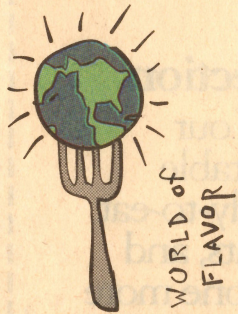


Russians welcome back salad days

■ Once, making salad was illegal in Russia. Today's cooks rely on what's fresh for their unusual salads.



By LEIGH GLENN

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia
Finding a traditional Russian salad is like trying to find bananas for less than a dollar a kilogram in the peak of summer here.

Such *smesheniya* — mixtures of vegetables, meats and eggs with dressing — was prohibited during the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the 16th century. Strict religious beliefs required eating things cooked whole, not cut and mixed together.

Although Russians don't have to contend with such policies anymore, the short growing season in places like Moscow and St. Petersburg still is very much a factor in the availability and types of salads.

And even if fruits and vegetables are available, many Russians cannot afford such extravagances.

Yet there is summer here, a relatively warm season that lasts from June through August, when dachas are open and gardens are full, when appetites are lighter, and when salads are most likely to appear.

"Earlier, in old Russia, chopping (food) was not allowed," said Igor Dubrovskii, 26, a pediatrician who studied Russian cuisine for a year and worked as a chef before going to medical school in St. Petersburg.

"They used only the whole products," he said. "They bought them uncut, salted or marinated, and ate the whole thing."

But Russians have Peter the

Please see **SALAD** 3D



Times photo — STEVE SMALL

FRESH AND RARE: Igor Chkalov picks cilantro for visitors to his garden at his dacha in a birch forest outside Moscow.

Salad

from 1D

Great to thank for importing the idea of mixing food together when he opened Russia up to the West at the beginning of the 18th century. Those earlier salads were complex but have become simpler during the last few centuries.

Today, unless it's New Year's or someone is celebrating a birthday, the idea is to keep things simple and even that "depends on what and where something is grown," Dubrovskii said.

In Southern Russia, where it's warm, people may use fruits in their salads more often than in the northern climes. And in places like St. Petersburg, there are summer and winter salads, so called not because of the season in which they are eaten, but because of the freshness of the ingredients.

Summer salads, or *lyetniye salati*, are made with combinations of fresh herbs and vegetables.

The typical Russian summer salad includes chopped cucumbers, tomatoes, dill, parsley and green onions. Everything is salted before adding a couple tablespoons of sour cream and stirring it so that it lightly coats everything in the salad.

Less often, sunflower seed oil is used in the same manner — as a dressing. Dubrovskii said he likes the "dark yellow" of the unrefined sunflower seed oil and the heavy taste it imparts.

Summer salads can be eaten together with meat, chicken or fish and rice, potatoes or macaroni, and black bread (white bread is used only as an hors d'oeuvre, perhaps spread with red caviar).

What goes into a summer salad depends on what is on hand, what can be found in stores, and in general how far rubles can be stretched. So, if tomatoes priced at 1,000 rubles a kilogram (about \$1 for 2.2 pounds) aren't within your budget, you exclude them and eat other things.

In Russia, guests often drop in on the spur of the moment, so it's not always reasonable to run out to a store or kiosk. People must use what they have.

"We don't have *polufabrikatov* — prepared food that you may buy, already-cut vegetables that you take, put in a microwave and are ready to eat," Dubrovskii said.

If guests drop in and you have a lot of mild radishes you may fix a simple salad with them and include cucumbers, green onions and dill with sour cream.

Although summer salads may be eaten in the winter if fresh vegetables can be found and are affordable, most average Russians in the northern climes spend their summer days gathering and preparing food for winter.

Cucumbers, for example, are eaten fresh in the summer, but people also buy them or gather them from their dachas to marinate and use during the win-

ter.

Winter salads are so called because they contain some of those items preserved from the summer, such as pickled cucumbers or dried mushrooms, or those that store well, like beets, potatoes, carrots, onions and large radishes.

They tend to be complex, requiring more preparation than summer salads.

