

## 'Kūčiukai' Christmas Eve biscuits



Prepare the dough mixture: heat the water, and add half the flour and yeast whisked with sugar. Stir well. Sprinkle the surface with flour and leave for 20 minutes to rise. Beat egg yolks lightly. After the dough mixture rises add the rest of the flour and poppy seeds, pour in the yolks, oil, and salt and knead until the dough is no longer sticky. Flatten the surface of the dough, cover and leave in a warm place to rise. Then roll the dough into 1.5cm-thick strips, cut into 1.5cm pieces, arrange them on a baking sheet sprinkled with flour, and bake in the oven, preheated to 220°C for approximately 15 minutes, until golden. Eat the 'Kūčiukai' with poppy milk or kisel.

### Ingredients:

1kg flour  
600ml water  
20g fresh yeast  
4 tbsp sugar  
4 egg yolks  
2 cups poppy seeds  
4 tbsp oil  
½ teaspoon salt

## Poppy milk



Wash the poppy seeds, cover with boiling water until they are submerged and leave to soak for approximately an hour. Drain the water, grind the poppy seeds or crush well, cover with 500ml boiled warm water and leave for an hour. The poppy milk can be sweetened or served with honey.

### Ingredients:

1 cup poppy seeds  
500ml boiled water  
sugar or honey to taste

'Kūčiukai' Christmas Eve biscuits and Poppy milk





## Christmas folk customs

On the first day of Christmas three masses used to be celebrated in churches. Attendees of the early mass would harness their best horses (complete with bells on their necks, referred to either as 'žvangučiai' or 'žaržolai'). People knew they would have to be quick and get home as fast as they could as this was also the sign of being quicker than one's neighbours in one's summer work. Back in the late nineteenth century, children in the Highlands used to bring their musical instruments, such as flutes, willow flutes, and Lithuanian aerophones ('birbynė') to church. The so-called Shepherds' Mass ('Piemenėlių mišios') used to be the most entertaining and exciting hour in church—for children, anyway! They used to have so much fun playing their instruments and lulling the newborn Christ to sleep. The vibrant sound of their flutes would fill the church, praising the forthcoming spring... Regrettably children no longer do this. The Shepherds' Mass has had to be renamed as the Shepherd Boys' Mass ('Bernėlių mišios') and is now held in the vigil (in the festive eve), not in the early morning.

Villagers used to spend the first day of Christmas at home. After returning from church they would eat festive meals, sing Christmas carols, and rest. They would eat aspic ('šaltiena'), ham, a kind of stew called 'šiupinys' with added pig's snout and ears, a potato dish called 'vėdarai', and roasted goose with cabbage. Everything would be prepared the night before, and all there would be left to do on this special day would be taking care of the animals. They too needed to be fed and watered. The old customs are described as follows: 'Christmas was a quiet, sacred period in which you could not even split a piece of wood'. A different saying warned people: 'Sweep the floor and the corn bin will empty, chickens will destroy your gardens, and the birds will do the same to your meadows; brush your hair and the sparrows will destroy the rues in your garden; do your laundry and be prepared for mice and rats to infest your house'.

bake Easter cakes and boil eggs that they would later decorate. In the traditional patterns of Lithuanian Easter eggs one can see the features of a mythically-perceived world formation; it is exactly this archaic method of depicting the world that makes Lithuanian Easter eggs exceptional. Since ancient times Easter eggs have been decorated with wax using a sharp tool, with colours obtained from the buds and barks of various trees.

In the past people used to wait overnight for the Resurrection Mass ('Prisikėlimo Mišios') in the church. Some people would dress up as devils or Jews and play various tricks or have different jokes up their sleeves so that the people in the church would not fall asleep. Christ's coffin would be guarded by young men dressed in home-made uniforms. Easter morning is always said to be very joyous, with even the sun said to be dancing while it rises. The wind direction predicts the weather for the forthcoming summer. The villagers would not spend a lot of time in town as the person to come home first was said to be very successful with all their spring jobs. On top of that, breakfast was already on the table for those who were breaking their Lent fast. Breakfast would consist of cold dishes: Easter eggs, aspic, ham, meat rolls, a meatloaf known as 'fake bunny' ('netikras zuikis'), whose name comes from the fact that the words 'bunny' and 'mince' sound very similar in German, plus a type of bread called 'ragaišis', Easter cake or a kind of muffin called 'Old Woman' ('Boba'), 'mozūras', a type of pancake with dried fruits, and finally a curd dessert called 'Easter' ('vėlykės'), also known as the Passover (pascha). In south-east Lithuania, people used to enjoy fatty cabbage soup and Highlanders used to love roasted goose. The table would be decorated with greenery and there would always be a lamb made of butter placed on it. After the festive breakfast comes a pleasant rest in the family circle, with the kids rolling their eggs in the garden or on the earthen floor. As evening approached, dressed-up people, 'lalautojai', would walk around the village. They would normally be young men, visiting neighbours with best wishes, songs, and music.

