

# UKRAINIAN-JEWISH CROSS-CULTURAL INFLUENCES IN LANGUAGE AND CUISINE



Recipes for the dishes pictured can be found in the Cuisines section on UJE's website [here](#).

At the end of the nineteenth century Ukraine had the highest concentration of Jews in the world with some 30 percent of world Jewry residing in ethnographic Ukrainian territories. Jews made up 10-15 percent of the population in Western and Right Bank Ukraine (west of the Dnieper River) and were a relative majority in some cities and towns in these areas. The presence among Ukrainians of such a numerous ethnic minority and the ongoing contact between Ukrainians and Yiddish-speaking Jews over five centuries left an indelible reciprocal imprint on the languages of these two peoples and their cuisine.

## Nu, let's talk!

### UKRAINIAN AND YIDDISH: LINGUISTIC INTERACTION

Hundreds of Ukrainian loanwords have been adopted in the Yiddish language (for example, words for various agricultural products and the multi-expressive "nu"). Many Yiddish words and expressions have entered the Ukrainian language, particularly urban speech and regional dialects. For example, Bukovynian Ukrainian speech absorbed expressions from Yiddish, such as:

- /moiry maty/ "to be afraid" (Y./hobn moyre)
- /tsuris/ "rage, fury" (Y. /tsures/ "trouble, plight, aggravation, misery")
- /buty broigis z kym/ "to be angry at somebody" (Y./zayn broyges oyf emetsn)
- /metsiia/ "something very good" (Y/metsie/ "bargain")



Ukrainian influence is also evident in Jewish family names, many of which are identical with Ukrainian surnames. Other Jewish surnames combine Ukrainian stems with Yiddish stems or suffixes. The suffix -enko was common among Jews in the Kyivan region (e.g., Faibishenko) and the suffix -iuk in Galicia (e.g., Shlomiuk). Around 70 percent of surnames of Ukrainian Jews derive from the names of towns or villages in Ukraine. *(Based on a presentation by Wolf Moskovich, Professor Emeritus, Hebrew University, at a UJE-sponsored conference in Jerusalem, October 2010.)*

# Nu, let's eat!

## COMMON DISHES IN UKRAINIAN AND JEWISH CUISINE

It is not surprising that in the course of over one thousand years of the Ukrainian-Jewish encounter the national cuisines of the two peoples evolved to feature common dishes. Jews who migrated from Germany to Eastern Europe brought with them former food habits but also adopted and adapted local food customs. Jewish religious culture imprinted its own character on these foods to reflect the requirements of kashrut, the Jewish dietary laws. For example, forbidden ingredients such as pork in Ukrainian dishes were substituted with beef or chicken, and beef or chicken would never be mixed with dairy foods.

Some of these foods acquired symbolic meaning in evolving Jewish traditions: braided bread (kolatch-Ukr., koylitch/challah-Yid.) became an essential feature of the Sabbath and Jewish festivals; filled dairy pancakes (nalysnyky-Ukr., blintzes-Yid.) became a specialty of the festival of Shavu'ot, which is associated with dairy products, and shredded potato pancakes (deruny-Ukr., latkes-Yid.) became the hallmark of Hanukkah because they are deep fried in oil, a key symbol of this festival.

Dill pickles are a staple side dish in both cultures, and for desert—anyone interested in a slice of poppy seed roll or honey cake?



Description	Ukrainian	Jewish	Names in other Slavic languages
braided bread	kolatch	challah/koylitch	kolach (Czech, Slovak, Pol.), the name originates from the Old Slavonic word kolo, meaning 'circle', 'wheel'
beet soup	borsch	borsht	barszcz (Pol.)
stuffed cabbage roll	holubtsi (served with sour cream)	holeptses/holishkes	gotąbki (Pol.)
Pancakes rolled with filling (cheese or other), ends tucked in and sautéd again	nalysnyky	blintzes	bliny (Rus.), naleśnik (Pol.)
shredded potato pancakes	deruny	latkes	placki (Pol.)
stuffed dumplings of unleavened dough	varenyky/pyrohy,	varenikes	spierogi (Pol.), vareniki (Rus.)