The Art of Bulgarian Cuisine
16 Traditional Bulgarian Recipes

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Many centuries of tradition have gone into what is now considered 'Bulgarian' cuisine - there are many influences from throughout this time, in particular the neighbouring countries of Greece and Turkey.

Many of the ingredients produced in Bulgaria are world famous - the herbs grown here are exported all around the world, Bulgarian yoghurt (kiselo mljako) is considered by many to be the best in the world (indeed some 200,000 tons of Bulgarian yoghurt are sold in Japan every year!) and the organic fruit and vegetables are legendary ... many of our subscribers write to us with tales of how 'the fruit tastes like it did when I was a child', and this is perfectly true ... no pesticides here ... everything grown naturally and one can certainly taste the difference.

Whilst there are some delicious meat dishes in Bulgaria, many of the dishes are 'meatless' - in fact the Bulgarians eat only half the amount of meat as people in other EU countries, which is partly down to their Orthodox beliefs where many celebrations require a fasting from meat - in this respect, the country is a perfect place for vegetarians to visit ... the salads and fruits are wonderful and everyone should try to experience the open air fruit and vegetable markets on a visit here.

Every month in Quest Bulgaria Magazine we feature a Bulgarian recipe, always trying to make the most of the organic vegetables. Most recipes are 'traditional' however, as it's me personally who cooks these dishes every month whilst photographing them for the magazine, they have all been slightly 'personalised' to suit my own and Jain's tastes!

Here we have selected a few recipes from recent issues which include, soups, salads, main dishes (both vegetarian and with meat) and desserts. We do hope you try some of them out ... and enjoy the results!

*Darren Kearney, Managing Director, Quest Bulgaria*
A very simple and traditional Bulgarian dish ... perfect for cooling down during the warmer days!

Serves 4-6:

**Ingredients:**
- 1 litre yoghurt (Bulgarian if possible)
- 2 cucumbers
- Walnuts, about 10
- 1 cup sunflower oil
- Fresh Fennel
- Garlic (if you are not going out for the afternoon!)

**Instructions:**
Finely chop the walnuts and fennel (and garlic)
Grate the cucumbers (or dice if you prefer)
Combine all the ingredients, mix and serve

That’s it... enjoy!

Tarator can be served as a starter (if so, you can add a cupful of water before serving), or makes a fabulous vegetarian main meal.

QBG
This month, Quest Bulgaria subscriber David Barker and family share with us their recipe for Roasted Tomato Soup, which makes perfect use of organic Bulgarian vegetables (see article on previous page).

**Ingredients:**

*Serves 4*

- 1 kilo of ripe tomatoes cut into quarters
- 250g red onions cut into wedges
- 4 garlic cloves
- 3 fresh rosemary sprigs
- 2 large red peppers quartered and de-seeded
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 300 ml of heated vegetable stock
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 4 dashes Worcestershire sauce (optional)
- A few sprigs of parsley
- 1 dash of Tabasco sauce (optional)

**Instructions:**

Pre-heat the oven to 220 degrees centigrade.

Place the tomatoes, onions, garlic, rosemary & peppers into a large roasting tin.

Drizzle with olive oil and roast for 45 minutes until tender and beginning to char.

Remove from the oven and blend briefly so that the mixture is still a bit chunky.

Tip into a large pan and add the stock, vinegar, Worcestershire sauce and Tabasco sauce.

Heat gently through and serve with parsley sprigs and chunky bread.

QBG
As soon as the winter months have faded and we start to enjoy the warmer months of summer, one can’t help thinking of the fabulous Bulgarian salads - with all that wonderful fresh produce.

Shopska salad (shopska salata) is one the the most popular salads in Bulgaria and also my mother’s personal favourite during my parents’ many visits here to Bulgaria.

Here is my own version!

**Serves 4**

**Ingredients:**
- 4 spring onions
- 4 medium size tomatoes
- half a cucumber
- 2 green peppers
- 100g of bulgarian ‘cerene’ white cheese (or feta)
- chopped fresh parsley
- olive oil
- salt
- optional: olives

**Instructions:**
Grill the peppers until the skin starts to darken and crisp. Let cool, covered, for a few minutes. Then remove the skins and the pips.

