roll and serve with rye bread or pumpernickel as an appetizer before Wigilia.

Pike Polish Style "Szczupak po Polsku"



2 carrots
2 celery stalks
1 onion, quartered
10 peppercorns
1 bay leaf
2 teaspoons salt
1 large whole fish (pike, whitefish, or sole)

Topping:

1/4 cup butter
4 tablespoons fresh dill, chopped
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon pepper
1/4 cup lemon juice
6 hardboiled eggs, finely chopped

Place vegetables, fish, dry seasonings, and enough water to cover the fish in a saucepan or shallow fish pan. Boil gently for about 15 to 20 minutes or until the fish flakes easily.

For the topping, heat the butter in a skillet and add the chopped eggs, lemon juice, dill, salt, and pepper. Cook 5 minutes, stirring frequently. When the fish is cooked, remove it gently from the fish pan and set on a warm platter. Spoon the topping over the fish and serve immediately.

Sauerkraut with Mushrooms "Kapusta z Grzybami"



2 ounces dried mushrooms
16 ounces fresh mushrooms (portabella mushrooms preferred)
1 large onion
4 tablespoons butter
1 1/2 pounds sauerkraut, rinsed in cold water, and drained
1/3 cup water
2 tablespoons flour
salt and pepper

Soak the dried mushrooms in 2 cups of hot water for 2 hours drain, and squeeze dry in cheesecloth. Chop finely. Wash and coarsely chop the fresh mushrooms and onion and sauté in the butter in a skillet for 5-7 minutes. Add sauerkraut to mushrooms; cook and stir for another 10 minutes.

Blend 1/3 cup water into flour, beating gently to remove lumps. Add slowly to sauerkraut and simmer for 15 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Noodles with Cabbage **"Kluski z kapusta"**



1 lb kluski-style noodles (or rotini), cooked and drained
2 sticks butter
1 large onion, coarsely chopped
2 lbs sauerkraut, drained (rinsed or unrinsed as desired)
1 lb. fresh mushrooms
salt and pepper to taste

In a large frying pan, sauté the onion in one stick of butter until golden but not browned. Add sauerkraut and cook over medium heat for 10-15 minutes until warmed, stirring frequently. Place in a large bowl. Clean and trim mushrooms and cut into thick slices. Sauté mushrooms in remaining butter in a large frying pan for 5-7 minutes and add to bowl with sauerkraut. Mix gently, check for seasoning, and then place into a buttered casserole and bake for 40-45 minutes in a preheated oven at 350 degrees.

Note: Fresh cabbage can be substituted for all or part of the sauerkraut. If using fresh cabbage, parboil it for 10 minutes and then slice into wide strips. Proceed with recipe as above but be sure to check carefully for seasoning, as fresh cabbage will need more salt and pepper than sauerkraut alone.

Mushroom Cabbage Rolls **"Golabki z Grzybami"**



1 large cabbage (with big leaves)
1 cup uncooked long grain rice
2 large onions, finely chopped
16 ounces fresh mushrooms
2 ounces dried mushrooms (optional)
1 stick of butter
6 cups of tomato juice or mushroom stock
salt and pepper to taste

Take out the hard core of the cabbage with a sharp knife. Place the cabbage in a large pot of salted, lightly boiling water for approximately 10 minutes. When the outside leaves are tender, peel them off gently with a fork. You may have to peel the first layers first and then return the cabbage to cook and

continue peeling the leaves until all are done. Cook the rice according to package instructions until just tender and set aside.

If using dried mushrooms, soak them in hot water for two hours. Drain, squeeze out excess water, and chop finely. Wash and chop the fresh mushrooms. Sauté the onions in half of the butter until softened and then add mushrooms. Cook for another 10 minutes, adding more butter as needed. Add mushrooms and onions to the cooked rice, mix and season well. Place two tablespoons of the mushroom and rice mixture in each cabbage leaf and wrap it carefully, rolling the leaf and folding the ends under tightly, like a parcel.

Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Grease a deep roasting pan or large casserole and fill it with the cabbage rolls, packing them tightly together. Pour enough tomato juice or mushroom stock to cover the rolls. Cover tightly with foil and bake in oven for 40 minutes. Uncover and bake for another 10-15 minutes to brown the rolls lightly. Serve with sour cream or mushroom sauce.

