

Travel the World without Leaving Your Kitchen

International Cooking Series

German-inspired Classics

Most of us can passionately describe a delicious recipe or meal that someone in our family has passed down for generations and the ensuing joy of sharing the dish around the table. Exploring, learning, and embracing cultural food traditions, both our own and others', can broaden our perspectives about history and cultures from around the world. Whether you experience these cultural differences in eating while traveling, while visiting a restaurant in your community, or by preparing them at home, it can help you celebrate the cultural diversity found in all our communities. So, let's travel the world without leaving your kitchen and experience the classic foods of Germany.



History of Food

What comes to mind when you think about German cuisine? Likely, sausages, sauerkraut, and lots of beer. But the varied geography of Germany, which includes the coastal plains of the North, Baltic, and Black Seas, the high-altitude mountains of the Bavarian Alps, and thick forests, including the Black Forest, has shaped an interesting culinary landscape.

In the 1700s, German peasants made do with what their growing season would allow – wheat and barley for homemade beer, potatoes, cabbage, lentils, and peas, then added light dumplings and firm breads. Pigs, sheep, and wild game became the mainstay of their diet. Old World techniques of food preservation through salting, smoking, curing, or pickling was a common way of preparing fish,

meats, and vegetables. Some of the most popular dishes today, such as matjes (pickled herring), sauerbraten (roast beef cured in vinegar and wine), or sauerkraut, still use ancient cooking methods. The addition of potatoes, which originally were grown during times of famine, can be found in everything from soups to puddings, and even in the making of schnapps. Beer is a part of many dishes, probably because it was quicker and easier to produce than wines.

If you are lucky enough to visit a German-style tavern, you will find an inviting home-cooked meal, a variety of local beers, along with lively music, and shared tables. But if you can't travel to experience it in person, here are some recipes to get your taste buds stirring. Some of them can be quite time consuming, but others are easy to prepare.

Traditional German Dinner

One of the easiest, yet most elegant dishes you can prepare at home is German Pork Schnitzel. Serve immediately with spaetzle, braised red cabbage, or German potato salad, and you have a traditional German meal. Green beans, applesauce, sauerkraut, or potatoes also make good accompaniments. Other schnitzel recipes you may find are Jägerschnitzel (hunter's schnitzel), which is topped with a mushroom sauce; Zigeunerschnitzel (gypsy schnitzel), which is topped with a tomato-based sauce that includes peppers and onions; and Käseschnitzel (cheese schnitzel), which is topped with melted cheese.

Traditional German Pork Schnitzel

Yield: 4 pork cutlets

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

Nutritional analysis per cutlet: 470cal; 31g fat; 160mg cholesterol; 450mg sodium; 18g carbohydrate; 30g protein

Ingredients

- 4 serving-size boneless pork loin chops, cut roughly ½-inch thick (about 1 lb)
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- 4 tablespoons olive or canola oil
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup plain breadcrumbs
- 2 eggs, beaten lightly
- Lemon slices and fresh parsley (a traditional topping)

Note: You can substitute chicken and veal cutlets for a traditional schnitzel.

Instructions

1. Place the pork cutlets in a sealable storage bag or between two sheets of plastic wrap. Place on a cutting board. Using a meat mallet or rolling pin, pound the cutlets to about 1/8-inch thick. Lightly sprinkle the pork cutlets with pepper.

Note: You can purchase already tenderized pork cutlets.

2. Prepare a standard breading station of three bowls with flour, eggs, and breadcrumbs in separate bowls. Then completely cover the cutlet first with flour, then egg, and finishing with the breadcrumbs.

Note: Low-sodium breadcrumbs are available.

3. In a 10-inch or larger skillet, over medium-high heat, heat 2 tablespoons of oil until shimmering. Work in batches, if needed.

Note: Reduce fat by using olive oil or canola cooking spray.

