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Exploring North Dakota's Foodways: Germans from Russia

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Brief History

Catherine was a German princess who married into the Russian royal family and later became czarina of Russia. She invited Germans to settle in Russia in 1763, with rights and privileges to offer them a chance for a better life. These are some examples of the rights: free transportation to Russia, free land and tax-free loans, religious freedom, local self-government, exemption from military service and the right to leave Russia at any time.

Many accepted the invitation and colonized the Volga region first. Then in 1803, Alexander I, grandson of Catherine, issued another invitation and Germans settled in southern Ukraine near the Black Sea. In 1871, Czar Alexander II revoked the preferential rights and privileges given to the colonist settlers by the manifestos of Catherine II and Alexander I. In 1874, universal military conscription was instituted.

This resulted in a new migration and the Germans left Russia to come to the U.S. for the free land provided by the Homestead Act of 1862. In 1910, approximately 60,000 Germans from Russia settled in what is now North Dakota. Others settled everywhere from Canada to Texas.

Today, many of the customs and delicious Germans from Russia foodways continue. We at NDSU Extension were asked to become involved in introducing the cultural heritage and the delicious foods with a slightly modern twist. We made a few minor tweaks in the recipes to more closely meet modern-day nutrition advice, but they retain their delicious flavor. These changes are noted in the "cook's notes."

We hope you enjoy this delicious taste of history that continues today in the rich heritage of the Germans from Russia culture. The recipes in this publication include two salads, rolls, two soups, a main dish and two desserts, so you can create meals. We have an accompanying lesson that describes some of the Germans from Russia history in North Dakota. The lesson is available through NDSU Extension. We invite you to enjoy a taste of Germans from Russia cuisine.

Be sure to explore the wide range of information on the NDSU Libraries' Germans from Russia Heritage Collection, including historical books, cookbooks and recorded documentaries, at <https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>.

Special thanks to our history content reviewers, Jeremy Kopp and Michael Miller, NDSU Libraries' Germans from Russia Heritage Collection; and Acacia Stuckle, Extension agent, and Carmen Rath-Wald, former Extension agent, in Emmons County and Logan County, respectively, for their input and review on this project.

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Recipes

Key to abbreviations

c. = cup
tsp. = teaspoon
Tbsp. = tablespoon
oz. = ounce
g = gram
mg = milligram

Bread

Potato rolls are a tasty sandwich bread or an accompaniment to soups or stews.

✓ **Cook's notes:** We have tried this recipe with audiences ranging from young children to adults. Everyone has thoroughly enjoyed the light, moist texture of these rolls, which have added mashed potatoes. We used half whole-wheat flour and half all-purpose flour to add fiber to the recipe. In most recipes that call for all-purpose flour, you can substitute half whole-wheat flour.

? **Did you know?** We are advised to make half of our grain choices whole grains because of the added nutrients in whole-grain foods. Whole-wheat products contain all parts of the kernel: the bran (outer layer), endosperm (starchy part) and germ (part that will sprout when planted). Whole-wheat flour contains fat and may develop off-flavors and odors when stored at room temperature. For longer-term storage, store whole-wheat flour in your refrigerator or freezer.

Potato Bread Rolls

1 package active dry yeast
1½ c. warm water (105 to 115 F)
1 c. lukewarm potatoes, mashed
1½ tsp. salt
⅔ c. shortening (such as Crisco)
2 eggs, slightly beaten
⅔ c. sugar
¾ c. white flour (add gradually)
¾ c. whole-wheat flour (add gradually)

Dissolve yeast in warm water; stir in sugar, salt, shortening, eggs, potatoes, 2 cups whole-wheat flour and 2 cups white flour. Beat until smooth. Mix in enough remaining flour to make dough easy to handle. Refrigerate at least eight hours or until ready to use. Dough can be kept up to five days in refrigerator at 45 degrees or below. Keep covered.