On the second day of Easter, children would go egg-collecting around the village. First of all, they would visit their godmothers and choose a couple of beautifully decorated Easter eggs. Meanwhile, the older kids used to like playing on the swing on that day. Whilst there they would sing swinging songs that would always be very energetic and happy. There once existed a tradition of hired workers washing the hands of their masters. Later, however, said tradition evolved into young people having fun and splashing each other with water. The third day of Easter used to be called the Ice Day. This used to be referred to as the lazy day, as people were not allowed to plough or harrow or the ice was said to destroy all the grain in the summer. These nine festive days are another reminder of the ancient traditions in which a week used to last for nine days, basing it on the lunar calendar.

The first Sunday after Easter is called 'Atvelykis' or 'Children's Easter'. This day signifies the end of the Easter period that is spent with relatives. It is time to go back to one's own cares and worries! The Sunday after Easter brings a lot of joy to the children. The weather is already warm, so they can roll their Easter eggs and play games outside.



## Baked curd cheese



Crush the garlic. Place the cheese on a large foil sheet and rub with garlic and salt, season with pepper, sprinkle with herbs and caraway seeds. Wrap the cheese that has been rubbed with seasoning into the foil and leave overnight to marinate. Place the cheese in a baking dish which has been greased with butter and bake in the oven, preheated to 180°C for approximately 40 minutes.

### Ingredients:

300g curd cheese  
4 garlic cloves  
1 tbsp caraway seeds  
1 teaspoon dried basil  
1 teaspoon herbs de Provence  
add salt to taste  
add ground black pepper to taste  
butter for greasing baking pan

## Cooked curd cheese slices



Slice curd cheese into slices approximately 1cm thick. Season with salt, roll in the flour and in the beaten egg seasoned with pepper. Place on the butter that has been preheated in the pan and cook on both sides until nicely browned.

### Ingredients:

500g curd cheese  
1 egg  
2 tbsp flour  
2 tbsp clarified butter  
add salt to taste  
add ground black pepper to taste

*Baked curd cheese*



## Scalded bread



Cover half the wheat flour with 500ml of boiling water. Mix the preparation well, cover and leave to cool. In the rest of the warm water, mix the bread starter with sugar and pour this mixture into the cooled preparation, mix once more and leave to rise for 12 hours in a warm place. Then add the rest of the sifted flour, add salt and caraway seeds and knead the dough. Place the well kneaded dough in a warm place to rise for approximately 2-3 hours. Then form the loaves, allow them to rise once more, and bake in the oven, preheated to 180°C for approximately 2 hours.

### Ingredients:

500g rye flour  
1.5kg wheat flour  
1 litre water  
1 glass bread starter  
1 tbsp sugar  
1 handful of caraway seeds  
1 teaspoon salt

## Fried bread with cheese sauce



Cut the bread into 1.5cm-thick slices, remove the crust. Cut the bread into sticks and fry in heated oil whilst flipping. Place the fried bread on a paper towel to absorb some of the oil. Then rub with garlic cloves and season with salt to taste.

Make the sauce: finely grate the cheese, crush into the garlic and mix with mayonnaise.

### Ingredients:

#### Bread:

200g rye bread  
2-3 garlic cloves  
add salt to taste  
oil for cooking

#### Sauce:

400g semi-hard fermented cheese  
100g mayonnaise  
3 garlic cloves

*Fried bread with cheese sauce*





## 'Šakotis' tree cake



### *Ingredients:*

1kg room temperature  
butter  
1kg sugar  
4-6 teaspoon vanilla  
sugar  
40 large eggs  
1kg wheat flour  
1 litre sour cream

Prepare a pyramid-shaped wooden spindle 45-50cm in length with a hole in the middle (avoid using conifers), so that a spit with baking paper can be inserted. Wrap the spindle with baking paper, secure with twine at both ends to prevent the paper from tangling while rotating the spindle. Grease the baking paper with butter. Coat the twine with any batter to prevent it burning during baking.

