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Borshch with mini-dumplings

**For the vegetarian filling:**

- dried ceps – 50 g
- onion – 150 g
- salt – 3 g
- vegetable oil – 40 g

To make the dough for the vegetarian dumplings:

- wheat flour – 250 g
- water – 120 g
- salt – 2 g
- vegetable oil – 5 g

For the meat filling:

- boiled potatoes – 100 g
- prunes – 20 g
- minced pork – 100 g
- salt – 3 g
- ground black pepper – 1 g

To make the dough for the meat dumplings:

- wheat flour – 250 g
- water – 60 g
- egg – 1
- salt – 2 g



- water – 2 l
- smoked brisket – 300 g
- ceps to make alternative stock – 100 g
- fresh beetroot juice (extract the juice by grating the beetroot or use a juicer) – 150 g
- carrots – 70 g
- potatoes – 250 g
- onion – 70 g
- cabbage – 150 g
- garlic – 20 g
- vinegar – 10 g
- salt – 10 g
- sugar – 10 g
- vegetable oil – 50 g
- fresh dill – 10 g
- tomato juice – 500 g

Wash and peel the vegetables. Combine the smoked brisket and water if you are cooking a meat borsch, or replace the meat with dried ceps if you are making a vegetarian version. Cook over a low heat for 2 hours if you are cooking with meat and for 40 minutes if you are cooking with mushrooms. Strain the stock. Discard the smoked brisket. Slice the mushrooms and add them back to the stock.

Dice the potatoes into 1×1 centimetre cubes. Peel the carrot and cut into semi-circles, dice the cabbage into 1.5×1.5 centimetre cubes. Dice the onion into small cubes, sauté in oil and then add finely minced garlic. Add the potatoes, carrots, cabbage and onion to the stock together with the garlic. Slow cook the tomato juice in a frying pan; when it has reduced two-fold add it to the borsch. Slow cook for 40 minutes. Five minutes before the borsch is finished add the beetroot juice, vinegar and sugar and season with salt.

To prepare the filling for the meaty dumplings: mince all the ingredients using a meat grinder.

To prepare the mushroom filling: boil the mushrooms in water for half an hour, then strain. Dice the onion and sauté with oil. Season the mushrooms with salt and mince them together with the onion using a meat grinder or blender.

Use the ingredients listed above to make an elastic dough. Roll it out 1 millimetre thick and cut out squares of 2.5–3 centimetres. Spoon the filling in the middle, pinch the corners to make triangles, seal the edges and form mini-dumplings. Cook the dumplings in lightly salted boiling water. Once the water boils, simmer over a low heat for 5 minutes. Serve the borsch in a bowl topped with 7 mini-dumplings (feel free to add more). Sprinkle with finely chopped fresh dill, add a spoonful of smetana to meat-based borsch.

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As spring progresses, wild and garden strawberries come into season. From time immemorial, Ukrainians have harvested wild berries either for personal consumption or commercially. Wild strawberries are eaten fresh or dried. As May draws to a close, garden strawberries grown on private garden plots or commercially flood Ukrainian markets and food stores. Strawberries are eaten fresh, mashed with a dressing of smetana mixed with sugar or honey, or used to fill varenyky and make jam.

With the advent of summer, the cherry season descends on Ukraine. Although Ukrainians grow cherries almost everywhere across the country, the Melitopol variety, which includes over forty sub-types, is a local popular brand and part of the European geographical indications system.

Much loved bilberries are also in season. In Ukraine blueberries are grown commercially, but harvesting wild bilberries is still popular. Usually bilberries are eaten fresh with ice cream, smetana or yogurt, or added as an ingredient to desserts. Varenyky with bilberries is a popular summer dish. The wild berries are also used to make jam, syrup and liqueur. Many people would dry bilberries to add later to dishes or beverages. Small dried bunches of wild strawberry and bilberry stems complete with leaves are used in herbal teas.

Ukrainians are particularly partial to raspberries. Just like strawberries they are grown in practically every rural garden. Harvesting wild raspberries is not as popular as it used to be, as the wild variety has much smaller berries and is laborious and time consuming to pick. As a result, wild raspberries are totally absent from the market, unlike bilberries and wild strawberries, which are freely available.

Ukrainian seasonal cuisine is not only famous for fruit and berries. Ukrainians love their cucumbers. Small soil-grown cucumbers, which have a distinct aroma, texture and sweet flavour, are highly prized, and are used to make quick pickled (fermented) cucumbers. It takes just a few days to transform fresh cucumbers into a spicy appetiser, a wonderful addition to lightly-cooked new potatoes with a sprinkling of dill. This delicious duo is the highlight of the summer menu in Ukraine.



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