When ready to bake, punch down dough. Let rise 1½ hours before baking. Heat oven to 400 F. Portion out 18 balls of dough, about ½ cup per bun. Evenly space buns on a lightly greased baking sheet. Allow to rise about 30 minutes. Bake 12 to 15 minutes.

Makes 18 rolls. Each roll has 300 calories, 9 g fat, 7 g protein, 48 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber and 240 mg sodium.



Salads

Fresh cucumber salad is a popular dish served in the German-Russian heritage. Cucumber salad is low in calories, carbohydrate and fat. Cucumbers are versatile and provide many vitamins and minerals, such as vitamin C and potassium.

✓ Cook's notes: The original side dish recipe was fairly healthful, so we made minimal changes. We used half and half instead of heavy whipping cream and we added sliced onion and fresh dill to enhance flavor. The substitutions that we made not only increased flavor but also decreased the amount of saturated fat. If you are looking for a side dish, cucumber salad would be a healthful option with the pleasing crunch and flavor.

? Did you know? Germans have a rich history of pickling vegetables and other foods, including cucumbers, beets and pigs feet. They also made an abundance of sauerkraut, or fermented cabbage.

Food preservation techniques have evolved through time, and some older recipes and preservation processes used by previous generations are no longer considered safe. Compare the older recipe recommendations in cookbooks to the current recipes. Research-tested recipes, including pickles and sauerkraut, are provided by NDSU Extension at www.ag.ndsu.edu/food.



Fresh Cucumber Salad

- 5 c. cucumbers, peeled and slice (approx. 5 whole cucumbers)
- 1½ c. half and half
- ½ c. water
- ½ tsp. salt (adjust to taste)
- ¼ tsp. black pepper (adjust to taste)
- ½ c. onion, sliced
- 2 Tbsp. fresh dill
- 3 Tbsp. vinegar

Mix together with spoon and pour in with the cucumbers. Refrigerate about four hours.

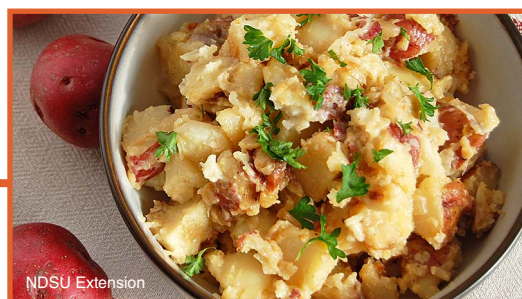
Makes 10 servings. Each serving has 60 calories, 4 g fat, 2 g protein, 5 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber and 140 mg sodium.

Source: Adapted from: Schott (Janke), A. (2012). *Alma's Favorite Recipes: Cooking & Memories from a German-Russian Farm Kitchen*. Germans from Russia Heritage Collection.

Hot Potato Salad

✓ Cook's notes: We tested this recipe exactly as written. At about 100 calories per serving, this salad is a tasty side dish with a slight tanginess from the vinegar. Leaving the potato skins on the potatoes adds color to the recipe and also preserves the fiber and nutrients naturally present in the skins.

? Did you know? Potatoes are a nutrient-rich food that can be prepared in a wide variety of ways. A medium-sized red potato (about 3 inches in diameter) with skin has 150 calories, 0.3 grams (g) fat, 4 g protein, 34 g carbohydrate, 3.6 g fiber and 38 milligrams sodium. Additionally, potatoes are an excellent source of potassium and vitamin C, and they provide many other vitamins and minerals.



Hot Potato Salad

- 7 c. boiled red potatoes, skins on
- 2 Tbsp. oil
- 1 medium onion
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- ½ tsp. salt
- 3 Tbsp. sugar
- 6 Tbsp. vinegar
- ½ c. cream

Boil potatoes in skins until tender. Cool slightly and cut into bite-sized pieces. Heat the oil, and add the chopped onion and cook until soft and lightly browned. Add potatoes, pepper, salt, sugar and vinegar. Simmer for five minutes on low. Season to taste. Add cream and simmer until ready to serve. This reheats well and tastes better the longer it simmers. For serving purposes, place in a preheated slow cooker on low to keep warm.

