

Crisp Apfelstrudel--'it rhymes with poodle': Apfelstrudel

By Risa Pisko Written for The Christian Science Monitor

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Apfelstrudel was a dish that we as children, could not resist. And there have been few—if any—among us whose taste for Strudel in any of its numerous varieties has palled with the years.

The filling of a Strudel (it rhymes with "poodle") can change. The Apfelstrudel is probably the granddaddy of all Strudels. But some people prefer a filling of either sweet or sour cherries, and Viennese cook-books also give recipes for Strudels with sour cream, cottage cheese, rhubarb, potato, or sweet cabbage fillings.

Who invented the delicious dessert is not known. All we know is that it is indigenous to Central Europe and ranks among the positive and most durable achievements of the Habsburg monarchy. It probably got its name from the similarity between swirls on the Danube River and the sight of a Strudel being rolled.

To navigate the Danube swirls required great skill; so does the rolling of a Strudel without breaking the dough and letting some of the filling spill out.

Preparing the dough and stretching it to exactly the right degree of thinness is an art bequeathed for generations from mother to daughter. It can be mastered only by practice. To watch such a performance is fascinating. But the opportunities for seeing it are getting rarer and rarer.

Apfelstrudel

Dough:

2 cups flour
¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup warm water, or a little more if needed
1 egg
2 tablespoons oil
1 teaspoon vinegar

Put flour and salt into large bowl; make a hole in the center of flour. Mix all other ingredients in a small bowl, beat slightly, and pour into flour hole. With wooden spoon, mix and beat dough until very smooth and elastic. Cover 40-inch square kitchen table with a large tablecloth, sprinkle well with flour, put dough in the middle of table, sprinkle top of dough with flour, cover with warm bowl, and let rest for 30 minutes.

Filling:

While dough rests, prepare filling.
10 medium-large apples
½ cup sugar
½ teaspoon cinnamon
½ cup raisins
¾ cup melted butter
½ cup bread crumbs

Soak raisins in water for 10 minutes; squeeze out and put aside.

Brown bread crumbs in ¼ cup of the melted butter and let cool.

Peel apples and slice very thin; sprinkle with greater part of the sugar, cinnamon, and raisins.

Roll out dough with well-floured rolling pin as thin as possible, brush lightly with

warm (but not hot) melted butter. Stretch dough evenly in all directions till it covers the whole table. (It will be paper-thin.) This has to be done quickly—when dough dries, it breaks easily.

How to stretch dough: Put both hands under it with palms up and fingers slightly bent, moving around table. With finger tips exert light pressure on dough, pulling toward you. (Be sure to take your rings off before you start dough stretching.) When dough hangs beyond edge of table, cut off thick ends with sharp knife or scissors. Sprinkle dough with melted butter, then with browned bread crumbs and remaining sugar. Cover two-thirds of dough with apple-raisin mixture.

Now roll the Strudel, starting with the covered part, by holding the tablecloth up with both hands. Bend the Strudel into horseshoe shape and lift it—using both hands—onto well-buttered 12"x18" baking sheet. Bake 30 to 45 minutes at 375 degrees F., sprinkle with vanilla sugar, cut into pieces 3 inches wide, and serve warm—not hot.



Delicate, delicious

Pieces of warm, flaky Apfelstrudel sparkle with vanilla sugar coating.



Photos by Peter Main, photo staff

Pastry art

By means of a large flowered tablecloth stretched over 40-inch square table, pastry cook rolls tissue-thin Apfelstrudel dough into long spiral filled with raisins and spices.