

Nut Roll (Povitica or “Gibanica”)

As demonstrated by Aunt Annie Mahovlich DeNoble on October 20, 2008.

Kitchen should be warm (at least 75° F) and protected from drafts. Aunt Annie hangs a shower curtain over the door between kitchen and dining room to prevent drafts.

A. First, prepare the filling:

Grind in a meat grinder with a medium blade:

2 lbs walnuts (8 cups)

Put the ground walnuts in a large heavy pot and mix in:

1 1/3 cup sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons salt (this is important, brings out the flavor of the nuts)

In a 1 cup measuring cup put:

a 5 ounce can of Carnation Evaporated Milk

add to the measuring cup:

enough regular milk to make one cup (approximately 3 ounces)

Add milk mixture to the nuts and stir.

Add to the nut mixture:

1/2 to 3/4 cup water (depending on how moist the mixture is)

1/4 tsp pure almond extract (not more, but this brings out the flavor)

Cook the mixture slowly for 5 to 10 minutes, stirring constantly. Take care, as the mixture burns very easily. Remove from the heat and allow to cool to room temperature (75° F). The mixture should be pliable, not stiff. It should not fall off a spoon, however. Set aside.

B. The Dough:

1. Measure then sift, 4 1/2 cups general purpose flour. Grandma and Aunt Annie used Gold Medal Flour. Sift the flour through a large sieve (strainer) into a bowl.

2. In a small bowl, mix together:

1/4 cup warm water

2 packets (1/4 ounce each) dry yeast.

Allow the mixture to sit in a warm place, for 5 – 15 minutes, until it begins to bubble.

3. In a bowl, combine:

1/2 cup shortening (Aunt Annie uses Crisco)

2 teaspoons salt

1/4 cup sugar

1 cup scalded milk

Stir until the shortening melts. Allow it to cool until lukewarm (about 85° F or so). Then stir in:

2 beaten eggs

Then stir in:

The yeast mixture, from 2.

Mixing:

4. Pour the mixture into the bowl of a Kitchen Aid heavy duty mixer fitted with the paddle mixer attachment (NOT the dough hook). Set the mixer on 2 – 3 (slow speed). Slowly add:
4 ½ cups sifted flour – Add about 1/3 cup at a time at first.

Make sure that each addition of flour is completely, smoothly incorporated before adding any more flour.

After about 1/3 of the flour has been added, stop the mixer and scrape down the sides. Turn the mixer back on and keep adding the flour slowly.

Scrape down the bowl again when about one cup of flour is left.

Add the last part of the flour bit, by bit – about 2-3 tablespoons at a time. When the dough finally gathers into a ball, stop and scrape the sides down again, then resume mixing to add the last few spoonfuls of flour. **The total time for adding and mixing the flour is about 30 minutes. Don't try to rush it.** (This is important to develop the right consistency of the dough.)

The aim during mixing is to keep the dough sticking to the sides of the mixer as long as possible – that is, that it not gather into a ball until the very end.

5. First Rising:

Once the last of the flour has been incorporated, turn the dough out onto a lightly floured cloth. Knead it for a couple of minutes to get it into an even ball shape. Lightly grease the surface of the dough. Place the dough into a large, greased, bowl, cover it with a cloth and allow it to rise in a warm place (the top of the stove in a warm kitchen is good for this.) Allow it to rise approximately 1 hour until double in bulk. When it's ready, the dough should not recover (doesn't spring back) when a finger is poked into it.

Rolling the dough:

6. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured cloth. Punch down and knead briefly. Cut the dough into three equal pieces. Take one piece (leave the remaining two covered with a cloth), form it into an even ball.

7. Roll the dough gently from the center out in each direction with a floured rolling pin. From time to time, pick up the dough to make sure that it is not sticking to the cloth. **DO NOT** stretch the dough with your hands. The eventual size should be an oval shape about 12" x 11" and between 1/8" and 3/16" thick.

Spreading the filling:

8. Using a broad bladed knife, start spreading the filling (at warm room temperature) at one end and spread out to the edge. Repeat all around the edges of the dough in each direction. Make sure that the filling covers the edge of the dough and goes all the way over the edge of the dough (although this is counterintuitive, this is vital if the roll is going to hold together properly.) If the filling is too stiff to spread easily, vigorously beat in some water or milk until you have the right consistency. When you are done, there should be a rather thin, even layer of filling covering the dough completely and lapping over the edges.

Forming the rolls (technique is critical):

9. Begin to roll the filling-covered dough with your fingers. Start rolling it up at the center of the long side of the dough. Roll it very tightly with your fingers, using a tucking under motion, that stretches the dough somewhat. **DON'T RUSH!** Take your time. After about three turns, begin rolling the dough up with the palms of your hands, starting at the center for each turn and then moving out to the edge. When it is finally rolled up, tuck in the ends of the roll (this is the same “poking in” motion used in making sarma). Use a knife to scrape off the extra fill that has leaked out at the seam. The finished roll will be about 16” in length (the rolling process stretches the dough somewhat).

Place the roll into a greased, 11” x 16” x 2” inch baking pan. The baking pan Aunt Annie uses is a shiny, aluminum pan, 16” x 11” x 2”.

Repeat the process with the other two portions of dough. **DO NOT** try to use up all of the filling – if you overfill the rolls, they do not come out well. If there is any left over - and there probably will be - it can be used to fill palačinke in the morning. All three rolls will fit side by side in the same pan.

Second Rising:

10. Cover the pan with a towel, allow it rise for 1 hour in warm place, free of drafts.

Baking:

11. Preheat oven to 350° F. Place the baking pan in the preheated oven and bake approximately 1 hour. Watch carefully, as the dough has a tendency to brown too early. If it does brown too early, cover the pan loosely with aluminum foil and reduce the temperature to 325° F.

12. After about 1 hour baking (it should sound hollow when tapped with your knuckle when done), allow it to cool in the pan on a wire rack for about 20 minutes. After 20 minutes or so, remove all three rolls from the pan in one piece and allow to cool on a wire rack for about 2 hours. **DO NOT** try to separate the roll until fully cooled. Once the rolls are fully cooled, use a thin bladed knife to separate the rolls.

NOTES ON INGREDIENTS:

This recipe does call for some American ingredients: Crisco vegetable shortening and Carnation evaporated milk. The recipe clearly evolved somewhat over the 20th century. Undoubtedly butter or lard was used as the original shortening and likely cream or reduced, boiled milk was used in place of evaporated. Certainly almond extract was not available in Croatian villages prior to World War I. Feel free to experiment with these ingredients, but know that the recipe was optimized with the ingredients listed.

NOTES ON THE SOURCE:

Annie Mahovlich DeNoble was born in Benwood, WV in 1926 to Emil and Ana Mahovlich. Her cooking and baking was in great demand her whole life. At every holiday she would make many of these nut rolls, sending them around the country as family members moved away. Although the formal name for the dish is “povitica” Aunt Annie, her siblings and parents always called it “gibanica”.

Walter Mahovlich