



Gulyás is a hearty blend of beef, onion, vegetables, and paprika. The authors' version has carrots, parsnips, potatoes, and tiny egg dumplings called galuska.

Hearty Hungarian Stews

Goulash and its kindred make satisfying suppers

BY MARIA & LORANT NAGYSZALANCZY

After we came to the United States from Hungary in the mid-1950s, we continued to cook the simple, nourishing foods we loved in our homeland. Nearly forty years later, we still make these dishes regularly. Over the intervening decades, we've refined some of the recipes to suit our taste and to accommodate the ingredients that are available in the United States.

Gulyás (commonly spelled *goulash* and pronounced *goo-yash*) was born on the Hungarian plains. The ancient Hungarians were cattle-herding people. They called the herd of cattle *gulya*, and the simple beef soup they made *gulyás*. To make the very lean and tough beef tender, they cooked it slowly in a kettle with water and flavored it with onions, vegetables, and herbs such as parsley and sometimes marjoram. Spices like black pepper were too expensive for herdsmen.

When finally pepper plants arrived in Hungary from America (via the Turks), they flourished in the good soil and climate. Both the fresh fruit and the ground paprika, which was made from dried red peppers, were quite welcome. The paprika gave to the dishes a beautiful red color that had never been seen before in Hungary. The flavor varied from gentle and mild to burning hot, and paprika was readily available. The potato arrived from America about the same time, so the perfect combination—beef, onion, paprika, and potato—could be combined in the *gulyás*.

GULYÁS AND ITS RELATIVES

The *gulyás*-type dishes that we cook fall into three groups: “true” *gulyás*, *pörkölt*, and *paprikás* (pronounced *pap-ri-kash*).

Gulyás—The true *gulyás* is a soup made with onions, cubed beef, paprika, and cubed potato. Vegetables might be added too, and it is always served with bread. During the winter hunting season in Hungary, *gulyás* was eaten outdoors. At home it was served as part of a simple dinner, usually followed by a pasta dish. Among all the variations, most frequently seen in Hungary is the *Székelgyulyás* (Transylvanian *gulyás*), made with pork, onion, paprika, and sauerkraut.

Pörkölt is a thick stew, probably derived from the *gulyás*. This is the dish that's called “Hungarian goulash” in the West. Its major ingredients are meat, onions, fat, and paprika (no potatoes), and it requires pasta, rice, or potatoes on the side as a complement. The meat can be beef, lamb, veal, pork, chicken, or even wild meat such as boar. *Pörkölt* is made essentially the same way as *gulyás*, but with less water added (or none at all), so that it's a stew rather than a soup.

Paprikás is similar to *pörkölt*, but sour cream, or occasionally sweet cream, is added at the end. There



are many kinds. Most famous are chicken *paprikás* and veal *paprikás*.

A very good vegetarian dish is the *gomba* (mushroom) *paprikás*, which we make in our home quite often. Hungarians also enjoy another vegetable variety, *krumpli paprikás* made with potato, onion, paprika, green pepper, and tomato. This simple but tasty dish is a staple food of the Hungarian common people, who can afford to eat meat only once or twice a week.

Of the many, many variations of these dishes, we most often make *gulyás*, *pörkölt* made with beef or beef and pork, *paprikás* made with chicken, veal, mushrooms, or potatoes, and *Székelgyulyás*.

SELECTING INGREDIENTS

These dishes all depend on the taste and color of the paprika; therefore, it's important to choose it carefully. When buying paprika, examine the color, smell, and taste. The color should be bright red, the smell must not be moldy, and the taste should be just to your own preference—as mild or as hot as you like it—without any bitterness. In Hungary, you can find as many as two dozen varieties of paprika, from mild to burning hot. We buy paprika at a Hungarian grocery, but the Szeged brand available at most supermarkets is perfectly acceptable.

In general, the hotter the paprika is, the less red it is, because the light-colored veins and seeds are ground in with the pepper flesh to produce the most

Cooking up Hungarian specialties. The Nagyszalanczys have been making *gulyás*-type dishes since they came to the United States in 1956. One refinement is to clean mushrooms a day ahead and let them sit on the counter until it's time to use them. This gives the mushrooms more intense flavor and prevents them from giving up so much liquid when cooking.

Red-pepper paste adds color and flavor.
In many dishes, the authors like to use this mixture of puréed red peppers and salt in place of plain salt.



heat. You can buy both the mild and the hot and mix to your taste; most Hungarian cooks do that. If you do use hot paprika, start with less than half the amount given in a recipe and add as needed.

In addition to paprika, we frequently use a salty red-pepper paste in place of salt. This paste is simply a purée of red peppers ground in the food processor with noniodized salt added. (See the recipe on the page opposite.)

Onions are just as important as paprika. When we came to the United States, we tried to make *pörkölt* with Spanish onions, but they gave the dish too hearty and rich a flavor. We find that red onions are closest in flavor to Hungarian onions. Before using the onion, we taste a small piece because some of them are bitter. We always cut them at the last minute; they might get bitter while standing in the air too long. Also, the dense root end is where a lot of the bitterness is concentrated, so we're careful to cut that part out.

In general, beef in Hungary is leaner than American beef, so we buy the leaner cuts, such as round or rump. Cooking takes longer than with more tender cuts, but we think these dishes taste better with less fat. Fresh ham is also fine in place of pork. Veal here is quite different from that in Hungary. Hungarian calves are slaughtered before weaning, so the flesh is light, with a very delicate taste. Veal *paprikás* made here won't have the same taste as it does there. And the chicken dishes will taste different, too, unless you find a free-range chicken.

