

Feasting and the Fasting with Varenyky



An essential dish at any Ukrainian celebration are varenyky or “вареники”. Usually they are called varenyky as they are boiled in water; when baked they are pyrohy or “пирозги.”

We indulge in a good feast of varenyky usually served with sour cream when families get together. When varenyky are served for Lenten meal or when fasting on Christmas Eve make them without any animal fat and serve them with a mushroom sauce made without cream or sour cream. Fry onions in oil.

These delicate dumplings are filled with savoury and sweet fruit fillings; savoury varenyky are usually served with sour cream and plenty of fried onions. The next day they are just as good when they are lightly fried and served with more sour cream. Sweet varenyky are also served with sour cream but at this time, they are sprinkled with sugar.

In preparing for this section, I spoke with many of the women associated with the church, and the residences. As we were talking, they spoke of how they used to make their varenyky; one said I add a little mashed potato to my dough to make it softer, another said; I only use milk for my dough, not water. Just like any traditional recipe, variations from family to family are customary. It was so interesting to hear what they did to make their varenyky the best tasting ones around.

I remember my mother making a huge batch of varenyky every Thursday for supper. Her great efforts ensured that not only did our family enjoy a fresh meal together, but that we had leftovers to take home. They were quite labour intensive for a 75+ year old, but she loved to see us.

It was about this time that my mother needed help in making the hundreds of varenyky she made for Swiat Vechir or Christmas Eve. It was time for me to learn how to add the filling and pinch the edges so they do not open when they are gently cooked in boiling water.



I have not yet meet a young boy of Ukrainian descent who does not like varenyky. Have you? By the way, varenyky are also pyrogies or pyrohy.

Varenyky - Our Family Recipe

The recipe for varenyky dough is very simple: flour, eggs, salt, and water. The key to our family's recipe is to add some canola oil and to use warm tap water.

4 cups all-purpose **Flour**
1 tsp. **Salt**
2 large **Eggs**
1/4 cup **Canola Oil**
1 cup **Warm Water**



- ◆ Make a well in the flour in a bowl, add the egg, salt and oil; stir in the well, pour warm water into the mixture, use a fork blend all wet ingredients into flour to make a soft dough.
- ◆ Knead the dough lightly, cover it with a damp cloth and let it stand for 10-15 min.
- ◆ Prepare the fillings starting with the standards: potato and cheddar cheese and sauerkraut and potato, all flavoured with fried onions.
- ◆ Prepare dough; cut the dough into half and roll out until 1/2" thick. Using 3/4" glass or cookie cutter, cut circles.
- ◆ Place circle on your hand, fill with spoonful of filling; seal the edges firmly. *(Fillings recipes follow.)*
- ◆ Place varenyky on floured board, cover with clean tea towel to prevent drying.
- ◆ Cook varenyky in large pot of salted boiling water, stir once after adding to pot.
- ◆ Varenyky are ready when they rise to the top and are well puffed.
- ◆ Remove with slotted spoon to sieve, drain thoroughly.
- ◆ Serve with fried onions fried either in butter or in canola oil.



Varenyky can be frozen either before cooking or after cooking. In either manner, place varenyky in one layer on a baking sheet and place in the freezer. When frozen, remove them to a plastic freezer bag, label, the kind of filling, and date prepared. Keep them frozen until ready to cook.

Varenyky Dough – One Recipe

This dough uses milk to keep the dough snowy white.

4 cups all-purpose **Flour**

1 tsp. **Salt**

2 large **Eggs**, whisked lightly

1/2 cup **Water**, at room temperature

1/2 cup **2% Milk**, at room temperature

- ◆ Sift the flour and salt into a bowl and form a well in the centre. Add the egg, water, and milk to the well and stir together with a spoon to form soft dough.
- ◆ Turn the dough out on to a lightly floured surface and knead until the dough is smooth, about 5 min. Cover with a clean tea towel and leave to rest for 15 min.
- ◆ Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface until about 1/2" thick.
- ◆ Cut 3-1/2" rounds with a glass or pastry cutter.
- ◆ Take a tsp. of the filling and place it in the centre of the round. Fold the dough over the filling that you end up with a semi-circle shaped pillow.
- ◆ Seal the rim by pinching the edges together. Make sure the edges are securely sealed or the filling will be washed out during cooking.
- ◆ Repeat the process until you have used all the dough.
- ◆ Any dough remnants can be re-rolled to make rounds and cooked.
- ◆ Bring a large pot of salted water to boil and drop the varenyky one by one in the water. Give them a gentle stir to lift any off the bottom of the pot and prevent them from sticking together.
- ◆ The water will soon come back to the boil and the varenyky will float to the top. Boil them for a further 3 to 4 min.
- ◆ Remove them with a perforated spoon ensuring they are drained well and rinse them with warm water.
- ◆ Coat them with melted butter or fried onions and toss gently to evenly coat each varenyky.

Varenyky Dough - Another Recipe

This dough adds mashed potatoes and uses egg yolks.

2 cups **Mashed Potatoes**

1/2 cup **Canola Oil**

2 large **Egg Yolks**

4 cups all-purpose **Flour**, plus flour for dusting the work surface

2 tsp. **Salt**

2 cups **Water**

- ♦ Combine mashed potatoes with oil, yolks; add flour, salt, and water.
- ♦ If dough is dry, add more water, 1 Tb. at a time, until moist.
- ♦ If dough is sticky, add more flour, 1 Tb. at a time, until it is smooth.
- ♦ On a floured surface, knead dough 3 or 4 min. or until elastic.
- ♦ Cover dough with plastic wrap; refrigerate at least 30 min.
- ♦ Roll out dough until it is quite thin and cut rounds about 2 - 3" wide with a large biscuit cutter. Continue with fillings and cooking instructions as in previous recipes.