4. Carefully add the breaded cutlets to the hot oil. Fry the cutlets for 1 to 2 minutes on each side until golden brown or cooked through to a temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit for medium rare to 160 degrees Fahrenheit for medium. Transfer the cutlets to a paper-towel-lined platter or wire rack.
5. Garnish the hot schnitzel with lemon slices and parsley.

Note: You can freeze uncooked and cooked breaded cutlets between parchment paper for up to three months for future cooking.

Braised red cabbage is known by a variety of names depending on the region you are visiting. Northern Germany uses Rotkohl, which literally means red cabbage; central and western use Rotkraut; and southern Germany uses Blaukraut, which literally means blue cabbage. Because purple was associated with royalty in the Middle Ages, the common peasant vegetable couldn't use that color for a name. And in different regions of Germany, the pH of the soil affects the color of the leafy green, along with different preparation styles. Adding acidic ingredients, such as lemon juice or vinegar turns the cabbage a brighter red; or adding apples and extra sugar, the color is even more pronounced. If you add a dark red wine as part of the braising liquid, the cabbage would become more purple. A little bit of acid plus sugar gives this easy, nutritious dish a sweet and sour finish.



German Braised Red Cabbage

Yield: 6 servings

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 2 hours 15 minutes

Nutritional analysis for ½ cup serving: 60cal; 2g fat; 5mg cholesterol; 180mg sodium; 10g carbohydrate; 2g protein

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 medium onion, diced (about ½ cup)
- 1 medium, unpeeled, tart green apple (like Granny Smith), cored and diced
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 whole cloves
- ½ teaspoon whole peppercorns
- 1 pound red cabbage, shredded
- 1 cup chicken broth or red wine, such as Merlot
- ¼ cup red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

Note: You can tie the spices in a cheesecloth or place them in a tea strainer for easy removal.

Instructions

1. In a large stock pot, over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the diced onions and sauté for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the diced apples and continue to sauté 2 to 3 minutes.
2. Add the rest of the ingredients, except for the flour. Bring the mixture to a simmer; then cover and simmer on low for 1½ to 2 hours, stirring occasionally to prevent sticking. You can always add more chicken broth if the dish begins to dry out.
3. When the cabbage is tender, sprinkle 1 tablespoon of flour over the cabbage. Mix it well and continue to cook the cabbage for 1 to 2 minutes, while any remaining liquid thickens.
4. Remove the spices and serve immediately. Or refrigerate up to three days for later use.

Note: Place all ingredients, except for flour, in a slow cooker with the same delicious results.



German Spaetzle are egg dumplings. They are a specialty of the south-central region of Germany. The word spaetzle means little sparrows because the original method of making them, using two spoons, created a small dumpling that looked like a sparrow. Compared to pasta dough, it is more tender and moister. Therefore, it is usually shaped by pressing through a flat colander, known as a Sieb, or a cheese-grater-like slicer, known as a Hobel. Before investing in these specialty tools, a slotted serving spoon with holes the size of a pencil or a potato ricer will work fine.

German Spaetzle Dumplings

Yield: 4 cups

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 15 minutes

Nutritional analysis for ½ cup servings: 200cal; 2.5g fat; 70mg cholesterol; 170mg sodium; 36g carbohydrate; 7g protein

Ingredients for Dough

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- 3 eggs
- ½ - ¾ cup water

Note: You can use different liquids in place of water, such as milk, sparkling water, and beer, but this will change the flavor and stated nutritional analysis.

Dough Instructions

1. In a medium bowl, combine the flour, salt, and nutmeg.
2. Add eggs and mix slightly with flour mixture.
3. Add the water, a little at a time, mixing until a soft dough forms. (Your dough should be somewhere between a drop biscuit dough and a stiff muffin batter. It should be spoonable, but not pourable.)
4. Cover the dough loosely with a tea towel, and set it aside to rest for 15 minutes.

