

# *Black Mountain*

RECIPES FROM  
NERO WOLFE'S YOUTH



Edited by Nero Wolfe and Jean Quinn

With Fritz Brenner

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# BLACK MOUNTAIN

## RECIPES FROM NERO WOLFE'S YOUTH

### Introduction

By Nero Wolfe

This collection of recipes is a record of the food of my youth. It is not meant to be a representation of the diet of all Montenegrins in the past or present.

My Montenegro was a country experiencing peace for the first time in five hundred years. Centuries of war had left the scars of poverty on the people and the land. Food was scarce. Hunger was the norm. The terrain was rugged and unforgiving.

As most families living in the mountains, we ate what we could produce. Most of our meals were a variation of flour and dairy products. We ate unleavened bread, cheese, eggs, fruit, and vegetables and drank coffee and kefir. We seldom ate fish. Meat might be eaten one or twice a year .

On Easter and other holidays we might celebrate with a roasted lamb and Rakia, a plum brandy. Cesnica, a flatbread, was a Christmas tradition.

These recipes may be of interest to those who have read *The Nero Wolfe Cookbook* and wish to learn about my early culinary experiences.



## Unleavened Bread Cooked in Ashes

Prepare a good large fire of dead wood and allow it to burn down to ashes.

### Ingredients

1 cup flour

generous pinch of salt

1/4 cup water

### Directions

1. Add salt to flour. Add scant 1/4 cup water.
2. Mix by hand, knead, and quickly make into a round, smooth ball until it is an even, rather stiff dough. Continue kneading and into a round, smooth ball.
3. On a floured surface, firmly press down using the palms of your hands until it becomes a flat cake of about 1 or 2 inches in thickness. Lightly dust cake with flour. Place cake in a round greased covered tin
4. Make a hole in the ashes, put in tin, and covered with hot ash until it is well buried.
5. Cook for 30 minutes or more.
6. Serve warm with a warm spoonful of pork lard or kajmak poured over the popara.

## Česnica — Christmas Bread

Česnica is a flat bread shared at Christmas. The custom is to bake a coin in the dough. It's good luck to find the coin.

### Ingredients

250 ml milk	1 kg flour
2 eggs	pinch of salt

Sourdough starter or 1 packet of yeast    silver or gold coin

### Directions

1. Mix together the flour, salt, yeast and one beaten egg in a mixing bowl. Pour the lukewarm milk into the flour mixture and mix everything together.
2. Transfer the dough to the counter and knead for approximately 10 minutes. Add more flour if needed.
3. Form the dough into a round shape, place it in a bowl covered with a tea towel, and leave to rise until it has doubled in size.
4. Remove the dough from the bowl and divide in two pieces (smaller should be set aside for braiding).
5. Make a round shape loaf from the larger piece and transfer it to a slightly greased round baking tin.
6. Divide the smaller piece of dough into 3 equal pieces. Roll out the pieces into strands and braid them using 3-braid method.
7. Place braid on the top of the loaf.
8. Use the remaining egg to make some egg wash (a cracked egg and a little bit of water). Brush the bread with the egg wash and cover with plastic wrap for an additional 40 minutes. Preheat the oven at 400F/200C.
9. Place the tin into the oven and bake the bread for 35-40 minutes. The bread is finished when it's beautifully golden brown on the top. Transfer the bread to a rack to cool.

## Cicvara

This breakfast dish is easy and inexpensive to prepare. It is eaten hot most often with sour milk and cream.

### Ingredients

3 dl milk  
1 dl oil  
100 gr. corn flour  
2 tablespoons cream  
2 tablespoons cheese  
1 cup sour cream  
pinch of salt

### Directions

1. In a deep pot put the milk to be heated. During this time, mash cheese, add oil, cream cheese and sour cream in a bowl then add to the milk.
2. When the mixture boils, slowly, with constant stirring, add the corn flour.
3. Constantly stir the mixture until it becomes dense. Then remove it from the stove and serve chilled with yoghurt and homemade sour milk.
4. Stir until the mixture thickens, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat, and serve chilled with sour milk or yogurt.

Tip: For best results, stir constantly.

## Belmuž

This shepherd's dish was prepared on St. George's Day from cheese made on the day of *Premlaz*, the beginning of the sheep milking season.

### Ingredients

700 g sheep cheese (very fresh, young)

150 g maize flour

salt (to taste)

### Directions

Gently heat the cheese in a deep pot until it has melted but not boiled, then stir in the maize flour very gradually. Continue to cook, stirring continuously for 15-20 minutes. When the cheese comes together in a ball in the middle of the pot and the milk fat separates out to the side, the belmuž is finished. Serves 4.