Makes 14 (half-cup) servings. Each serving has 100 calories, 3 g fat, 2 g protein, 17 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber and 260 mg sodium.

Source: Adapted from a recipe from Carol Fey, from her great-grandmother, NDSU Germans from Russia Collection.

Main Dishes and Soups

Halupsi (cabbage rolls)

✓ **Cook's notes:** We used extra-lean ground beef for high protein and reduced fat content. "Par boiling" refers to partially cooking rice. Boiling two parts water and one part rice, cover the pot and reduce the heat. The rice should be slightly undercooked because it will complete the cooking process in the oven. Be sure to selected large cabbages so you can create larger cabbage rolls.

? **Did you know?** The cruciferous vegetable family tree includes numerous types of cabbage, Brussels sprouts, broccoli, cauliflower and others. They all look a little different but have similar nutritional properties. Natural plant chemicals (phytochemicals) in cabbage and its relatives are linked to health benefits, which may lower our risk for chronic diseases including cancer. Cabbage is a good source of vitamin C, and it is low in calories at about 15 calories per half cup of raw cabbage.

Halupsi (cabbage rolls)

- 1 head cabbage
- 1 pound ground beef, 93% lean
- ½ small onion finely chopped
- ½ c. rice (parboiled)
- ½ c. carrots, shredded
- ½ c. green pepper, chopped
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. pepper
- 1 can tomato soup
- 1 can tomato sauce
- ½ c. sour cream
- 1 tsp. vinegar
- ½ c. water



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Remove the cabbage core. Place cabbage head into a deep pot and cover with hot water. Steam until the leaves are all softened. Drain the cabbage. Separate cabbage leaves and set aside. Mix meat, onion, rice, carrot, green pepper, salt and pepper in a bowl. Roll a spoonful of the meat and rice mixture into a cabbage leaf and place in a pan. Makes about seven rolls.

In a separate bowl, mix together tomato soup, tomato sauce, sour cream and vinegar. Pour mixture over cabbage rolls. Bake at 350 degrees for two hours. About half way through cooking, pour ½ cup of water over the rolls to keep them from drying out. Bake until rice is soft and the mixture reaches 160 degrees. Spoon sauce from the bottom of the pan over the top of each roll just before serving.

Makes seven servings. Each serving has 260 calories, 7 g fat, 19 g protein, 29 g carbohydrate, 5 g fiber and 710 mg sodium.

Source: From *Thy Bounty Cookbook*, Germans from Russian Heritage Collection. North Dakota State University Libraries.

Knoephla Soup

Knoephla (“neffla”) is related to the modern German word “knopfle,” meaning “little button.” Knoephla is a type of dough that is used in a flavorful creamy potato soup. With a few modifications, this knoephla soup recipe was created to be equally delicious and a bit more nutritious.

Cook’s notes: The original recipe used regular chicken base and was limited in vegetables. We added carrots and celery, used a lower-sodium chicken base and substituted whole-wheat flour for half of the white flour to add fiber. The dumplings, therefore, will be grayish instead of creamy white.

Using a low-sodium base in place of the regular base decreased sodium. Substituting whole milk or half and half for cream decreased calories, total fat and saturated fat. As a result, dietary fiber, protein, vitamin A, vitamin D and potassium increased in the updated recipe.

Did you know? The daily recommendation for sodium is about 2,300 mg per day. On average, American consume more than 3,400 mg per day. Consuming too much sodium can increase the risk for hypertension (high blood pressure), kidney disease and fluid retention.