Ingredients for Cooking

- 3 quarts water
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 tablespoon olive oil (optional)

Cooking Instructions

1. While dough is resting, add salt and oil to the water, and bring it to a boil. The oil will keep the spaetzle from sticking together.
2. Press the dough through your chosen press and then drop into the boiling water, carefully.
3. When the spaetzle rises to the top of the water, it is done. Remove and place in bowl until all the dough is cooked.
4. Serve immediately.

Once again, regions differ in their version of German Potato Salad. In the southeast, bacon or ham is combined with potatoes and a vinegar-based dressing. This potato salad is usually served warm.

Bavarian Potato Salad

Yield: 4 cups

Prep time: 30 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes

Nutritional analysis for ½ cup serving: 280cal; 20g fat; 25mg cholesterol; 510mg sodium; 20g carbohydrate; 7g protein

Ingredients

- 2 pounds Yukon Gold or new potatoes, cut into slices or large dices
- 8 slices bacon, finely diced
- ½ cup small red onion, finely chopped
- ¾ cup beef broth
- 6 tablespoons white vinegar
- 1 teaspoon Dijon or mild German mustard
- 2 tablespoons canola oil
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt, or to taste
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons parsley or chives, chopped – for garnish

Instructions

1. In a large pot, on high heat, add potatoes and cover with water. Bring to a boil and cook until tender, 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the size of the cut potatoes. The potatoes are done when you can slide a fork into the potato with a little resistance. Do not overcook or you will have mashed potato salad.

Note: You can cook potatoes in an Instant Pot or pressure cooker, following manufacturer's instructions.



While potatoes are cooking, heat a large skillet over medium heat, and fry the bacon until crisp. Remove the bacon, and let it cool on paper towels. Once cool, crumble the bacon and set aside for later use. Note: You may prepare the bacon in the microwave, according to manufacturer's instructions, but reserve the fat for the next step.

2. Add the onion to the bacon fat and sauté over medium heat, until translucent, about 3 to 4 minutes. Drain excess fat and cool slightly to prevent spattering when adding the broth.
3. Add beef broth and bring to a simmer.
4. Remove from heat, and add the vinegar, mustard, oil, sugar, salt, and pepper then combine.
5. In a large bowl, combine potatoes and hot mixture. Mix until everything is well-coated. Refrigerate overnight to let flavors intensify. Serve hot, warm, or chilled. Garnish with chopped parsley before serving.

Note: You can store the potato salad in the refrigerator up to three days.

Other Common German Foods

There are many cookbooks and websites with recipes just waiting for you to try. So, if you enjoyed your meal, here are some other traditional German foods to experience.

- Rouladen is thinly sliced beef rolled around a mixture of pickle, onion, bacon, and mustard, which is then baked in red wine.
- Sauerbraten is a marinated beef roast baked slowly and served with a sweet and tangy gravy. Try this in the crockpot.
- There are more than 1,500 classic German sausages. Currywurst, Bratwurst, frankfurter, weisswurst, nurnberger, blutwurst, and Landjager are common. Keep in mind you may have to travel to Germany to try them all!
- Kartoffelpuffer is a golden-brown fried potato pancake. It often is served with applesauce and sour cream.
- Sauerkraut is finely cut raw cabbage that has been fermented by lactic acid bacteria. The distinctive sour flavor is a result of the bacteria fermenting the natural sugars found in the cabbage leaves.
- Maultaschen are pasta pockets filled with spiced meat, bread, onions, and spinach.
- Flammkuchen is the German version of pizza.
- Hasenpfeffer is a braised dish of rabbit stew.
- Konigsberger Klopse is finely minced veal meatballs served in a white sauce and capers with potatoes.
- Eintopf is a hearty, one-pot meal made with a variety of vegetables and sausage.
- Leberkase is a meatloaf made with ground meat.

If you love soft pretzels, you will love the dense, chewy dough and beautifully browned, salty crust of Laugenbroetchen, or German pretzel rolls. Try making a roll for a burger bun before moving on to make the twisted pretzel shape. Traditionally, these were poached in food-grade lye to give them a characteristic brown pretzel crust. Today, we use baking soda.