Tip: here in Bulgaria, rather than heating the grill, the peppers are often browned on an electric hot plate.

Cut them into small cubes, along with the onions, tomatoes and cucumbers.

Place the prepared ingredients into a large salad bowl. Season, add chopped parsley, olive oil and mix well.

Cover in grated white cheese and enjoy!

If it takes your fancy, throw on a few black olives.

Whilst most Bulgarians would normally accompany this with a traditional glass of rakia - I prefer a glass of chilled Bulgarian Chardonnay - Perfect!
Mish-Mash is the traditional type of Bulgarian Omelette ... a perfect dish for using up all those leftovers in the fridge!

**Ingredients:** (serves 4)
- 8 eggs
- 1 onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 green peppers
- 2 medium tomatoes
- 200 gr. of sirene (or feta) cheese, crumbled
- 50g butter
- Vegetable oil
- Chopped fresh parsley (third of a cup)
- Paprika
- Salt and freshly milled black pepper

**Instructions:**
Cut the onions into rounds, finely chop the peppers, parsley and garlic. Peel the tomatoes and dice.
In a bowl, beat the eggs and add to the mixture the crumbled cheese.
Melt the butter in a frying pan, add a splash of oil and cook the onions and garlic for a few minutes.
Keep stirring and add the peppers. Cook again for another 2 or 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes and reduce the liquid for a good 10 minutes.
Season with salt and pepper, and add a good sprinkle of paprika.
Pour over the eggs/cheese mixture and cook for another 3 or so minutes, stirring very gently.
Sprinkle with parsley and serve immediately.
Perfect with toasted crusty bread!
The last day of Christmas Lent is Christmas Eve and therefore all meals are vegetarian. This month, we share with you two traditional vegetarian recipes … here we have stuffed red peppers and on page 47 ‘medenki’, traditional biscuits.

If you have Bulgarian friends or neighbours for Christmas Eve, then you can’t go wrong serving these two dishes.

Dobar apetit!

Stuffed Red Peppers are a traditional dish from the Pleven region, but to me - a native of the Dobrudja region - this is an unusual and interesting way to serve beans.

For the stuffing use the dry white/ red beans you see on sale at the supermarkets. I would not use the big beans from the Rhodopi region - as they are too big to fit in a small pepper.

Remember, when you boil the beans beforehand, do not use any salt - or they’ll never boil. Once they’ve started boiling, take the pan off the hot plate, pour the water out and replace with fresh water. After you’ve made sure the beans are nice and soft, you can add the seasoning - choubritza or mint (jojen) is good for cooked beans.

Ingredients:
(Serves 4)
8 medium-sized dry red peppers
1 onion
200 g of dry beans
choubritza (if unavailable you can use Herbes de Provence)
salt
oil
flour

Instructions:
Soak the dry red peppers in hot water to give them some texture and help them loosen up (if you don’t have dry ones, use fresh ones - in this case do not soak them in hot water)
Cook the beans in water with no salt in it until they are soft when pressed with a fork
Fry the chopped onion in a pan, add to the beans - add salt, oil, choubritza and simmer until the most of the water has evaporated
Fill the peppers with the beans, dip the peppers in flour with the open side down, so the contents won’t spill
Preheat the oven to 220°C
Lay the stuffed peppers on a tin
Originally some sauerkraut juice was poured into the tin, to keep the dish moist and give it more flavour - if you are not fond of that, just add water and oil and bake until the peppers are nice and brown
Serve
Svetoslava Slavova
**Kufteta** is a traditional Bulgarian dish which is served all year round - similar in taste to a savoury meatball or a homemade burger ... perfect for those outdoor barbecues particularly if served with a few well chilled Bulgarian beers!

Alternatively, you could make the most of the wonderful Bulgarian organic vegetables and create a vegetarian version of the same dish ...

