

Gogosi and Sarmale

By Chef Hădean

Welcome, my dear guests! Welcome to the „Clean plates” series!

I won't be playing the pipe in every episode. I did it now, so you can see that the sound track of this series, because it will be a series, it's realized by me, performing freestyle with the help of the pipe.

Now, leaving the pipe aside, I want to share with you the reasoning of our meeting, today: a donut recipe. But it's not a normal donut recipe, it's a special one, made with a dough that my mom usually uses for “cozonaci” (i.e. traditional Romanian sweet bread) for Easter and Christmas.

The most important part is to use high quality products.

Starting with flour, it has to be white, sifted flour. Why does the flour need to be sifted? Because, in this way, it will be aerated and can be better hydrated. What does hydrated flour mean? It means that it absorbs better, easier and with a higher quality (if one can say that) the liquid components of the dough.

After the flour was sifted, we put it in the mixer bowl, adding one egg and a tablespoon of sour cream (in excess). And if you have around a so-desired bar of yeast, you don't have to use it all - 25-30 grams of raw yeast or 7-8 grams of dry yeast should be enough. You leave the yeast to bloom, in a bowl of milk and a bit of salt, and then you wait until it bubbles, or, how my grandma used to say, to create a flower.

The next step is to add the bloomed yeast in the mixer bowl, where the flour is, and, in a saucepan, you warm some milk. For every kilogram of flour, it's important to have 600-650 milliliters of liquid, including the egg, the sour cream and the milk mixed with some melted butter, because you're adding some butter to be melted, in the saucepan with milk - around 30-40 grams of butter. Be sure that the butter will melt nicely in the milk, but don't let it boil. In this milk, add 3-4 full spoons of sugar, which means around 100 grams. Afterwards, you stir well, so the sugar is incorporated and, if you want and have, add a vanilla pod. You stir again and then test with your finger: if it's too warm for you, it will be way too warm for the yeast too, but, if you test with your finger and it doesn't burn you, the temperature is ideal. If the temperature is too high, you let it cool for a bit and only after that, you turn on the tool - the mixer. You slowly pour the mix of liquids and pay attention for the dough to be medium - not too soft, but not too solid. It's important for it to be elastic, after a 10-12 minutes of kneading.

You remove the dough from the mixer bowl and put it on a board on which you previously spread flour. You fold it for 2-3 times, because you don't have to force it too much. Then, you let it rest in a bowl and cover it with a plastic wrap. Why is it so important to use this wrap? Because, if it develops a crust on the surface, you will mix it in the dough afterwards and the result won't be the one you want. I mean, the dough won't be so soft, in the end.

You take off the grown dough, put it again on the flour spread board and now, you either press it with your hand or with a rolling pin. What's important is to press it until it's one centimeter thick, and 3 millimeters over - it has to be pretty thick when you cut it, so it can grow fluffy. Cut the donuts with a circled, metallic form, not with a champagne glass - as I did and broke a finger, two years ago. After you cut the donuts, you fry them in boiled oil and you permanently turn them on both sides, so they can roast and grow on both sides evenly.

Powdered sugar on top of the donuts, after they cool down and, if you want, add some jam or jelly, or a rosehip jam, also known as Hetschenpetsch, in Transilvania.

Welcome, my dears, at a new Clean plates episode!

This time, I want to show you a recipe of “sarmale” (i.e. traditional Romanian cabbage and meat rolls) - it’s one of the numerous ones that I discovered in Romania. I counted over 200 “sarmale” recipes until now, made in many, many ways. This is a recipe in which I try a combination of meats that I didn’t try until now and I think you’ll like it too. Now, let’s make “sarmale”!

I am the kind of person who likes “sarmale” with pickled cabbage leaves. It’s something in their flavor which charms me lots.

For the stuffing that I am going to show you in today’s episode, I’ll use half a kilogram of beef pulp. In butchereries, you find it also called fricando and it has to be a bit stocky, which means that it must have some intramuscular fat. The other half of kilogram is sheep pastrami, which usually comes already spiced - that means that it’s better to taste it before you add any more spices, thus you know how to balance the taste.

This is what I do: I take the meat and cut it in small pieces, so my meat grinder can grip the meat, piece by piece. I start mincing it, while I alternate 1-2 pieces of sheep pastrami with 1-2 pieces of beef, so they mince well and, thus, we start the process of mixing the meats.

The other ingredients that we need, are: green onion and a lot of butter. I leave the green onion to soak in butter, on low heat. Why? Because I observed that the butter is able to make the most out of onions, especially green onions. I add some rice - for every kilo of meat, I add 100, maximum 110 grams of rice. The moment the rice starts to be translucent, I take this mix of rice and green onions and add it to the bowl in which I already have the minced meat. I add an egg, some dried thyme, sweet paprika, which can also be smoked, if you like it like that, and mashed tomatoes or tomato paste - it can be tomato broth made by you, last autumn, if you had. Then all this has to be well mixed, so it’s all bounded and nice.

Chop some cabbage and put it on the bottom of a pot. You can also scatter some smoked sausage slices, or smoked bacon, some twigs of dry thyme and bay leaves. From now on, you can start and roll the sarmale. On top of every layer of sarmale, you can scatter some tomato paste or broth, diluted with water, one or two more sausage slices, maybe even a bay leaf or dry thyme and so on, until the pot is full. After the pot is full, pour 1-2 glasses of white wine. It has to be a wine you like to drink, because if you don’t like its taste, you won’t like it in your food either. And then, up until the top, tomato paste diluted with water - if you have some tomato broth made at home, it’s even better. On top of everything, you can add either a lid, or you make one out of a piece of baking paper. You cover it properly and put the pot with sarmale in the oven for 3 hours, at 150 C.

After you take the pot out of the oven, you let the sarmale cool down and can eat them with your dear ones, or alone, but be sure that you add a tablespoon of sour cream.