Polish Dumplings "Pierogi"



Pierogi Dough

2 cups all-purpose flour
2 eggs
2 tablespoons sour cream
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup lukewarm water

Mound flour on a large cutting board and make a well in the center. Drop eggs, sour cream, and salt into well. Add water a few drops at a time and work it into the flour with a knife, moving slowly from the center to the outside of the flour mound. While mixing the liquid into the flour with one hand, keep the flour mounded with other hand. Try not to let any liquid break through the walls of the mound.

When all the water and egg is mixed into the flour, knead until the dough is firm and well mixed and no longer sticks to your hands (about 10-15 minutes). Add flour if it seems too sticky; a few drops of water if it seems too dry. Then cover the dough with a bowl or clean dishtowel and let rest for 30 minutes.

Divide the dough into halves. On a well-floured surface, using half of the dough at a time, roll it out as thinly as possible. Cut out 3-inch rounds with a biscuit cutter or a drinking glass. Then place a tablespoon of filling in the middle of each round of dough, fold over carefully and press edges together. Be sure to press firmly as filling will spill out during cooking if the dough rounds are not well sealed.

Pierogi can be frozen at this point. Layer carefully in freezer container; be sure to separate layers with wax paper. If you are going to eat right away, drop 12-20 pierogi into a large pot of boiling, lightly salted water. Cook gently 3 to 5 minutes, or until pierogi float. Lift out of water with perforated spoon.

Toss in butter and place in heatproof serving dish. Pierogi can be reheated in the microwave or in the oven, just before serving. They can also be reheated by frying in butter. Serve pierogi with sour cream and chopped chives.

Sauerkraut and Mushroom Filling

2 cups sauerkraut
2 tablespoons butter
1/2 cup chopped onion
4 ounces mushrooms
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 hardboiled egg, finely chopped
1 tablespoon breadcrumbs
2 tablespoons sour cream

Rinse sauerkraut in cold water and drain well. Sauté for 10 minutes in medium saucepan until dry. Set aside. In frying pan, sauté onion and mushrooms in the remaining butter. Add sauerkraut and pepper. Fry until sauerkraut is golden. Add chopped egg, breadcrumbs, and sour cream. Mix. Cool thoroughly before stuffing pierogi.

Potato and Cheese Filling

4 Russet potatoes
8 ounces farmer's cheese or dry cottage cheese
1 onion, finely chopped
2 tablespoons butter
Salt and pepper to taste

Peel and boil the potatoes until tender. Mash until smooth and let cool. Sauté chopped onion in the butter. Let cool. When mashed potatoes are cool, add onions and cheese. Mix well. Add salt and pepper to taste before filling pierogi. Serve with sour cream.

Cheese Filling

8 ounces dry cottage cheese, farmer's cheese, or ricotta.
1 egg
2 tablespoons sugar (to taste)
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/2 cup raisins (optional)

Mix well before stuffing pierogi. If using raisins, soak them in warm water for one hour and drain and dry well before adding to cheese mixture.

Noodles with Poppy Seeds "Kluski z Makciem"



1 cup boiling water
4 tablespoons poppy seeds
3 tablespoons sugar
1 package wide egg noodles, kluski
2-3 tablespoons melted butter

Scald poppy seeds with boiling water and soak for 3 hours. Drain. Force through food grinder (or coffee grinder) and mix with sugar. Cook noodles in lightly salted water. Drain and rinse with cold water. Toss noodles in melted butter, place in shallow baking dish, and keep in warm oven until ready to serve. Toss with poppy seeds and sugar just before serving.

Dried Fruit Compote **"Kompot z Owocow Suszonych"**



1 1/2 pounds mixed dried fruit
6 cups of water
1 lemon
6 whole cloves, 1 cinnamon stick
1 cup of sugar

Rinse and soak fruit in 4 cups of water overnight in a ceramic or glass bowl. Transfer fruit and the water into a stainless steel or enameled pot; add 2 more cups water, sugar, cloves, and cinnamon. Peel the lemon, leaving the peel in one piece, if possible, and add the peel to the pot. Then cut the peeled lemon in half and squeeze the juice into the pot. Cook for 30 minutes, adding more water, lemon juice, or water to taste. Refrigerate for a few hours. Serve cold in glass bowls, along with Christmas cookies, for dessert.