**Ingredients:**
- 800gr courgettes (3-4)
- 500gr boiled potatoes (5-6)
- 3 eggs
- Half a sprig of parsley finely chopped
- 90 gr flour (1/2 a cup)
- 1 cup sunflower oil
- black pepper and salt
- Yoghurt to garnish

**Instructions:**
Peel the boiled potatoes and mash them. Grate the raw courgettes and add to the potatoes. Mix together with two of the eggs, parsley, black pepper and the salt. Form into balls or burgers, brush with the last beaten egg and dip in some flour. Pan fry or barbecue them and serve with the yoghurt.
RECIPE OF THE MONTH

moussaka
OF AUBERGINE

Bulgarian Moussaka, is quite similar to its 'greek' counterpart and generally comes in 3 varieties: aubergine, courgette or the more well-known potato

Feel free to substitute the aubergine for slices of potato or courgette to try the other versions of this recipe.

**Ingredients:** (Serves 6)
- 500g of minced beef
- 4 large, firm aubergines
- 2 onions
- 4 cloves of garlic
- 4 tomatoes
- 1 small tin of tomato puree
- 100g of grated hard cheese
- 1 teaspoon of chopped fresh parsley
- Half teaspoon of chilli powder
- Flower
- Sunflower oil
- Water
- Salt and freshly milled black pepper

**Instructions:**

Without peeling the aubergines, cut them into thin slices. Spread them out and sprinkle them with salt, leave until the water has come out, then turn over and do the same.

Coarsely chop the onions and finely chop the garlic. Blanch, peel and chop the tomatoes, grate the cheese and finely chop the parsley.

Heat 2 tablespoons of oil in a frying pan and gently fry the onion for around 5 minutes, adding the garlic for the last minute or so. Add the minced beef, and keep frying, whilst stirring for another 5 minutes.

Add to this mixture the tomatoes, spices, tomato puree and let cook for a further 10 minutes whilst stirring frequently.

Dry the aubergines, then dip each side into flower. Heat another 2 tablespoons of oil in a frying pan and cook the aubergines for around 5 minutes each side until a lovely,
golden brown. Once cooked, drain the aubergines and if necessary, remove excess oil with absorbent paper.

**RECIPE OF THE MONTH - MOUSSAKA**

Heat the oven to 180°C. In a large oven proof dish, place alternate layers of aubergines, mince, finally finishing with a layer of aubergines.

Sprinkle with grated cheese and cook in the oven for around 20 minutes. Enjoy!

Another option is to mix the grated cheese into a litre of natural yoghurt (Bulgarian if possible) and pour this on the mixture before cooking ... delicious!
This recipe is traditional Bulgarian, and not only makes best use of the fabulous organic vegetables here, but is incredibly cheap to prepare. Also perfect for our vegetarian readers.

**Ingredients:**

Serves 4

350g dried haricot beans
2 medium onions
1 carrot
1 stick of celery
2 tomatoes
1 soup spoon of tomato purée
4 soup spoons of oil
1 coffee spoon of paprika
half a coffee spoon of chilli powder
2 soup spoons of chopped fresh mint
2 soup spoons of chopped fresh parsley

**Instructions:**

Soak the beans in water for at least 24 hours and drain well before preparation.

Chop the onion and dice the carrots and celery. Blanche the tomatoes then peel and chop.

Place the beans in a large pan and cover with cold water. Bring to the boil and cook for 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and drain. Place the drained beans back in the pan and cover again in clean boiling water and a soup spoon of oil.

Reduce the heat, cover and cook until the beans are cooked, but still firm (up to 2 hours).

Add the carrots, celery and mint. Heat the remaining oil in a pan and gently fry the onion for 3-4 minutes. Add the paprika, chilli, tomatoes and tomato purée.

Gently cook for a few minutes more then add to the beans. Cook a further 5 minutes.

Season with salt and ground black pepper if necessary and sprinkle with chopped parsley - can be served hot or cold - priaten apetit!
There are many recipes for the Bulgarian dish Kavarma - this is a traditional one using Pork, although the dish also exists in Beef and Chicken versions … perfect for a cold winter evening!