Knoephla Soup

- ¼ c. butter, unsalted
- 6 c. baking potatoes (about 3 large), peeled and cubed
- ½ c. onion (about 1 small onion), diced
- ¾ c. celery, diced
- ¾ c. carrot, diced
- ½ tsp. pepper (or to taste)
- 3 c. whole milk
- 6 c. chicken broth

Knoephla (dumpling) recipe:

- ¾ c. whole-wheat flour
- ¾ c. white flour
- 7 Tbsp. whole milk, or more as needed
- 1 egg
- 2 tsp. dill weed
- 2 tsp. parsley
- ½ tsp. ground black pepper (or to taste)
- ½ tsp. salt

Melt butter in large skillet over medium heat. Saute potatoes, carrot, celery, onion and pepper until vegetables are tender, about 20 minutes. Stir 3 c. milk into potato mixture and heat until almost boiling, about five minutes. Remove skillet from heat. In separate pot, bring chicken broth to a boil.

To make knoephla (dumplings): Combine whole-wheat and white flour, 7 tablespoons milk, egg, dill, parsley, salt and pepper. Add more milk a tablespoon at a time until dough is stiff. Roll dough into ½-inch-thick ropes. Cut ropes into ¼-inch pieces with a knife or kitchen shears. Drop pieces into boiling broth. Cover pot and reduce heat to simmer until knoephla begin to float, about 10 minutes. Stir potato mixture into broth and knoephla. Simmer until potatoes are tender.

Makes 10 (1-cup) servings. Each serving has 260 calories, 8 g fat, 9 g protein, 39 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber and 480 mg sodium.

Source: Adapted from several recipes.



Borscht

Borscht, also spelled borsch, (pronounced “bore-scht”) is a soup that is vibrant in color and flavor.

✓ **Cook’s notes:** The original borscht recipe included a variety of vegetables and was pleasing in flavor and appearance. Minimal adjustments were made. We used low-sodium broth in place of regular beef broth and fresh tomatoes instead of canned to further reduce sodium. Carrots and celery also were added. The resulting recipe had less sodium and more vitamins and minerals.

? **Did you know?** Beets are an excellent source of antioxidants, vitamin C, folate (a B vitamin), potassium and fiber. The entire beet plant is edible, including the leaves and the roots.

Pickled beets were popular in the Germans from Russia foodways. Refer to “Making Pickled Products” (FN189) for more information on how to preserve beets safely.

German-Russian Borscht Soup

- 3 medium beets with leaves **or** substitute
- 2 c. spinach (remove stems) for beet leaves
- 1 Tbsp. olive oil
- 1 pounds beef, cut into small cubes
(stew meat or short ribs recommended)
- 2 Tbsp. butter
- 1 onion, diced
- 2 c. celery, chopped
- 1¾ c. fresh tomato, diced
- 1 tsp. fresh dill
- 5 c. beef broth, low sodium
(to make broth, you can use beef short ribs;
simmer in 2 quarts water for 3 hours)
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- 2 c. cabbage
- 2 tbsp. vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. sugar



To prepare beets:

Trim leaves from the beets and leave an inch of stem attached. Rinse the beet leaves (or spinach). In a 6-quart kettle, add water to beets until beets are covered with water. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat to simmer. Cover for about 45 minutes or until beets are tender. Drain and slip off the skins from the beets. Cut beets in small pieces to measure 4 cups.

Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large skillet over high heat. Add the beef and sear for about five minutes, stirring frequently, until browned. Transfer the meat and any juices to a bowl. In the same 6-quart kettle, melt butter; add onion and celery and cook for five minutes. Add the tomatoes, dill, broth, salt and pepper. Bring to boil; lower the heat to simmer and cook covered for five to 10 minutes. Stir in beet tops or spinach, cabbage, beef, vinegar and sugar. Carefully stir in cooked beets. Simmer covered for five to seven minutes more to heat through. Serve with sour cream and fresh dill garnish.

Makes eight servings. Each serving has 120 calories, 6 g fat, 7 g protein, 10 g carbohydrate, 2 g fiber and 420 mg sodium.

Source: Adapted from: Schott (Janke), A. (2012). *Alma’s Favorite Recipes: Cooking & Memories from a German-Russian Farm Kitchen*. Germans from Russia Heritage Collection.