Christmas Wheat Berry Pudding **"Kutia"**



Ingredients:
1 cup whole wheat berries
2 cups hot water
1/2 cup poppy seeds
1/2 cup slivered almonds
1/2 cup white raisins
1 shot vodka, rum, or brandy (optional)
1/2 cup honey
Extra honey and heavy cream, for serving

Soak wheat berries in two cups of hot water for two hours or overnight. Drain wheat berries and place in an enameled pot. Cover with cold water, bring to a boil, reduce heat, and cook over low heat for two

hours, or until all liquid is absorbed. Let cool. Cover poppy seeds with a cup of boiling water for 30 minutes. Drain through a fine sieve and place in a glass bowl to dry. Grind poppy seeds in a coffee grinder or food processor, until the seeds start to show their white interiors. Add ground poppy seeds to the wheat berries and then add almonds, raisins, and honey. Mix well. Add more honey if needed. Refrigerate.

Serve kutia cold in small glass bowls with extra honey on the side. Add 2-3 tablespoons of heavy cream (or half and half) to each serving. Wheat ferments easily, so be sure to refrigerate any leftovers. The kutia will hold well for up to a week, if it is refrigerated.

Polish Almond Soup "Zupa migdalowa"



This soup is often served during Wigilia, between courses or after the family comes home from Midnight Mass, rather than as a replacement for the beet or mushroom soup typically served at the beginning of the meal. Almond soup is also served during the year for breakfast or brunch, or, in the summertime, it is sometimes served cold for a light, refreshing lunch.

5 cups whole milk
1/2 pound finely ground almonds
1 teaspoon almond extract
2 cups cooked rice
1/3 cup sugar

In a large saucepan, bring the milk to a very low boil. Add the remaining ingredients and continue cooking, over low heat, for 5-7 minutes, stirring constantly until the rice is warm. Add more sugar to taste. You can garnish with raisins, cinnamon, or sliced almonds before serving.

Polish Honey Spice Cookies "Pierniczki"



These cookies are very popular in Poland during the holidays. They are very similar to American gingerbread cookies. To hang decorated pierniczki on your Christmas tree, the way it is done in Poland, you should make a hole in the cookies before baking with a plastic straw. After baking, decorate and thread a thin ribbon through the hole in the cookie to hang it on your tree.

1 cup honey
4 cups flour
4 eggs
1 cup sugar
pinch of ground black pepper
1/2 tablespoon ground cinnamon
1/2 tablespoon ground nutmeg
1/2 tablespoon ground cloves
1/2 tablespoon ground allspice
1 tablespoon baking soda

Heat the honey in a small saucepan until it just begins to boil. Take off heat and allow to cool slightly. Combine eggs and sugar in a bowl and beat together until slightly thickened. In another bowl, mix the flour, spices, and baking soda together and add slowly to the egg and sugar mixture while beating rapidly. The dough should not have any lumps. Pour in the lukewarm honey and mix everything until smooth. You can cover the dough with plastic and refrigerate until ready to make the cookies.

Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured surface, knead for a minute to warm it, and then roll out with a floured rolling pin to a thickness of a 1/4 inch. Use cookie cutters to cut into shapes. Bake in 350 degree preheated oven on greased cookie sheets for about 12 minutes. Allow to cool completely before decorating with white frosting or covering with a chocolate glaze.

Polish Kolaczki Cookies "Kolaczki"



1 (8-ounce) cream cheese, softened
12 ounces (3 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
3 cups all-purpose flour
2 (14-ounce) cans fillings of choice (apricot, prune, raspberry, etc.)
Confectioners' sugar

Mix cream cheese and butter until light and fluffy. Add flour 1 cup at a time and mix well. Wrap dough in plastic and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Roll out dough 1/4-inch on a surface that has been dusted with equal parts confectioners' and granulated sugar (not flour). Cut into 2-inch squares. Place 1/2 to 1 teaspoon filling on center of each square. Overlap opposite corners of dough to the center over filling.

Bake for 15 minutes or until corners start to brown. Cool and dust with confectioners' sugar. If not serving the same day, store in a tight container without the confectioners' sugar, or freeze. Dust with confectioners' sugar just before serving.