**Ingredients:**

Serves 4  
800 g pork (fillet is best)  
5 red peppers (the ‘flat’ Bulgarian ones)  
4-5 onions (the larger and softer the better)  
1-2 tomatoes  
1 cupful button mushrooms  
1 small green chilli (if you prefer your dishes spicy)  
1/3 cupful white wine  
Chubritza (a Bulgarian herb - it is possible to replace with ‘Herbes de Provence’ but not the same taste!)  
sprinkle of paprika  
parsley (fresh and finely chopped)  
half a cupful of lard or sunflower oil  
salt and pepper

**Instructions:**

Cut the meat into small pieces and brown in the lard or oil. Add the onions and continue to fry until the onions are tender.

Add the sliced mushrooms, peppers, tomatoes, wine, pepper, salt, paprika (optional chilli), chubritza and a splash of warm water.

Kavarma should be baked in the oven in traditional earthenware bowls - (guvech - see below) these bowls are available in most hardware shops in Bulgaria for around 3 leva for individual bowls and around 15 leva for a 4-6 servings bowl.

Stir, pour into individual earthenware bowls (or a large earthenware bowl) and bake for one and a half hours at 180°C. Serve with finely chopped parsley and large pieces of crusty bread. Enjoy!

Plus, leaving out the pork makes for a delicious vegetarian meal.
The town after which this dish is named is Panagurishte (pronounced pan-a-gyoor-ish-te), and if you wanted to order this dish in a restaurant or bar then you would ask for ‘yaitsa po panagyuski’, but to be honest, it could possibly take longer to learn the correct pronunciation as it would to prepare the actual dish!

**Ingredients:**

_Serves 4_

- 8 eggs
- 4 soup spoons of butter
- 600 g of natural yoghurt (Bulgarian if possible!)
- 5 or 6 cloves of garlic
- 5 soup spoons of vinegar
- 2 teaspoons of paprika
- One third of a teaspoon of chilli powder
- Freshly chopped dill
- Salt

**Instructions:**

Crush the garlic and mix this together with the yoghurt and half a coffee cup of salt.

Bring a full pan of water to the boil (with salt and the vinegar). Break the eggs one by one into a bowl, then poach them in the simmering water.

After three minutes of cooking, remove the eggs. In a serving bowl, place the yoghurt and then the eggs on top.

Heat the butter, add paprika and the chilli powder. Mix together for a few seconds and remove from the heat. Drizzle over the poached eggs.

Sprinkle with freshly chopped dill and serve with a dry white wine and fresh crusty bread for a delicious and quick meal.

Bon appetit!
Home-made breads are very traditional for the Christmas Eve celebrations in Bulgaria, often a silver coin will be hidden inside and the person who finds it will have good luck in the coming year.

**Ingredients:**
Half a cup of warm water
1kg flour
1 teaspoon vegetable oil
2 eggs
1 soup spoon of salt
2 soup spoons of sugar
1 cube of yeast

**Instructions:**
Dissolve the yeast in the warm water in a bowl. Add the sugar and 1 to 2 soup spoons of flour. The mixture should not become too thick.

Put the rest of the ingredients in a bowl (except one egg yolk which should be kept aside for later), add the diluted yeast and knead into a dough.

Separate the dough into 7 equal size balls.

Take 6 of the 7 balls of dough and roll them into circles with a rolling pin. Cut each of the 6 circles of dough into 8 triangular pieces (like a pizza).

Place the 7th, uncut ball, into the centre of a greased baking tray.

Brush the triangular cut pieces with oil. Take three slices, place them on top of each other and ‘twist’ to form cone shapes (see photograph). Repeat this process using 3 cut slices of dough until all the dough is used.

Arrange the cones of dough, in a circular pattern around the centre ’7th ball’ on the baking tray, in effect making a complete circle.

Leave the dough in a warm place to rise.