For holidays or birthdays, when winter salads are served, they are eaten with hors d'oeuvres such as caviar or small salted fish (like sardines) or sliced dill pickles with some type of alcohol such as vodka or cognac. After a couple of hours, they are followed with meat or chicken and potatoes.

One type of winter salad was called *olivy* and when first invented included eight types of meat, Dubrovskii said. Over the years, it became simpler. Today, salad with any type of meat or sausage is known as *olivy*.

"Now this salad, *olivy*, is only for holidays because it requires many products and is not easy to do," he said.

One type of winter salad that is popular at parties is called *myasnoi salat* because it contains meat or *myaso*.

From mid-summer through September, mushroom hunting is a popular pastime for Russians, who don old green army fatigues and wading boots, and grab buckets or baskets and head for the forest.

Unlike in the United States, Russians don't eat their mushrooms fresh. They may marinate them and eat them immediately, but they also dry some for wintertime use.

Russians didn't forget to use beet when it comes to their salads. In a salad they call "vinagret," beets are always the main component.

The difference between vinagret and other winter salads is that they call for oils and dressing while the winter salads use mayonnaise or sour cream. Dubrovskii said that in Russian winter salads, all ingredients should be cut to the same size as much as possible. When you want to create a larger salad, it's important to add neutral ingredients such as potatoes or rice. These won't upset the balance of flavors.

If you plan to have a Russian-style party and don't know how much food to prepare, remember that here even salads have their paradoxes.

"Usually, salads are for the beginning, so that later, you eat more," Dubrovskii said.

But during holidays when several salads are made to offset the vodka or cognac, guests dig into the salads so much that they tend to grin when the meat and potatoes are finally served.

■ Leigh Glenn is a native of Pinellas Park and a graduate of the University of Florida now living in St. Petersburg. ■

Myasnoi Salat

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| 3/4 pounds of beef, boiled until soft and cut into small cubes * | 4 or 5 boiled and skinned potatoes, cubed to 1/2 inch |
| 1 large or two small onions, chopped into pieces the size of rice | 5 boiled eggs cut to the same size as the onions |
| 9 ounces of mayonnaise, which is mixed with the beef and onions and set aside | 2 medium-sized dill pickles cut smaller than the potatoes |
| | 1 tablespoon sunflower seed oil |
| | 1 8-ounce can of green peas |

Mix everything together, setting aside either enough peas or one or two eggs to cover the top of the salad.

You may add salt and pepper if you like, but keep in mind that given the dill pickles, the salad already has a salty taste, so be careful not to add too much.

You also may add fresh parsley to the top if you desire.

* Note: 10 to 12 ounces of fatless kielbasa may be substituted for the beef.

Mushroom salad

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| 14 ounces rice | One medium onion |
| 10 to 12 ounces of walnuts | 4 hard-boiled eggs |
| 10 to 12 ounces of mushrooms | 3 tablespoons mayonnaise or sour cream |
| Sunflower seed oil | |

First, boil 14 ounces of white rice. The rice should be a little bit firm.

Next, chop 10 to 12 ounces of walnuts. They should be about the same size as whole pepper.

Then, boil 10 to 12 ounces of dried mushrooms for about a half-hour. After boiling, these also should be cut to the size of whole pepper.

Fry the boiled mushrooms in sunflower seed oil. Make sure they don't burn. If they begin to burn, their color will darken.

Chop one medium white onion into pieces the same size as the rice.

Cut four hard-boiled eggs to the same size.

Mix everything together with either 3 tablespoons mayonnaise or 3 tablespoons of sour cream, depending on your preference. You may also mix the sour cream and mayonnaise together — with sour cream making up the larger proportion.

Vinagret Salad

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| 1 large potato | 1 to 2 tablespoons sunflower seed oil |
| 1 large carrot | 1 to 2 dill pickles, cubed (more for sharper taste, less for a milder one) |
| Beets (double the combined quantity of potato and carrot) | |

Boil potato, carrot and beets until soft. Then cut them into cubes. Mix everything with the sunflower seed oil and add salt to taste.