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Please To The Table: The Russian Cookbook



Synopsis

From the robust foods of the Baltic states to the delicately perfumed pilafs of Azerbaijan, from borscht and beef stroganoff to the grains and yogurts of Georgia, Anya von Bremzen and John Welchman take Westerners on a spectacular tour of the many and varied cuisines of the fifteen former Soviet republics. Anya von Bremzen, a native Muscovite, grew up on regional cooking and has traveled extensively throughout the former Soviet Union, visiting professional chefs, touring markets, and sampling and gathering dishes. Covering eleven time zones and hundreds of recipes, *Please to the Table* brings to light the astounding culinary diversity of this corner of the world-and the similarities between the cuisines, too. Here are Byelorussian Mushroom Croquettes, Armenian Stuffed Mussels, and dozens of other zakuski-the "little bites" that are the heart and soul of Russian meals. Soups from Armenian Lentil and Apricot Soup to Lithuanian Apple Soup with Apple Dumplings. Dozens of entrees including Uzbek Lamb Pilaf, Russian Salmon with Sorrel and Spinach, Azerbaijani Quail in Walnut and Pomegranate Sauce, Armenian Pumpkin Moussaka. And side dishes, salads, beverages, and desserts such as Russian Cranberry Mousse and an Almond and Pistachio Paklava. Plus vatrushki, pampushki, halushki, blinchiki, sirniki, and pirozhki. Winner of the 1990 James Beard Food and Beverage Book Award. Selection of the Book-of-the-Month Club's Homestyle Books and the Better Homes & Gardens Family Book Service. 58,000 copies in print.

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Customer Reviews

This cookbook is the most-used of any in my home. Having lived in Crimea (in southern Ukraine) with and amongst Russians, I find myself reading Anya von Bremzen's *Please to the Table* for sheer pleasure and nostalgia. I infinitely prefer it to *The Art of Russian Cuisine* by Anne Volokh.

Although I admire Volokh's work as comprehensive, the results from her recipes taste less like the cooking I ate in my my own and my friends' homes on a daily basis, and more like the mediocre food I ate during rare hotel and restaurant meals. I also find The Art of Russian Cuisine lacking in many dishes that were staples of home cooking and entertaining in my milieu. In Please to the Table, I found the recipes for dishes that I know well to be very authentic indeed. I'd like to address specifically one criticism I saw here in a review, that von Bremzen uses paprika in her recipes. The reviewer wrote that "Paprika is not an ingredient which is traditionally used in Russian cooking. It is the spice of Central Europe (Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, etc.)..." True that Hungarian paprika is not a traditional ingredient of pure Russian cuisine. However, I disagree that it is inauthentic. First, this cookbook covers most of the former USSR, including the western republics such as Moldova and Ukraine, where influence from Central Europe shows up in the food. Second, the great home cooks I knew used what they called red pepper ("krasnij perets") more often than black pepper, and the red pepper where I lived tasted much more like a mixture of hot and sweet paprika than like cayenne, which is what you get in the U.S. if you buy something called simply "red pepper". If von Bremzen's recipes called for "red pepper," then the recipes would taste spicier and much less authentic than they do.

Please to the Table is without a doubt the most-used cookbook I own (and I have dozens!) I love cooking and baking, but was a total novice at anything beyond Central Europe -- much to the initial dismay of my Ukrainian-born husband. We've since read and re-read this cookbook together, including the delightful narrative sections and literary excerpts. (He's especially fond of the Gogol bits!) It's got history, literature, cultural tidbits, and culinary savvy that make a fun read for anyone. Not having ever eaten any of this food myself, and being one to generally prefer cookbooks with pictures, I was initially nervous about trying any of the recipes. But the directions are so precise and easy to follow that I can proudly say that every single recipe I've tried has been a smashing success. I have since tried other Russian and Ukrainian cookbooks, but none yields the same superlative results with my picky hubby -- and my critical in-laws!! ;) We've eaten our way across the entire former USSR, and loved every minute of it! I would especially like to thank the author for the following recipes (whose pages are stained and whose ingredients are responsible for not a few of the extra pounds on my man's middle...): "My Mother's Vegetarian Borscht" -- you can add beef if you like, but even his father (who is a professional Soviet-trained cook) didn't notice it was missing. His sister pronounced this borscht her favorite - over their mother's - and she has never made any secret about not liking me, so that's a ringing endorsement! "Apple Baba" -- this one is a unanimous

hit and my husband always begs me to make it for guests. I usually add 2 extra apples and double the cinnamon, though, by popular request. The "Rum Baba" makes a great New Year's treat.

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