Brush the dough with the remaining egg yolk and bake for 30 minutes in a preheated oven at 200 degrees.
**Ingredients:**
500g filo pastry sheets (available everywhere nowadays!)
500g unsalted butter
500g of finely chopped walnuts
50g sugar
5ml vanilla essence
Half a cup of sugar
1 cup of honey
500ml water
5ml lemon juice
Teaspoon of cinnamon

**Instructions:**
Preheat the oven to 175 deg. C
In a pan, boil the water and half a cup of sugar for 15 minutes. Add the lemon juice and honey boil for a further 10 minutes. Set aside to cool.

For the filling, combine the walnuts, 50g of sugar and vanilla essence. Mix well.

Melt the butter in a saucepan and place two tablespoons in the bottom of a baking tray (I use 30cm x 20cm). Cut the filo to the size of the baking tray and place two sheets in the bottom, then again brush with melted butter.

Now spread a couple of spoons of the walnut mixture on the filo sheets. Add two more filo sheets, and again brush with melted butter. Continue in this manner of filo, walnut, filo, walnut until the ingredients are used up.

Cut the Baklava into individual portions before baking for around 1 hour until a lovely golden brown.

Let cool on a wire rack for 5 minutes the pour over the honey and sugar mixture which should have cooled by now and sprinkle with icing sugar. Let stand for at least another two hours - if you can!

*Baklava is a very sweet and delicious dessert - and goes perfect with a strong espresso coffee. Whilst this is a popular dessert here in Bulgaria, the origins are probably somewhat further south as the Greeks claim it as Greek and the Turks as Turkish! There are many variations of this recipe and this is my own version which seems just about right. This may not be the easiest to prepare recipe we have ever published but it is truly worth the effort ... enjoy!*
Recipe of the Month

Pumpkin Soup

Ingredients:
Half a pumpkin (de-seeded and diced)
2 large tomatoes, diced
4 cloves garlic, crushed
300 ml vegetable stock
Fresh, chopped basil
Olive oil
Salt and milled black pepper

Instructions:
Heat 2 tbsp of olive oil in a large pan. Add the pumpkin and sauté for 5 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté for another 2 minutes. Add the chopped tomatoes and continue to sauté for a further 5 minutes, season with salt and pepper. Pour in the stock, bring to the boil and simmer for 15 minutes. Blend the mixture and transfer to a serving dish. Stir in the cream, sprinkle with chopped basil and serve. Delicious!

The Story behind this recipe:
We recently met our good friend Diana St. John-Palmer for lunch and as usual we exchanged any ‘goodies’ we had spare. Diana kindly brought us a huge amount of fresh vegetables and salads from her garden which we exchanged for a recent English-language novel and a jar of Branston pickle (such exchanges are not uncommon here in Bulgaria!).

The following day I had to decide what to do with the huge pumpkin that formed part of the parcel. I decided to make a soup ... the recipe is a fairly standard soup recipe but I was interested in using the pumpkin with the home-grown tomatoes and garlic.

The result, I have to say, was fantastic ... even Jain had second and third helpings of soup! The following day I even made another batch with the remaining half of the pumpkin.

I sent an e-mail of thanks to Diana and explained the recent ‘soup success’ chez nous. Diana replied and asked me for the recipe as she had a load of pumpkins growing in the garden but couldn’t get rid of them as all the neighbours also had lots growing in the garden.

Diana tried the recipe and even served the soup to her Bulgarian friends ... every one of them also asked for the recipe ... so we thought, it must be good enough to publish here!

Feel free to double up the quantities shown here, use up the whole pumpkin and make a whole load of soup as it can be frozen and reheated.

So ... if you are unsure as to what to do with all those leftover pumpkins after the Halloween celebrations, why not try out this simple but tasty recipe?

Enjoy!