German Pretzel Rolls

Yield: 12 dinner rolls

Prep time: 2 hours

Cook time: 25 minutes

Nutritional analysis per dinner roll: 130cal; .5g fat; 0mg cholesterol; 290mg sodium; 27g carbohydrate; 5g protein

Ingredients for Dough

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 packet (2 ¼ teaspoons) active dry yeast
- 1 ½ teaspoons salt
- 1 ½ teaspoons sugar
- 1 cup water

Cooking Ingredients

- 4 cups water
- 2 tablespoons baking soda
- Coarse salt

Cooking Instructions

1. In a large bowl, combine all dry ingredients.
2. Heat water to 105 to 115 degrees Fahrenheit. Add to dry ingredients and mix until a soft dough is formed. If the dough is too dry, add 1 tablespoon warm water at a time between mixings.
3. On a lightly floured surface, knead dough for 7 to 10 minutes, until the dough becomes smooth and elastic. Or use a dough hook on a stand mixer for 2 to 3 minutes or by following the manufacturer's instruction.
4. Place the dough in a greased bowl and cover with a damp towel. Let it rise until it's double in size, about 45 minutes.
5. Gently punch the dough in the center with your fist and knead several times. Divide the dough into 12 even pieces, forming each piece into a ball. Place rolls on a well-greased sheet of parchment paper, about 2 inches apart. Cover with a damp paper towel. Let the rolls rise until they are doubled in size, about 20 to 30 minutes.
6. While the dough is rising, preheat the oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit.
7. In a large stock pot, on high heat, bring the water to a boil. Carefully add the baking soda to the water, as it will fizz.
8. Reduce the heat to a gentle simmer, as tiny bubbles will allow your roll to form a smooth crust. Gently add a few rolls to the water, making sure there is enough room in the pot for no touching. Poach rolls 30 seconds on each side. Repeat with the remaining rolls. Note: If you over-poach the rolls, they will continue to rise in the oven, resulting in a cracked appearance.
9. Remove rolls from the water with a slotted spoon. Drain as much water as possible from the rolls before placing the rolls onto a greased baking sheet. Repeat with the remaining rolls.
10. Gently cut a deep X into the top of each roll

using a serrated knife or pair of scissors. Sprinkle with coarse salt.

11. Bake rolls for about 15 minutes, until browned.
12. Cool on a wire rack.

Desserts

One can't forget the delectable sweets that are popular in Germany. Schwarzwälder Kirschtorte, known as Black Forest Gateau or Black Forest Cake, consists of several alternating layers of chocolate sponge cake and thick whipped cream, usually topped with chocolate shavings and cherries. The magic ingredient is Schwarzwälder Kirschwasser, which is a cherry liqueur that is a specialty of the Black Forest region. To make a good Black Forest Cake, you must measure all ingredients accurately and have the time to prepare, bake, and assemble the cake. Also, remember, that desserts are usually extremely high in calories, fat, and sugar, so you should eat them sparingly or on special occasions.

Note: This cake has been sliced into 16 servings instead of the traditional 12.

Black Forest Cake

Yield: 16 slices

Prep time: 1 hour 30 minutes

Bake time: 25 minutes

Nutritional analysis per slice: 410cal; 27g fat; 165mg cholesterol; 50mg sodium; 36g carbohydrate; 7g protein

Ingredients for the Chocolate Cake Layers

- 9 large eggs, room temp
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled to room temp
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract



Note: If time is an issue, there are many good Devil's Food cake mixes available. These can be prepared according to package directions. Add the Bing cherry filling and frosting that follows for an almost authentic taste.

Instructions for Baking the Cake

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Line two 9-inch round pans with parchment paper, without greasing sides.
2. On high speed in a stand mixer mixing bowl, beat the eggs with a whisk attachment for one minute. Gradually add sugar and continue to beat on high speed until thick and fluffy, about 8 minutes.