Varenyky Dough - Yet Another Recipe

And this dough uses sour cream and margarine with whole eggs.

6 cups all-purpose **Flour**

1/2 cup **Margarine**

2 large, **Eggs**

3 heaping Tb. **Sour Cream**

Salt

- ♦ In a large mixing bowl, mix flour and margarine together. Cut in the margarine until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs.
- ♦ Add remaining ingredients and combine until you form medium-soft dough.
- ♦ Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead until it is really elastic; for about 10 min.
- ♦ Let the dough rest for about 30 min. on the counter.
- ♦ Roll out the dough until it is quite thin and cut rounds about 2 - 3" wide with a large biscuit cutter. Continue with fillings...

Anne Ursulak

Varenyky Dough - and Another Recipe

This recipe has only two ingredients, flour and sour cream.

2 cups **14% Sour Cream**

4 cups all-purpose **Flour**

- ◆ Combine the flour and sour cream in a large mixing bowl.
- ◆ Keep adding flour to the sour cream until you form medium-soft dough.
- ◆ Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead until it is really elastic; for about 10 min.
- ◆ Let the dough rest for about an hour in the fridge or on the counter.
- ◆ Divide the dough in half and cover with an inverted bowl.
- ◆ Roll out the dough until it is quite thin and cut rounds about 2 - 3" wide with a large biscuit cutter. Continue with filling...



Vivian Boguski Rico

Tips on what to Do with Leftover Dough...

As children, we loved palenychky, or varenyky without fillings. My mother made them when she had some dough left over; she would cook them with the varenyky and serve them with a little fried onion...they were the best.

This dough also made lochshyna, tisto or noodles for chicken soup or rosil.

The filling is the heart of the varenyk. Various regions of Ukraine have their own versions of varenyky as defined by their fillings. Mashed potatoes with fried onions and cheddar cheese are popular.

There are many more varieties: you can add curd cottage cheese or sauerkraut to the potatoes, there is basic sauerkraut or sauerkraut and mushrooms fillings. In addition, there are buckwheat, buckwheat and curd cottage cheese, or mushroom fillings made at special times of the year. And, as a treat in the summer, there are blueberry or sour cherry varenyky. "Betcha" can't have just one!

Popular Potato and Cheese

You can use a medium or sharp Cheddar Cheese in this filling.

3-4 large **Russet** or **Yukon Gold Potatoes**

1/4 cup **Potato Water**

1 medium **Onion**, diced

Canola Oil for frying onions

3/4 cup **Cheddar Cheese**, grated

Salt and Pepper to taste



- ◆ Peel and dice the potatoes, then boil in salted water until fork tender. Mash the potatoes with the potato water.
- ◆ Add grated cheese and fried onions to the warm mashed potatoes and thoroughly mix until the cheese is melted.
- ◆ Season to taste with salt and pepper.

*Oksana Berky adds finely chopped cooked spinach to this filling...
mmmm!!!*

Tips on Fillings For Varenyky...

Mashed potatoes seasoned with fried onions are the beginning; the addition of cheese gives them a superior flavour. Excellent cheese choices are curd cottage cheese, grated cheddar or cream cheese. Add some chopped dill or chives to build more flavour.

In the old country, "bryndzia", a type of aged cheese made of sheep's milk was used in fillings. Vary the proportions and ingredients in this potato and cheese recipe to suit your taste. You can find bryndzia at some Polish delis or you could try adding feta cheese to the potatoes.

Potato and Cheese Whiz

- 1 medium **Onion**, very finely chopped
- 1/4 cup **Margarine**
- 3 cups cold **Mashed Potatoes** (*russet potatoes*)
- Salt and Pepper** to taste
- 3-4 Tb. **Cheese Whiz**

- ◆ Sauté the onions in the margarine.
- ◆ Add the sautéed onions to the mashed potatoes.
- ◆ Add just enough Cheese Whiz to hold the filling together.
- ◆ Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Potato and Cottage Cheese

- 1 Tb. **Onion**, grated
- 2 Tb. unsalted **Butter**
- 2 cups **Cold Mashed Potatoes**
- 1 cup + **Curd Cottage Cheese**
- Salt and Pepper** and **Chopped Dill** to taste



- ◆ Cook the onion in the butter until tender.
- ◆ Combine it with the potatoes and cheese. Add chopped dill.
- ◆ Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Cottage Cheese

- 2 cups curd **Cottage Cheese**
- 1 large **Egg**, slightly beaten
- Salt** to taste



- ◆ Combine cottage cheese with the egg and salt to taste.
- ◆ An additional egg or egg yolk or some thick sour cream may be used, if the cheese is very dry.

Dry curd cheese is preferred for a filling because a wet, creamy cheese will melt, giving flat and empty varenyky. The mixture may require chilling before using it, if the consistency is thin.

Some enjoy cottage cheese filling flavoured with fresh chopped dill.

Serving Varenyky with Cheese

Any varenyky made with cheese or cheese and potato filling are usually served with fried onions and sour cream.