QBG
**Ingredients:**

- Pastry
  - (either shop-bought filo, or make your own using flour, water, and a dessert spoonful of olive oil: knead and roll it out very thinly into a large circle)
- 200g butter
- 600g cooked rice
- 4 eggs
- Salt (to taste)
- 200g ‘sirene’ cheese. (Feta or similar will do just as well)
- Nettles (dried or fresh) or spinach (optional)

**Instructions:**

Place the thin pastry casing (around 1mm thick) into a wide shallow pan that has been very generously buttered. The pastry should overlap the edges, preferably enough for you to use only one pastry sheet as the casing (but you can ‘patchwork’ it if necessary). The diameter of the pan must be no wider than the diameter of the hob heating it.

Mix together the rice, crumbled cheese and eggs. Add salt (not too much as the white cheese is fairly salty already). You can make it plain, or add spinach as suggested, nettles (soak first for about a minute if using fresh, and make sure you are using young plants) or just about anything else you fancy. Place the filling into the pastry case and flatten it down. It should be between 1 and 2cm deep. Fold the pastry over to make it into a parcel.

Cook on a low heat for around 20 minutes. From time to time, gently insert small pieces of butter between the sides of the dish and the pastry. Keep shaking the pan gently to ensure the pastry base is not sticking to the bottom. Carefully slide the klin onto a plate. Butter the pan again - generously. Place small butter knobs on the top of the klin too. Place the pan upside-down on top of the plate, and flip the whole thing over so that the klin lands in the pan, the other way up. Cook the other side. This normally takes another 20 minutes or so, when the pastry should look a beautiful golden colour.

Alternatively you can cook klin in the oven, turning it over halfway through, as above.

It really is as easy as that: simple but delicious!

Eilidh Horder

Klin is a typical Rhodopean dish which is deliciously warming and a filling staple. Proof that the simple things in life are sometimes the best, klin is cheap to make, and can be eaten as a main supper dish or an accompaniment. It’s basically a type of rice pie, but don’t be put off - it tastes much better than it sounds!

Klin is scrumptious served hot, especially when the cold weather sets in, with Bulgarian yoghurt served on the side - but it can also be eaten cold, during a summer barbecue or picnic, or as a snack. Different variations of the dish can be made using flavours according to your mood and the season.
Bulgarian Sarmi are leaves of various kinds, stuffed with a mixture based on either meat or rice. Certain regions use lettuce or vine leaves and the most common variation is pickled cabbage leaves.

Unlike other countries that know and use ‘choucroute’ in Bulgaria the cabbage is pickled and preserved whole, rather than chopped … this makes it perfect for creating both meat and vegetarian versions of ‘sarmi’ at any time during the year.

**Ingredients:**
- Serves 6
- 1 kg pork mince
- 1 whole cabbage
- 1 large onion
- 1 cup of rice
- Paprika
- Fresh parsley
- Chilli powder
- Oil
- Salt
- Pepper

**Instructions:**
Finely chop the onion and fry in a tablespoon of oil until softened. Stir in a teaspoon of paprika and remove from the heat.

Stir in the meat, rice, a handful of finely chopped parsley and a pinch of chilli powder. Salt and pepper to taste.

Cover with warm salted water and simmer until the water has been absorbed by the rice.

Select around 40-50 large cabbage leaves and dip them in boiling, salted water for around a minute.

Place one soup spoon of the pork and rice mixture in the centre of each leaf.

Roll the leaf tightly and arrange them in a saucepan (see photograph).

Pour over a cup and a half of warm water (or use the water that you dipped the cabbage leaves in earlier) and a drizzle of oil, cover and simmer on a low heat for two hours.

Serve hot with vegetables of your choice and a glass of Mavrud … delicious!
Ingredients:
750 g flour
200 g sugar
100 g honey
One full teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda
3 eggs
50 g cooking oil,
1 teaspoon of ground cloves
1 teaspoon of cinnamon
Pinch of salt

Instructions:
Sift the flour with the soda, salt, sugar, cinnamon and clove
Beat the eggs with the honey and the oil
Mix all into a dough
Roll and cut it into shapes
Bake in a greased tin - don’t forget to leave some space
between the biscuits
Bake in a moderately hot oven
When cold, dip into some icing
Enjoy!
Svetoslava Slavova