Sides / Ukraine

Ukrainian Beet Borscht

Ukraine's crimson national soup — beetroot, cabbage, potatoes, and tomatoes built into a vivid, deeply flavored broth that holds both sweetness and acid in tension. Finished at the table with a snow-white dollop of sour cream and a shower of fresh dill, it is the most complete bowl in Eastern European cooking.

Time 90 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 350 g Raw beets, peeled and coarsely grated
- ☐ 250 g Potatoes (Yukon Gold), peeled and diced 1.5 cm
- ☐ 120 g Carrot, peeled and grated or julienned
- ☐ 30 g Tomato paste
- ☐ 20 ml Apple cider vinegar
- ☐ 2 leaves Bay leaves
- ☐ 30 ml Neutral oil (sunflower or neutral),
- ☐ 15 g Fresh dill, roughly chopped, for serving
- ☐ 250 g White cabbage, thinly shredded
- ☐ 150 g White onion, finely diced
- ☐ 200 g Canned or fresh tomatoes, crushed
- ☐ 1500 ml Vegetable stock (or light beef/chicken stock)
- ☐ 10 g Sugar
- ☐ 8 g Salt and black pepper
- ☐ 120 ml Sour cream, for serving

Let's make it.

01 In a bowl, toss the coarsely grated raw beets with all the apple cider vinegar and a pinch of salt. Toss thoroughly and set aside. This acidulation step is not optional: the acid reacts with the betalain pigments in the beet and stabilizes them, preventing the borscht from turning a dull brownish-purple during the long simmer. Acidulated beets maintain their vivid crimson color through cooking. The beets will immediately begin to weep their juice into the vinegar.

02 Heat the oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the diced onion and grated carrot and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is soft and translucent and the carrot has begun to soften, about 6–8 minutes. Push the vegetables to the sides and add the tomato paste to the center of the pot, pressing it against the hot metal. Cook the paste for 1–2 minutes, stirring, until it darkens slightly from bright red to deep brick — this pinçage deepens the tomato flavor and removes the tinned taste. Then stir the paste into the vegetables.

03 Add the acidulated beets and their liquid to the pot and stir well. Pour in all the stock. Add the bay leaves. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce to a steady, low simmer. The borscht should simmer, never boil hard, to develop flavor without making it murky. Cook for 15 minutes to begin building the base. The broth at this stage will be a vivid, deep crimson — this is the color you are working to preserve through the rest of the cook.

04 Add the shredded cabbage and diced potatoes to the simmering borscht. Stir to submerge and return to a simmer. Cook for 20–25 minutes until the potatoes are completely tender and beginning to thicken the broth slightly with their released starch, and the cabbage has fully softened and surrendered any raw crunch. The soup should remain at a gentle simmer throughout — a hard boil will make the potatoes break down too quickly and make the broth starchy and cloudy.

05 Add the crushed tomatoes, sugar, salt, and black pepper to the simmering pot. Stir well and taste carefully. Borscht is defined by the balance between sweet and sour: add vinegar a teaspoon at a time if it needs more brightness; add sugar or a grated beet if it needs more sweetness. The salt should be assertive — borscht can absorb considerable salt without tasting salty because of the acidity. Simmer for a final 5 minutes to marry the flavors, taste a final time, and remove the bay leaves.

06 Ladle the hot borscht into deep, warmed bowls. Place a generous dollop of cold sour cream directly in the center — the contrast of cold dairy against hot soup is part of the experience. Scatter freshly chopped dill generously over the top. The dill fragrance rising from the hot soup is one of the most distinctive smells in Eastern European cuisine. Serve with dark rye bread or pampushky (Ukrainian garlic rolls) on the side.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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