

Bakalar – Croatian Style for Christmas Eve

Mahovlich family recipe

1 fillet of dried, salt cod (called Baccala in Italian) usually about 2 lbs

Get the kind that is boneless, it usually sold frozen these days

About 2 lbs of redskin potatoes (the smaller “B” size, if available)

It’s important that these be waxy potatoes, not starchy ones

Oil – about ½ to ¾ cup (either vegetable oil, or light olive oil – not EVO)

Garlic – 3-4 cloves, peeled

Freshly ground black pepper

1. 3 days in advance: rinse and soak the dried codfish. You can cut it into a couple of pieces if it’s more convenient. Soak the fish in cold water for three days. Change the water every day. You can keep it in the refrigerator if you prefer.
2. Simmer the cod in water to cover until it flakes easily.
3. In the meantime, boil the whole potatoes in their skins until they are just tender. Peel the hot, cooked potatoes (best done under running cool water). Cut them in either quarters or eighths and add to a large bowl.
4. While potatoes are cooking, slowly brown the whole garlic cloves in the oil until they are golden.
5. Combine the flaked fish (leave it in large flakes) with the still hot, peeled and cut potatoes.
6. Strain the hot oil over the fish and potatoes.
7. Grind plenty of black pepper over the dish.
8. Taste and add salt if needed.
9. Allow to marinate for at least one hour at room temperature.
10. Serve at room temperature.

Pro tips:

The potatoes need to still be quite warm when the oil is added so they properly absorb the oil. The fish also need to be warm.

Save a bit of the water in which the fish was simmered and add a bit if the dish seems too dry, or if it need a bit of salt.

The dish should have a distinctly fishy taste.

Leftovers can be refrigerated, but should be allowed to come to room temperature before serving.

Parsley? FORGET IT! We are not Italians.

This is the traditional recipe from my family that was always served on Christmas Eve and on Holy Saturday. Typically, this was the extent of the meal; occasionally a simple shredded cabbage salad dressed with oil, vinegar, and salt was the accompaniment.

There are other recipes for Bakalar, but this was the “ritual dish” for holidays.