Desserts

Kuchen

Kuchen (pronounced “koo-ken” or “koo-gen”) is another term for German cake. Kuchen is a popular dessert with a cookie crust and custard filling, and often is topped with fruit. The Germans from Russia use a variety of fruit in kuchen, including berries, dates, apples, rhubarb or peaches.

✓ **Cook’s notes:** We wanted to savor the flavor but also make a few more healthful adjustments. We substituted oil for shortening and half and half for heavy whipping cream to reduce calories, fat and saturated fat. We used a sheet pan in place of a pie pan to make kuchen bars instead of a pie. These simple adjustments made an impact in the nutrition but also retained the flavor of Alma’s original recipe.

? **Did you know?** Saturated fat is solid, or semisolid, at room temperature. Saturated fat is a type of dietary fat that should be consumed in moderation because it may raise blood cholesterol levels, especially LDL “bad” cholesterol. High levels of LDL in the blood increase the risk for heart disease and stroke. The daily recommended intake of saturated fat is 13 grams per day. Read the Nutrition Facts labels on food products to learn more.



Kuchen Bars

- 7/8 c. canola oil (1 c. – 2 Tbsp.)
- 1 c. sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 c. flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1/4 tsp. salt
- 5 fresh apples, peeled and thinly sliced

Beat well with mixer. Put in greased jelly roll pan. Put a layer of fresh sliced apples on the dough layer and then the filling.

Filling:

- 1 1/2 c. half and half
- 1 c. sugar
- 3 eggs
- Cinnamon (sprinkle on top after baking, optional)

Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 45 minutes until custard is set and crust is brown. Allow time to cool before serving. Store leftovers in refrigerator.

Makes 28 servings. Each serving has 190 calories, 8 g fat, 2 g protein, 26 g carbohydrate, 1 g fiber and 40 mg sodium.

Source: Adapted from: Schott (Janke), A. (2012). *Alma’s Favorite Recipes: Cooking & Memories from a German-Russian Farm Kitchen*. Germans from Russia Heritage Collection.

Blachinda

Blachinda also is spelled Plachinda, Platchenda, Platchinta, Blachinde and Blagenda. Some say Blachinda and some say Plachinda, but we all can agree that it's a tasty treat. Blachinda is a pastry dessert with a pie crust and pumpkin filling. It is similar to a turnover or a hand-pie.

✓ **Cook's notes:** The dessert was pleasing to the palate with only a couple of substitutions. We used butter in place of lard in the filling and oil in place of shortening to decrease calories, fat and saturated fat. These simple changes decreased calories, saturated fat and carbohydrate, and added sugar.

? **Did you know?** Pumpkin is low in calories, fat and sodium. Pumpkin is a good source of beta-carotene, which our body uses to make vitamin A. It also contains vitamin B, potassium and iron. Refer to "Field to Fork: Pumpkin" (FN1796) from NDSU Extension for more information.

Blachinda

4 c. flour
4 tsp. baking powder
½ c. sugar
½ tsp. salt
¾ c. oil
¾ c. milk

Filling:

2 c. pumpkin
1 tsp. cinnamon
½ c. sugar
¼ c. melted butter



Combine flour, baking powder, sugar and salt and cut in oil with a pastry blender or fork. Add enough milk to make a soft dough. Combine filling ingredients in mixing bowl. Divide dough into small balls about the size of a large walnut. Roll into 3-inch circles. Place 1 tablespoon of filling on circle and fold over and seal by pressing the tines of a fork around the edges. Bake at 425 degrees until light brown, about 15 to 20 minutes.

Makes 25 servings. Each serving has 220 calories, 12 g fat, 3 g protein, 25 carbohydrate, 0 g fiber and 130 mg sodium.

Source: Adapted from Schott (Janke), A. (2012). *Alma's Favorite Recipes: Cooking & Memories from a German-Russian Farm Kitchen*. Germans from Russia Heritage Collection.

More Information

For more information about nutrition, see the NDSU Extension website at www.ag.ndsu.edu/food.

For historical information, see the NDSU Germans from Russia Heritage Collection at <https://library.ndsu.edu/grhc>.

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