



Kholodnyk (cold borsch)

RECIPE AND PHOTO BY ANNA VOLOSHYNA

IN the scorching summer days of southern Ukraine, where I grew up, when the heat hangs heavily in the air and the sun blazes down upon us, one dish comes to our rescue – kholodnyk, the fuchsia-colored cold borsch that brings instant relief from the heat and the blissful feeling of rejuvenation.

The name itself, kholodnyk, carries a meaning that perfectly captures its essence. Derived from the Ukrainian word “kholod,” meaning “cold,” in English, this soup offers a respite from the oppressive heat that engulfs us. It is a culinary oasis, beckoning us to indulge in its cool embrace.

Preparing kholodnyk is an art in itself, requiring a delicate balance of flavors and textures, with an abundance of fresh, crisp vegetables, each offering its own burst of color and taste. The heart of this soup lies in the harmonious marriage of those vegetables with herbs, and tangy cultured dairy. Vibrant magenta beets, luscious green cucumbers and the mildly spicy bite of radishes create a tapestry of hues that entice the eyes and tantalize the taste buds. The fragrant dill, with its unmistakable aroma, dances alongside the gentle notes of chives and parsley, infusing the soup with invigorating freshness. With each spoonful, these aromatic herbs transport me to sun-drenched fields, where the essence of Ukrainian summer fills the air.

As I bring all the elements together, I am reminded of the communal aspect of Ukrainian cuisine. In our culture, food is not merely sustenance; it is a way of fostering connection and sharing love. Sitting around a table, laughter and stories intertwine with the clinking of spoons against bowls, creating a chorus that celebrates the bonds of family and friendship. Within these moments, kholodnyk truly shines, for it embodies the spirit of togetherness and the joys of summer. So as the sun beats down and the summer heat becomes unbearable, I invite you to indulge in a bowl of kholodnyk. Let its cool embrace wash over you, revitalizing both body and soul.

Serves 6

- 2 medium (about 12 ounces) red beets**
- 5 hard-boiled eggs, peeled**
- 3 cups plain kefir or buttermilk**
- 2 medium Persian cucumbers, thinly sliced**
- 3 medium radishes, thinly sliced**
- ¼ cup fresh dill and flatleaf parsley, freshly chopped, in equal parts, plus more for serving**
- Distilled water, chilled, if needed for thinning**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 2 green onions, green parts only, thinly sliced**
- ½ cup full-fat plain Greek yogurt**
- Extra-virgin olive oil, for serving**

In a medium saucepan, place the beets and cover them with water by about 2 inches. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat and cook until the beets are easily pierced with a knife, 30 to 40 minutes. Drain the beets and let them sit for about 10 minutes. Peel then coarsely grate them when they are cool enough to handle. Return them to the pot.

Coarsely grate 2 of the eggs and add them to the beets. Add the kefir, about ½ each of the cucumbers and radishes (reserve the remainder for finishing the soup), the dill and parsley. Mix everything together with a spoon. The mixture should be the consistency of a yogurt soup. If it is too thick, add a bit of the chilled water. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Cover the pot and chill for at least 30 minutes or up to 2 hours before serving.

When ready to serve, halve the remaining 3 eggs lengthwise. Ladle the soup into bowls. Top each serving with some of the remaining cucumbers and radishes, green onions, egg halves, a dollop of yogurt, some dill and parsley, and a generous drizzle of oil. The soup needs to be eaten very cold, right from the fridge. It tastes best the day it is made.