Whisk room temperature butter with sugar and vanilla sugar. Whisk until sugar dissolves, preferably adding sugar in smaller portions. Separate egg yolks from egg whites. Place the yolks into the butter and sugar mixture and beat. Mix in flour and sour cream in portions. The batter should have a homogeneous consistency. Beat the egg whites well (preferably in smaller portions). Carefully mix in the beaten egg whites in portions into the prepared batter.

Set up the spindle on the stands near a burner or fireplace so that the heat of the furnace can reach the 'Šakotis'. Light the burner and rotate the spindle until it heats up. If there is any excess fat on the baking paper, clean it off. Place a pan under the 'Šakotis' to catch any excess batter that may drip off the spit so that it can be used again. Rotate the spindle constantly and pour the batter over it using a ladle. When the spindle is covered in batter, stop pouring and slowly rotate the spindle until the sides are baked, and then pour on the second layer of batter. Repeat until there is no batter left. As the batter drips off, spikes that are very specific to 'Šakotis' will form. Bake the last layer longest. Baking takes approximately 3-5 hours.



## Honey cake



Melt the honey, sugar and butter. Add an egg, seasoning, and activated baking soda into the cooled egg mixture, add flour and knead the dough. Wrap in plastic film and place in the refrigerator until it hardens. Then roll out 2-3mm-thick patties. Take the upper part of the 23-24cm-round springform baking pan, place on the kneaded dough and press a little. Using a knife cut between seven and eight round patties. Cut out cookies using cookie cutters from one patty. Place the patties, the rest of the dough, and the cookies onto baking sheets lined with baking paper and bake in the oven, preheated to 200-220°C. To check whether they are fully cooked, lift with a knife from the bottom—the patties should not bend.

Swell gelatine for the cream with a little water, and before pouring into the cream, melt on a very low heat. Beat the whipping cream with sugar. Beat the sour cream as well, mix with the whipping cream and add prepared gelatine. Place the prepared cream into the refrigerator for 10 minutes to thicken.

Mix the egg white with powdered sugar and lemon juice. Decorate cookies with prepared glaze in various patterns, decorate with sprinkles.

Form the cake in a springform baking pan. Place a patty and cream on top, continuing until all patties are similarly done. Cover the top of the cake with cream. Crush the baked residual dough and sprinkle it on top of the cake. Place into the refrigerator. Remove the thickened cake from the pan. Lightly cover the cookies with cream and press against the side of the cake.

### *Ingredients:*

#### *Dough:*

100g natural honey  
100g sugar  
100g butter  
1 large egg  
½ teaspoon cinnamon  
¼ teaspoon ground ginger  
¼ teaspoon grated nutmeg  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
300g flour

#### *Cream:*

20g gelatine  
200g whipping cream  
100g sugar  
300g sour cream

#### *For cookie decoration:*

200g powdered sugar  
1 egg white  
1 teaspoon lemon juice  
sprinkles

## 'Cepelinai' with meat



Grate the peeled potatoes and squeeze out excess moisture. When the starch settles into the liquid, add it to the grated potatoes. Peel the boiled potatoes, mash, add this to the grated potatoes, and knead.

Peel the onion, cut into cubes, cook in heated butter, cool, add to the meat and mix. Season the filling with salt and pepper.

Take the grated potato dough, form patties with damp hands, place one teaspoon of meat filling in the middle, fold, press the edges and make oblong dumplings. Place the prepared 'Cepelinai' into salted boiling water; when they rise to the surface, cook for 20-25 minutes.

Prepare the sauce: peel the onions into cubes, chop backfat finely. Fry it all. Serve 'Cepelinai' with this sauce. 'Cepelinai' may also be served with sour cream.

### *Ingredients:*

#### *Dough:*

1kg peeled potatoes

3 boiled potatoes

#### *Filling:*

500g ground pork

1 tsp clarified butter

1 onion

add salt to taste

add ground black

pepper to taste

#### *Sauce:*

2 onions

100g backfat