In Hungary, fat for cooking is most often lard. Butter is also used frequently, but never in *gulyás* or *pörkölt*. Instead of using lard, you can prepare these dishes with a cooking oil that has little or no taste of

its own and won't burn at higher temperatures, such as peanut oil.

Finally, sour cream is sweeter in the United States than it is in Hungary. Some cooks mix a little buttermilk in it to make it tarter, but this doesn't seem necessary to us. In fact, we sometimes make *paprikás* with heavy cream instead of sour cream. The taste is even milder.

GULYÁS WITH DUMPLINGS

This soup is similar to the original meal prepared by cattlemen on the Hungarian plains. If you can't find Hungarian bread, use the best Italian or French you can buy. When the soup is done, make tiny dumplings (*galuska*) to finish it off. We like to serve a red Hungarian wine, such as a *Bikavér*, with *gulyás*. Serves four.

FOR THE SOUP:

1 large red onion, diced or grated
2 Tbs. lard or oil
2 lb. lean beef, cut into ¾-in. cubes
2 tsp. paprika, more or less to taste
1 green pepper, sliced
2 tsp. red-pepper paste (see recipe at right) or 1 tsp. salt
1 large potato, peeled and cut into chunks
1 large carrot, peeled and cut into chunks
1 large parsnip, peeled and cut into chunks

FOR THE DUMPLINGS:

1 egg
Salt
About ½ cup flour

Make the soup. In a deep pot, sauté the onions in the fat until they turn a light golden color. Add the beef and brown it on all sides. Add the paprika and a few slices of the green pepper, the red-pepper paste or salt, and a little water to prevent burning. Cover and simmer for about 1 hour, checking and adding water periodically if needed. Then add the rest of the green pepper, the potato, carrot, and parsnip, and as much water as you like, depending on how much broth you want. Cover and cook until the meat is tender, about 30 min. Taste for salt.

Make the dumplings. In a small bowl or a cup, beat the egg with a pinch of salt. Add enough flour to make a sticky paste and stir until perfectly smooth. Take up a small amount of the paste—less than ⅛ tsp.—on the tip of a teaspoon and dip it into the boiling soup to release it. Continue until all the paste is used. Let boil another minute and then serve in soup bowls with thick slices of Hungarian bread on the side.

GOMBA PAPRIKÁS

(Mushroom paprikás)

The day before we make this, we always clean the mushrooms and let them sit, uncovered, on the counter. This enhances their flavor and prevents them from exuding so much liquid while cooking. If you want this dish to be more colorful, sauté thin strips of red pepper with the onion. Two red wines that would go well with this are merlot and pinot noir; for white, a riesling would be a good choice. Serves four.

1 lb. medium to large mushrooms
2 Tbs. butter or oil
1 large red onion, chopped fine
Black pepper
1 tsp. paprika
Salt
½ cup sour or heavy cream



Ready for the cream, which makes it paprikás. Sour cream is added to browned mushrooms, onions, a few red pepper strips for color, and paprika before the paprikás is spooned over pasta.



For a more pronounced mushroom flavor, make mushroom paprikás with heavy cream instead of sour cream. The result is delicious.

Wipe the mushrooms and let them stand in a dry, room-temperature place all day or overnight. Slice them $\frac{1}{8}$ in. thick.

Melt the butter in a large frying pan and cook the onion slowly until transparent. Transfer to a plate. Increase the heat to high and add a third of the mushrooms and a dash of black pepper. Stir constantly and cook the mushrooms quickly so that they brown but don't soften. If you haven't had time to let the mushrooms sit out, be sure to cook until all juice they exude is evaporated. Repeat until all the mushrooms are browned. Lower the heat and stir in the onion, paprika, and salt. Then add the sour or heavy cream, heat, and serve over pasta.

RED-PEPPER PASTE

We like to use this paste in place of salt for the additional flavor and color it gives. Don't use iodized salt, which contributes a chemical taste.

2 lb. red peppers, cleaned and cut into pieces
8 oz. noniodized salt

Clean the peppers and cut them in pieces. Purée the peppers to a paste in a food processor. Mix in the salt, put into jars, and refrigerate. It will keep indefinitely. Use it with soups, gulyás, and paprikás dishes instead of salt.

SZÉKELY GULYÁS

(Transylvanian gulyás)

It's all right for the meat used in this dish to be slightly on the fatty side. Sliced Hungarian sausage can also be added with the pork. Because of the sauerkraut, Alsatian wines, such as gewürztraminer or riesling, go particularly well with this dish. Serves four.

1 large red onion, chopped fine
2 Tbs. lard or oil
2 lb. pork butt, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. cubes
1 green pepper, sliced
1 tsp. paprika
1 small tomato, peeled and sliced
2 tsp. red-pepper paste (see recipe at left) or 1 tsp. salt
Black pepper
1½ lb. sauerkraut, drained and rinsed
1½ cups sour cream, plus more for garnish

In a deep pot, sauté the onion in the fat until light brown. Add the meat and brown it. Then stir in the green pepper, paprika, tomato, red-pepper paste or salt, a pinch of black pepper, and enough water to cover the bottom of the pan. Cover and cook for about 45 min., stirring occasionally and adding a little water if needed.

Mix in the sauerkraut and a little water or some of the sauerkraut juice if it isn't too tart. Continue cooking until the meat is tender. Taste for salt and then mix in the sour cream. Don't boil the sour cream. Serve topped with a spoonful of sour cream and accompanied by Hungarian bread.

Maria and Lorant Nagyszalanczy cook their Hungarian specialties at their home in Sherman Oaks, California. Luckily, there's a Hungarian grocery not far from their neighborhood where they can stock up on imported food products from their homeland. ♦