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Dear Lara!

I must apologize I didn't make in time to send you some Christmas recipes.
I'm trying to make up for it now.

I ought to say that most German families have their own Christmas habits and meals.
However, a very traditional one is "Kartoffelsalat mit Würstchen" (Potato salad with sausages), which is extremely simple.

In our family, we always have cheese fondue with mushrooms on Christmas Eve and goose with red cabbage on First Christmas Day.

Don't worry about Leonard: He'll be happy to learn what to eat and how to celebrate Christmas in an American family. But all these meals are very tasty during the whole winter season. Leonard can help you preparing them or he can prepare them himself (I hope so).

I can't write down all these recipes now but I'll try to add the missing ones as soon as possible.

(1) Kartoffelsalat mit Würstchen

For the potato salad take lots of cooked and sliced potatoes, add gherkins, apples and onions, all cut to tiny peaces. Capers, if you like.

For the sauce you can take mayonnaise, add salt and pepper, oil and vinegar. (You can take some spicy vinegar from the gherkin glass.)

Or else, make a bechamel sauce, using flour, butter, milk. In this version, you should add bacon as well as parsel. This potato salad version may be served warm.

You can't count the ways Germans prepare their potato salad, but these are two very popular of them.

"Würstchen": I think it's "Frankfurters". In Germany, we call them "Wiener Würstchen", but Anne has told me that, in US, the word "Wiener" has a slightly different meaning.

This is a simple, very traditional and still very popular German meal. For example, it's also traditional for roofing ceremonies. Everybody must get something to eat, but nobody wants to worry about cooking on that day. The same on Christmas eve. (The goose or whatever will be served the following day.) – With this dish, we'll always have mustard, never ketchup.

(2) Cheese fondue with marinated mushrooms

In our family, since many years, we are having cheese fondue with mushrooms and pickles.

Annette prefers the Neuenburger Fondue recipe. 400 g of Greyerzer cheese and 200 g Emmentaler cheese, both shredded. Rub the pot with garlic, fill in the shredded cheese, mixed with 4 teaspoons of flour, add a quarter litre of white wine and a tea spoon of lemon juice, a tiny glass of cherry brandy ("Kirschwasser"), some pepper and a pinch of nutmeg. Melt the cheese on the stove until it begins to boil, then put it on the table stove.

Dip slices of French bread with the long fondue fork (special cutlery), turn them (but you must never lose your bread in the cheese, as we read in the "Asterix in Switzerland"-comic strip.

Emmentaler is a plain cheese, with a slightly special taste, however. Greyerzer is a great Switzerland mountain cheese with rich flavour. The French word is "Gruyère". Cheese Fondue is a very traditional Swiss meal. Sort of an icon of Swiss cooking.

For the mushrooms Annette uses a Greek recipe. She guts 8 cloves of garlic to tiny pieces, takes peeled parsel roots, 3 cups of chicken broth, a cup of white wine, a cup of olive oil, juice of 1 lemon, a teaspoon of salt, ten black peppercorns, dried thyme. She cooks this marinade for about 10 minutes.

Then she fills in 500g of cleaned whole mushrooms, possibly very small ones and stops the fire. She lets the mushrooms in the marinade for at least 2 hours. She always prepares the mushrooms the day before Christmas eve, so there's no hurry. Sometimes, she adds minced parsel.

It's so much fun sitting together with the family and dipping the cheese! The whole family feels comfortable. We always have several pickles etc., Nikolaus goes mad for pickled "silver onions", and we have ananas, olives, sometimes pickled peperoni and whatever.

Ah, by the way: Annette always takes the double quantity for the whole family.

(3) Goose with red cabbage

Tomorrow, First Christmas day, we'll have goose with red cabbage.

We've got a goose roasting tin. We take out stomach, liver etc., fill the goose with potatoes, apples and some more things (possibly celery root or carrots or parsley root cut to pieces). And then we put the goose into the stove. One hour for each kilo, is the main rule, at about 200° C. Breast down first. We turn it after a while. And we add the giblets (for all these words I have to use my dictionary). Breast up at the end for best roasting result.

We cut the breast to tranches, and the most hungry people will get one of the haunches.

For the sauce we take what has been dripping from the big bird, we take away most of the fat (the lard will be delicious for weeks or months!), and we mix it with the farce, the filling (potato, apple, possibly carrot etc.)

The red cabbage is the very traditional German sunday vegetable. I don't know if you can get it in the US, I don't think so. The taste is not so very much different from white cabbage, but nobody will use white cabbage for this recipe in Germany.

We fry about four or five onions, possibly with some fumed bacon. Then we add the shredded red cabbage. And apples! About 5 apples, "normal" size. You need a big pot for this stew. Add some water, enough salt and pepper, some bay leaves and let it stew for about half an hour. Or, better, put it into the stove, the longer, the better. Its so tasty!

This is a really great German meal. As most of them, this one has to be served with salt potatoes. (Even better are "Thüringer Klöße", but I've not learnt to prepare them.) Don't take fried potatoes or chips because the goose is extremely fat.

(All these cabbage dishes become better if left in the stove for quite a long time, they'll be even better the next day. A German poem says: "Wofür sie besonders schwärmt, / wenn er wieder aufgewärmt", which means: she loves this dish even more when warmed up the following day.) (Maybe canned red cabbage may be bought in Minnesota supermarkets. But attention: most of the products are spoiled by adding sugar, which is disgusting. Try to get PLAIN red cabbage, WITHOUT sugar. And don't add vinegar, even though proposed in some recipes. Rather use apples, deliberately.)

