

Luba's Quick and Easy Genuine Ukrainian Borshch

First of all, do not be intimidated by the length of this recipe. It is very easy to make, and moves along pretty quickly. I have decided to give the amounts of some of the ingredients by weight rather than number, as potatoes and carrots can vary a lot in size. The amounts given below are for about one gallon of borshch; increase or decrease amounts of ingredients depending on the capacity of your soup pot and amount of soup you wish to produce.

To make my prize-winning Ukrainian borshch, you will need the following items:

Soup stuff:

- a large soup pot
- water
- 1 pound whole chicken breasts, boned and cubed
- chicken bouillon cubes or chicken base

Vegetables:

- dried mushrooms, a handful (optional)
- 1 pound potatoes, peeled and cubed
- 1/3 to 1/2 pound carrots, scrubbed/peeled and sliced
- 1 very small green cabbage, finely sliced, or half of a regular sized cabbage (or 1 bag coleslaw mix)
- 1-2 sweet peppers (capsicums), cleaned, cored, and sliced into bite-sized pieces (all green is fine, but sometimes I like a mix of red, green and yellow for the aesthetic appeal)
- 1-2 yellow onions, diced and sauteed to a translucent to light brown stage
- 2-4 cloves of garlic, chopped (or 1-2 t chopped bottled garlic)
- 1 can of diced tomatoes or tomato puree
- 1 large can/bottle of tomato juice

Spices:

- 4 bay leaves
- red pepper "hot seeds"
- dill weed, fresh or dried
- parsley, fresh or dried
- various other spices and condiments to taste:
 - salt
 - fresh ground pepper
 - paprika, hot or sweet
 - vinegar (if borscht is too sweet)
 - honey or sugar (if borscht is too sour)
 - garlic powder
 - tomato paste (if not enough tomato flavor)

Remember, borshch is easiest to make if you consider it a process. **Have all your raw materials ready (peeled, cleaned, etc), but save the chopping or the vegetables until actually needed.** Here it goes:

Fill your soup pot with approximately 1/3 gallon of water, and bring the water to a boil. Chop up the chicken, and throw it in once the water begins to boil. Dice the onions and, in a frying pan off to the side, begin sauteing the them on a gentle, low flame, stirring occasionally. I fry in olive oil, but any good vegetable oil is OK.

Skim off that foamy stuff that boiling the chicken always produces. Once the chicken is done foaming, add your chicken bouillon or base. Add to taste—you should have a very strong but not overpowering chicken taste. Remember, your final product will be diluted to three times the original volume, so don't skimp.

Turn the heat down to medium. Peel, cut up and add first the potatoes, and then the carrots. Chop the cabbage; once the potatoes are cooked, throw it in. Add also the chopped tomatoes (with their juice) and tomato juice. Continue cooking, now on a low flame. Core and cut up the fresh sweet peppers, and add them in.

Once the cabbage is fully cooked, add in the bay leaves, hot seeds, freshly chopped garlic and sauteed onions, oil and all (drain excess oil off before adding). Let this cook a bit more.

Add the dried mushrooms.

Once the peppers are cooked, the borscht is done. Sample a bit, and then add salt, pepper, and paprika to taste. If needed, add garlic powder.

Since tomato juices vary so much in flavor and acidity, you may wish to sweeten or acidify the soup a bit, by adding a bit of sugar (or honey) or vinegar (or lemon juice). Also, if the borscht is

- not "chicken-y" enough (or tastes "weak")—add a bit more bouillon
- not tomato-y enough—add some tomato paste, or my mom's secret ingredient.....ketchup!
- not spicy enough—add more hot seeds

(Keep in mind that the hot seeds can take several hours to manifest their true "hotness" so go easy on them; you can always add more later!)

Just before you're done cooking, add the dill weed and parsley. If you're using fresh herbs in either case, add them just prior to serving—they don't stand up to prolonged heating well.

Serving suggestions:

Borshch is traditionally served piping hot, with a dollop of sour cream on top. The sour cream is mixed in prior to consumption—it cools the borscht and makes it creamier. Many people prefer it without the sour cream. It's also nice served with some fresh chopped green garlic and/or dill weed. Many Ukrainians like to add some crisply fried onions, or chopped garlic cloves. Some like even more hot pepper seed!

A great accompaniment is nice fresh rye bread, but any full-bodied bread (e.g. Sourdough) will do.

Enjoy, and remember that borshch is always better the second day, so save a bit for tomorrow!

Notes:

“Borshch” (aka borscht, borsch, borsht) is a Ukrainian word that refers to a vegetable soup with a meat base, and red borshch (like this one) usually incorporates beets and cabbage. I simply prefer mine without beets. There are at least as many recipes for borshch as there are Ukrainian cooks, as each one I know has several different borshch recipes.

My traditional borshch is based on a recipe I got from my mother, but have tweaked quite a bit. I like my borshch thick and hearty, and she likes it more watery. My borshch won the Best Borshch award at St. Mary’s Ukrainian Orthodox Church in 1997 (and I have the beribboned wooden spoon to prove it).

Remember that you don’t need any fancy equipment or the even the exact ingredients—I have cooked my borshch all over the world, making do with local items and whatever cookware was available. And you can add more or less of any particular vegetables, according to your preference.

And if you want to add beets, feel free to do so. I have been told that it is best to add them in right at the end, so that they don’t turn all grey and mushy. Some people sauté the beets first, before adding. I have also been told that cooked (or baked) beets work best. Cook or bake them with the skin on; then cool, chop, and add to the borshch at the end, with the peppers.