## Kajmak

Kajmak a creamy dairy product similar to clotted cream. It is eaten as a spread on bread or as an ingredient in the main dish.

### Directions

Boil milk slowly, then simmer for two hours over a very low heat.

1. After removing from heat, skim the cream and allow to cool and mildly ferment for several hours or days.

Kajmak has a thick, creamy consistence and a rich, mildly sour taste, depending on how long it matured.

## Nettle Soup

Nettle soup is a traditional soup prepared from stinging nettles. It is eaten mainly during spring and early summer, when young nettle buds are collected.

### Ingredients

Half a carrier bagful of stinging nettle tops, or fresh-looking larger leaves

50 g butter

1 large onion, peeled and chopped

1 litre vegetable, chicken or fish stock

1 large potato, peeled and cut into cubes

1 large carrot, peeled and chopped

salt and black pepper

### Directions

1. Wearing protective gloves, sort through the nettles, discarding anything you don't like the look of and any thick stalks. Wash the nettles and drain in a colander.
2. Melt the butter in a large saucepan, add the onion and cook gently for 5 - 7 minutes until softened.
3. Add the stock, nettles, potato and carrot. Bring to a simmer and cook gently until the potato is soft, about 15 minutes.
4. Remove from the heat. Use a whisk or spoon to purée the soup and then season with salt and pepper to taste.
5. Ladle into warmed bowls and top with cream.

Serves 4.



## Duvan Čvarci — Cracklings

Cracklings are a variant of pork rinds and considered a winter food. Cracklings can be used as an ingredient in other recipes, eaten with bread and onions, or enjoyed as a snack with Rakija or beer.

### Ingredients

5 kg of raw white pork fat

1 dl milk

2 tablespoons salt

### Directions

1. Use white pork bacon, preferably with the dorsal part because it has less meat.
2. With a sharp knife, remove the skin layer. Cut the bacon into cubes about 2 to 3 cm.
3. Place the bacon in a large pot over medium heat. When bacon begins to release fat, stir with a wooden spoon.
4. As soon as they begin to appear yellow, add the milk. This will make them crisp.
5. When all the fat has melted cut pieces of bacon until you obtain a dark yellow color, remove cracklings.
6. Put cracklings in a gauze bag and use a press to remove grease.
7. Salt to taste.

Approximate yields: 1 kg of cracklings and 3 liters of home-made fats.

## BLACK MOUNTAIN

### Popara

Popara is a meal made with left over or fresh bread.

#### Ingredients

1 loaf stale bread, cut in small pieces

1 liter milk

1 tablespoon of Butter

1 teaspoon of salt

Spoonful of lard, kajmak or cheese

#### Directions

Add butter and salt to milk and bring to a boil. Add bread. Cook for a few minutes until the bread is moist and it turns into a thick paste. Serve warm with a warm spoonful of pork lard or kajmak poured over the popara.

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*We drank a little Rakia, or white brandy, that coursed down my throat like liquid fire, causing tears of agony to run over my cheeks.*

— Roy Trevor, *Montenegro: A Land of Warriors* (1913)

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### Rakia — Plum Brandy

Rakia is widely considered to be Montenegro's national drink. The brandy can be made out of almost any fruit, Montenegrins prefer plum brandy made from their local fruit. The alcohol content ranges from 40% to 80% depending on whether is commercial produced or made at home.

## Food for Special Occasions

### Lamb in Milk

Wash the meat, put into a pot and pour milk over it, add one whole carrot, bay leaves, pepper and salt as needed. Boil peeled whole potatoes in another pot. When the meat is boiled, take it out of the pot, put into a deeper pot and add whole boiled potatoes and carrot. Pour over it strained milk in which the meat was boiled and garnish with parsley.

### Meat Under the Dome

The meat (be it goat, veal or lamb) is slow roasted in ashes under an iron dome. The end result is fall-apart roasted meat that's served with the best roast potatoes you've ever had.

### Mussels in Wine

Mussels are most frequently prepared by putting into a pan, seasoned with parsley, garlic, bread crumbs and pepper with wine and oil. Boiled on high heat. They let out sauce in which they are boiled. Cook until the shells open.

### Carp

Cut the carp on both sides, salt, and put to fry in oil. During that time, braise chopped onions on oil. After a while add gradually 3 spoons of flour, 1 small spoon of pepper, tomato, 2 glasses of water, plums (dipped in hot water previously), chopped apple and quince, 1 spoon of sugar, 4 spoons of wine vinegar. Salt as needed. When the carp is fried pour this mixture over it and leave it to bake for half an hour until done.



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The Wolfe Pack, PO Box 230822, Ansonia Station, New York, NY 10023. <http://www.nerowolfe.org>

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