(4) Räuber-Hotzenplotz-Essen (Sauerkraut mit Bratwurst und Kartoffelbrei)

In a German children's book, the mugger Hotzenplotz steals Sauerkraut and Bratwurst away from grandmother ("Neues vom Räuber Hotzenplotz", by Otfried Preußler), which is her favorite dish. According to this, the name for this dish in our family is "Räuber-Hotzenplotz-Essen".

Probably you can buy canned sauerkraut in St. Paul supermarkets. Though hard to find even in Germany, the original sauerkraut is not with wine. It's just shredded white cabbage and salt, pressed together in a big jar (in old times the farmers stepped into the barrel with naked feet). I don't think you can easily find that in American supermarkets. The Amish people, however, will still process and offer it. Certain bacteria change the consistency of the cabbage, which becomes sour and, in this way, will last for the whole winter, bearing great taste and strong effects for good health, against all kinds of cold and starving. An excellent winter meal.

When I prepare sauerkraut I put three sliced onions into olive oil in the hot pan (or, even better, into the chinese wok). As soon as the onions have taken colour, I add the sauerkraut.

No salt needed, but pepper and bay leaves, and let it take colour for about 20 minutes. Sometimes I feel should give more time, or else the sauerkraut may cause rebellions of the intestines. It's so simple but the great taste of the sauerkraut will always guarantee a great meal.

For the bratwurst, two versions can be found in Germany: there are boiled ones (they are grey, in many, many spicy variations) and raw ones (they are red and white, plain, without spices). Leonard can show you, if they can be found at the butcher's. Just fry them in the pan – or have them with the barbecue. (They'll never miss at any barbecue in Germany.)

For the mashed potatoes we take boiled and peeled potatoes, milk, salt. Some people like to add some nutmeg. (Annette does, I think. I don't.) We mash the potatoes until they take a plain, creamy consistency.

With the bratwurst, we always have mustard, never ketchup.

(5) Schnibbelbohnen (Schnippelbohnen, Schneidebohnen: cut green beans)

Like sauerkraut, also "cut beans" ("schnibbelbohnen") have suffered a process of acidation by certain bacteria in their barrel, mistreated by the farmers' feet, in order to conserve them for the whole winter. In Germany, they can be bought in special traditional shops, in the market as well as in certain supermarkets, but in very different qualities. They must never contain anything than just "green beans & salt". Beware of the canned ones.

This is a stew. My mother used to cut slices of three onions into the big pot with some fat (she used margarine or something, we prefer olive oil. She added some pieces of bacon, also the rind will give great taste to the stew. She fried the the onions until they had taken colour. Then added the beans. (They had to be watered before use because very salty.) And potatoes. You can peel them and add them, or else, even better, cook (? boil?) them first an peel them then. Annette uses to mash them a little bit and adds them to the stew. A quarter of an hour before bringing the stew to table my mother added "rauchendchen" (= "kochwürstchen", fumed sausages; let Leonard find them, he knows).

Schnibbelbohnen are SO tasty you needn't add bacon or sausages, so it's an excellent vegetarian dish as well. However, most people will make use of bacon and sausages.

(6) Grünkohl mit Pinkel

This is the queen of Oldenburg dishes. Green cabbage: The cabbage plants are huge, about mansize and even higher. They don't get harvested before the first frost (they slightly change their chemistry, then), and they accompany us for the whole winter season. Cabbage walks, cabbage parties are a great Oldenburg tradition. People walk through the winter afternoon, until they arrive at one of the cabbage restaurants where the meal is served, together with sorts of drinks I must not refer to as long as Leonard is in the room. After that, great silly speeches are

being made about the blessings of the green cabbage. It's always great fun. The Oldenburg dialect word is "Defftig Ollnborger Grönkohläten".

For the cabbage take a huge kettle. Fry onions, together with loads of bacon. Add several kilos of green cabbage. Salt, pepper. And some cut "Pinkel" sausages. (It's a bit strange, the German word "Pinkel" means the same as "piss", never ask me why. I doubt if this kind of sausages can be found at ANY place in the US.) Pinkel is a very fat sausage, a mixture of a bit of cheap meat, lard and grits? oat groats? porridge? You can also add a lot of lard. Put the whole thing into the stove and wait for a very long time. The longer the better. It will be even better tomorrow. Only very late, add more sausages ("Rauchendchen", see above, and "Pinkel", see above).

To be served with peeled potatoes.

In restaurants, they serve a soup first and a dessert afterwards, preferably the wonderful northern German "Rote Grütze" (red grit). But before, they will bring more sausages and bacon until the very last of the party shows the white flag.

(7) Heringssalat

Cut salted herring, after long watering, to tiny, tiny pieces, as well as boiled and peeled beetroot, onions, apples, pickles (gherkins). Capers galore. Add pepper, salt only if really needed (the salted herring from the barrel is really salty). Some mayonnaise. no more spices. The salt will draw the juice from the beetroot and the apples. Turn around several times.

Not all children like this. But this is the great traditional Northern German family salad for great winter days. We always had herring salad on Christmas Eve in my parents' family, and often on New Year's Eve. It's a lot of work. All that cutting to tiny pieces, the cleaning of the fish. But it merits. A good herring salad will always attract great attention. An incredible and unique taste.

So, dear Lara and everybody,
this is what I can tell you about winter cooking in our family.

I hope you'll enjoy cooking all these dishes.

Takusan tabete kudasai!
Guten Appetit!

Ralf