

WINTER RECIPES 4

FOOD MEMORY FROM HAMBURG

4 TASTY VEGETABLES

Brussels Sprouts with Walnut Oil and Nutmeg,
Buttered Carrots,
White Cabbage with Wine, Oil and Caraway
Red Cabbage in Red wine

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When I left school at the age of eighteen I had been accepted for nurse training but was not allowed to start until I was nineteen. I had nearly a year to do something. The term “gap year” was not in use but many of the group who started nursing with me in 1961 had spent the last year as “au pairs”.

I found my family through an agency. They had 3 children, girls of eight and twelve and a boy of ten. My job was to clean, cook, do the laundry, and speak English with the children. In return I had board and lodging, pocket money and a chance to learn German.

Apart from 10 days in Belgium, a couple of years earlier, this was my first experience of being away from UK and away from my family. I compared all of my experiences as an au pair with what I knew from growing up in England in 1940's and 50.s. This household in Germany appeared to live with a strange mixture of luxury and - almost penury. They said they had always had a Mercedes Benz car, but the one I saw was very old and seemed to struggle often. The housework involved much manual labour. I cleaned the carpets with a stiff brush, polished wooden floors on my hands and knees, straightened the carpet fringes with a metal comb, and wrung by hand the sheets and clothes before hanging them in the garden.

The food was a surprise also. Breakfast and one other meal in the day were both based around tasty country style bread – with boiled eggs for breakfast, and sliced cheese, liver sausage and other spreads for the second meal. The main meal, usually in the evening, required cooked vegetables that I learnt to prepare and it was served with wine, but where was the meat? In this small village on the edge of Hamburg we rarely bought anything from the butchers. Sausages and speck (fat bacon) could be bought from the general grocers and this is what was served for the main meal except for Friday when fish was bought from a travelling fishmonger. The lack of meat – for example a joint, a chicken, a stew or some chops was a surprise to me. I reasoned to myself - they could afford to have me living in their house, so why did they not have sufficient money to buy meat? I was used to vegetables being a major part of my dinner plate as I had grown up during the wartime and the rationing that followed. . However, dinners at home relied on meat and gravy for flavour. Here in Germany it was very different without a piece of meat or gravy – just a slice of sausage. I did develop an appreciation for sausages, but also I began to think

that the vegetables were the best part of the hot meals. I still use what I learnt there for Brussel Sprouts, Carrots, White Cabbage and Red Cabbage. Here are the recipes - and you can have them with meat if you wish!

1) BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH NUTMEG AND WALNUT OIL

I have added the walnut oil that was not easily available 50 years ago.
Brussel Sprouts taste best after a frost.

Preparation

Remove any discoloured outer leaves from sprouts and cut a cross into the stalk end. Simmer the sprouts in a small amount of water – fill pan to about half way up the vegetables. Cook until tender.

Strain off the water and save it for stock to add to soup.

Leave sprouts in the saucepan. Add pepper, salt, freshly grated nutmeg and a little walnut oil. Then put the lid back on the pan and holding the saucepan handle in one hand and the lid firmly on top with the other, shake the pan to mix everything together. Tip into serving dish and keep warm in the oven. .

2) CARROTS

Preparation

Peel carrots and cut into sticks.

Cook in a pan with small amount of water, some butter or marg (about a tablespoon to 500 g carrots), pepper and salt.

Cook gently as the small amount of water makes burning a possibility.

When cooked add a handful of fresh chopped parsley.

This is a delicious way of cooking carrots and I recently heard of someone who ate this when I prepared it for a family meal several years ago. She reported that she still uses this recipe and added ‘the children eat carrots when cooked like this’.

3) WHITE/ GREEN CABBAGE

This is suitable for savoy or white winter cabbage.

Cabbage

White wine - about ½ teacup

1 or 2 tablespoons (walnut) Oil

Caraway seeds

Pepper and salt

Remove outside leaves from cabbage.

Cut into quarters

Cut out the stalks and then chop the quarters as finely as possible or use fine slicer in food processor.

Place shredded cabbage in saucepan. Add about an inch of water, simmer and cook – check water from time to time.

When cooked to your liking – about 20 minutes - strain and save water for soup.

Add about half a teacupful of white wine, salt pepper, (walnut) oil and caraway seeds to your liking – about a teaspoonful for large cabbage. Turn all together with large spoon, reheat. Tip into a warm dish and serve. Very good with pork

4) RED CABBAGE

Ingredients

Red cabbage prepared as above for white cabbage.

2 onions – one finely chopped, the other stuck with about 20 cloves

One apple chopped

100 mls red wine

Fatty bacon chopped - optional.

3 tablespoon oil

Choose large pot eg Le Creuset with tight fitting lid that can be left on or in the cooker and taken to the table.

Method

Heat oil

Add chopped onion and bacon (optional) and cook until onion is soft and bacon cooked through. If preferred - cook the onion and bacon separately.

Add chopped cabbage and chopped apple to the oil, bacon and onion mix.

Turn over to coat everything in oil.

Add wine and a little water

Bury the onion that has been stuck with cloves.

Simmer for an hour or so until tender. Having brought it to simmering point it could be placed in the oven at a low temperature.

If the food processor has been used the cabbage will cook quite quickly but when chopped by hand the slices are usually larger and cooking takes longer.

Check from time to time, as more water and/or wine may be required.

In Germany we always used wine for this dish but some recipes suggest vinegar. Recently I used some old damson juice that had become vinegar. It worked.