Note: Lift the whisk and drip some batter off the whisk. If it doesn't sink, it is the right consistency; if it sinks, beat a few more minutes.

3. In a small bowl, combine flour and cocoa powder by sifting. Fold this mixture, a third at a time, into the batter, leaving no streaks of flour, and making sure to scrape the bottom of the mixing bowl. Do not overmix or you will deflate the batter.

4. Gently fold in vanilla and butter, folding just until incorporated into the batter.
5. Divide batter equally between the two prepared cake pans and bake quickly in the preheated oven for 20 to 25 minutes or until a toothpick comes out clean.
6. Cool pans for 10 minutes and then loosen the edges of the cake with a knife or spatula.
7. Transfer to a wire rack, remove parchment paper, and allow to cool completely. Once cooled, slice cake layers in half horizontally with a long, serrated knife. Now you have four cake layers.

Ingredients for the Bing Cherry Filling

- 4 cups Bing cherries, pitted, and chopped
*Reserve 12 whole pitted cherries for top decoration
- 3 tablespoons kirsch (cherry liqueur) or cherry preserves
- ¼ cup cold water

Note: You can use thawed frozen cherries or canned cherries in water or juice if Bing cherries are not in season. To use the canned cherries, omit the ¼ cup additional water and use the juice from the can instead. The cherry flavor will be different if you don't use Bing cherries.

Instructions for making the Bing Cherry Filling

1. In a medium bowl, combine cherries and kirsch. Allow to stand at room temperature for 30 minutes, stirring several times.
2. Drain cherries, but reserve syrup. Add cold water to syrup to make ¾ cup of syrup.

Ingredients for the Frosting

- 3 ½ cups heavy whipping cream
- ⅓ cup powdered sugar
- 1 tablespoon kirsch (cherry liqueur) or cherry preserves
- 4 ounces dark chocolate

Instructions for making the Frosting

1. For best results, freeze the mixing bowl and whisk attachment 15 minutes before using.
2. Using the whisk attachment, beat the heavy cream on high speed until soft peaks form. Then add powdered sugar and kirsch. Beat on high speed until stiff and spreadable, about 1 to 2 minutes. Refrigerate until ready to assemble the cake. If the frosting loses the stiff peaks during refrigeration, you can whip the frosting for another 30 seconds.

Ingredients for making Chocolate Curls

- 2 ounces dark chocolate
- 2 teaspoons butter

Assembling the Black Forest Cake

1. To assemble the cake, place the first cake layer on a cake plate or stand and brush it with 1/4 cup of the syrup. Then spread on about 3/4 cup frosting and top with 1/3 of the chopped cherries. Repeat with remaining layers and top with the prettiest layer. Transfer 1 1/2 cups of frosting to a pastry bag with a large flower tip and refrigerate until ready to use. Fill the cracks along the sides of cake with frosting and then frost the top and sides with remaining frosting.
2. To make chocolate shavings, you can either slowly melt chocolate in the microwave and spread it thinly over the back of a baking sheet; and refrigerate a few minutes; or use a vegetable peeler to create bark-like shavings.

3. Pipe frosting around the top of the cake and decorate with chocolate shavings and whole cherries without the pits.
4. To allow the flavors to intensify, refrigerate the cake overnight before serving.

If you mastered the Black Forest Cake, here are some other tasty German desserts to consider.

- The Berliner is a cream, jam, or liqueur filled doughnut without the hole.
- The Bienenstich (bee's sting) cake is yeast dough filled with custard or cream and topped with caramelized almonds and drizzled with honey.
- The Danube wave or Donauwelle contains alternate layers of chocolate and vanilla pound cake, filled with cherries, and topped with buttercream icing and chocolate glaze.
- Stollen is the traditional German Christmas cake, chock full of dried or candied fruits, raisins, nuts, cardamom, and cinnamon. If you get the chance, celebrate with others in Dresden, Saxony, in the winter as you attend a big festival centering on stollen.

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