



Howard Hillman's Great Peasant Dishes of the world

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Houskove Knedliky

Czech Republic

It originated as a peasant dish. Today, it is a popular national specialty.

Pronunciation:

how'-skoh-vay
kuhned'-lee-kee

Part 1 Recipe

■ Ingredients

Servings: 4

■ Water

7 deciliters or 3 cups

■ Salt

10 milliliters or 2 teaspoons

■ Slightly stale white bread

6 slices

■ Unsalted butter

60 milliliters or 4 tablespoons

■ Flour

25 centiliters or 1 cup

■ Baking powder

2 milliliters or 1/2 teaspoon

■ Yolks

of 2 large eggs, beaten

■ Chopped scallions

30 milliliters or 2 tablespoons

■ Chopped fresh parsley

15 milliliters or 1 tablespoon

■ Ground black pepper

1/2 milliliter or 1/8 teaspoon

■ Whole milk

15 centiliters or 5/8 cup

■ Steps

1 Bring the water and 7 milliliters (or 1 1/2 teaspoons) of the salt to a rapid boil in a wide bottomed 4 1/2 to 6 liter (or 4 1/2 to 6 quart) pot.

2 Trim off the crust and cut the bread into 1 1/2 centimeter (or 1/2 inch) cubes).

3 Melt the butter in a large sauté pan or skillet. Sauté the bread cubes for several minutes, until they are lightly brown. Remove from the heat and reserve for step 5.

4 Add the remaining ingredients (including the 2 milliliter or 1/2 teaspoon salt) to a mixing bowl and blend them with a wooden spoon.

5 Gently incorporate the cooled bread cubes into the flour mixture.

6 Shape the dough into several cylinders measuring 4 centimeters (or 1 1/2 inches) in diameter by 8 centimeters (or 3 inches) in length.

7 Gently place the dumplings in the boiling water.

8 Adjust the heat to a very low simmer. Cover, and cook for 20 minutes, turning the dumplings halfway through this period.

9 With a slotted spoon, remove the houskove knedliky from the pot, and let them drain briefly.

10 Slice the dumplings into 1 1/2 centimeters (or 1/2 inch) thick disks with a knife or (if you

want to be traditional) with a taut piece of string, using a sawing motion. Serve your houskove knedliky immediately.

Part 2 Cooking tips

■ Pointers

• **Bread** - If you don't have slightly stale bread, place the cubes made from fresh bread slices on a plate and let stand uncovered at room temperature for at least 12 hours.

Alternatively, place the fresh cubes on a cookie sheet in the middle of a preheated 90°C or 200°F oven for 15 to 20 minutes.

• **Sticking** - To prevent sticking, moisten your hands before shaping the dumplings.

• **Boiling** - The dumplings may break apart and will certainly become denser than necessary if cooked at a boil.

■ Serving suggestions

• **Presentation** - Overlap the dumpling disks in a ring around the entree.

• **Affinities** - Whoever invented houskove knedliky probably had in mind roast goose, duck, or pork. The thick, rich sauce that usually accompanies these entrees brings out the best in the dumplings and is usually spooned over them with abandon.

■ Variations

- **Baking powder** - Omit it for a firmer, more compact dumpling.
- **Additions** - Stuff your houskove knedliky with a medley of chopped mushrooms and onions sautéed in butter.
- **Cheesecloth** - Wrap the cylindrical dumplings in cheesecloth and steam them over boiling salted water.
- **Spheres** - Mold the dumplings into balls and cook them in a soup or stew.

cause undue alarm. I never gained a pound during my stays in the the Czech nation, and I greedily devoured more than my fair share of these savory dumplings.

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Part 3

Travelog

The former Czechoslovakia peacefully split in 1993 into two nations, the Czech Republic and Slovakia. I've noticed that while the Slovaks are beer drinkers like the Czechs, they are more avid wine drinkers. The latter Slovakian propensity is influenced by neighboring Hungary, a prolific wine-producing country.

Czechs are beer drinkers, and they make some of the best beer in the world. Genuine Pilsner beer, made in its hometown of Plzen, has enviable character, a quality lacking in most American beers. The Czechs acquired their love of beer and hearty fare from their westerly neighbors, the Germans and Austrians.

Czechs adore dumplings. The national favorite is a rich bread dumpling called houskove knedliky. During a drive through the Bohemian countryside in search of the quintessential houskove knedliky, my Czech companion told me her theory: "These dumplings are largely responsible for the excess weight my countrymen tote around." An occasional serving of houskove knedliky shouldn't