

Potica

Growing up my Dad fondly remembers the smell of Potica (Pō-tēē-tsā) baking in the oven. This Slovenian nut bread (or desert roll) is always at a gathering of family and friends. It is usually eaten as a desert. [That is, if you can keep everyone from eating it before dinner!] “Potica is as Slovenian as Apple Pie is American.”¹ My Great-Nana and Great-aunts all make their own variations of this special desert. My mom has been learning how to make it from my Nana as well. Below is our family recipe from the old neighborhood in Cleveland, Ohio.

Christina Harr

Dough:

7	cups sifted all-purpose flour	½	cup butter, room temperature (1 stick)
¾	cup sugar	1	tsp salt
1	pint whole milk (2 cups)	4	eggs (normal)
3	packages dry yeast (6 ¾ tsp)		

Bring the milk to a boil and add the butter. Stir to mix and set aside to cool. Must be under 130deg F when used.

Using a strong, heavy duty mixer, mix 4 cups of flour in a bowl along with the yeast, sugar and salt. Then alternately add the milk-and-butter mixture along with some of the remaining flour to the bowl while still mixing. Beat the eggs. Add alternately with the remaining flour while continuing to mix. You may need to use one or two more cups of flour depending on the size of the eggs. Knead for twenty minutes until the dough is smooth and all pulls away from the sides of the bowl onto the knead/mixing stick. Remove from mixer and cover; let rise in a warm place for about one hour (should double in size).

Walnut and Raisin filling:

2	lbs walnuts	2	eggs
½	lb butter (2 sticks)	1	cup sugar
½	lb honey (¾ cup)	½	tbl vanilla
½	pint whole milk (1 cup)	½	tbl lemon extract
1	cup sour cream (8 fl oz)	1	lb yellow or dark raisins

Grind the walnuts. Beat eggs and sour cream together and set aside. Melt butter, add milk, honey and sugar; heat mixture until hot. Pour the mixture over the walnuts. Add beaten eggs and sour cream; add vanilla and lemon extract. Stir and mix by hand thoroughly. Will seem too soupy at first but thickens as the honey cools. Set aside.

Rolling out, rolling up and cutting:

Prepare a large table (at least 4 by 3 feet) with a clean cloth stretched tightly and taped under the edges; sprinkle well with flour. Roll the dough out on the table until 1/16th to 1/8th inch thick. Should see print of table cloth through the dough. Sprinkle more flour if dough starts sticking to the cloth or rolling pin. Repair tears by hand kneading in place but try to avoid them to start with. This is likely the longest, hardest and most important step to get done right! Is much easier if the dough has risen properly. Should roughly fill a 4 by 3 foot area. Sloppily ladle the filling over the rolled-out dough. Using the back of a ladle or spoon, spread the filling evenly over the dough to the very edge. Sparingly sprinkle raisins over the filling. Should end up with a 4'x3' rectangle of dough completely covered in filling. Raisins are optional.

Grease three 12x4 inch loaf pans and one 6x4 inch pan for the ends. Starting from the widest side of the rectangular dough, begin rolling the dough-filling mixture from the outside edge inward. Make sure the ends of the roll stay even with the middle. Prick with a fork or toothpick as you go to prevent air pockets from forming during baking. You will end up with an approximate 4 foot long “jelly roll”. Lift the table cloth along the whole edge to roll. We often roll evenly from both sides to create a double roll in the center. Place the baking pans along the elongated roll. Using the edge of a flat plate (not a knife), cut the roll into desired lengths to fill each pan. Secure the ends by pulling on the dough at the cut end and pinching then place in the pan. Take the two leftover ends of the roll and arrange in the final bread pan. Some people like these the best as they usually have less filling. Cover each pan and let rise for another hour in a warm place (should double in size again). Bake in a preheated 325° oven for 1 hour until medium brown. Remove from the oven and let cool for 15 minutes before removing from the pan. Once cool, slice and sprinkle the top with powdered sugar.

¹ Quoted from the Slovenian Woman’s Union of America National Officers, “More Pots and Pans: Slovenian-American Cookbook”, 1998, Croatian Franciscan Press, Chicago, IL