

Gefilte fish

How a Chinese fish became a Jewish fish, and why Jewish children never took a bath on thursdays.

People used to travel all over the world for trading. They took food with them and sold it along the way. Upon arriving in distant countries, they would buy other food to take home with them. Merchants from Russia and Poland traveled to China, where they found a delicious and robust fish. They brought a few of these fish back home in containers of water. Then Jews got the idea to start breeding these fish. That is how a Chinese fish became a Jewish fish that is usually served on special occasions, such as Shabbat.

Carp, as the fish is called, tastes best fresh. On Thursdays many market vendors used to sell live carp. People who bought the carp took it home and put it in their bathtub. By changing the bath water, they made sure that the carp kept getting cleaner as it swam around. On Friday morning they would take the fish out of the tub. Afterwards the children could take a bath again.

Do you want to try making this dish? If you don't have a tub or don't want a live carp swimming around at home, you can ask the fish store to prepare the carp. But don't forget to ask for the fish bones and the head. You'll need them to make the broth in which you cook the gefilte fish.

Gefilte fish actually means stuffed fish. But nowadays this dish mostly resembles meatballs, but of course made of fish!

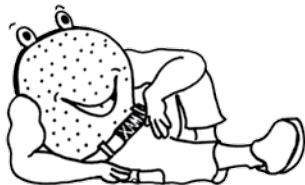


What you'll need to make the broth:

- 2 large carrots
- 1 onion
- 1 fish head and bones
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 teaspoons sugar
- 6 peppercorns

What you'll need to make the fish meatballs:

- 500 grams (1.2 lb) carp (pike or sweet-water fish fillets are also okay)
- 2 tablespoons matzo meal
- 1 onion
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon of salt
- 1 teaspoon of sugar
- Pinch of pepper



First we'll make the broth, then the fish meatballs.

Put all the ingredients in a pot. Add two liters (8-9 cups) of cold water. Put the pot on the stove on a high flame and let it all come to a boil. Use a skimmer to remove the foam from the pot. Then let the broth simmer for 30 minutes on a low flame. In the meantime, prepare the fish.

Break the egg and separate the egg yolk from the egg white (you can ask someone to help you!). Dice the fish and the onion into small (but not tiny) pieces in the bowl of a food processor. Add the matzo meal, egg yolk, salt, sugar and pepper. Mix everything well. Then beat the egg white with a whisk until it stiffens and gently fold into the mixture.

Take out a clean pot and a large sieve. Pour the broth through the sieve into this pot. Return the broth to the stove. Throw away the fish head and bones, but put the carrot aside for later.

With wet hands, roll the mixture into fish meatballs. They won't be perfectly round but will have the shape of your hands. Once all of them are ready, turn the heat under the broth as low as possible. Gently drop the balls into the broth. Cover the pot and let the balls float in the pot for 30 minutes.

Turn off the stove and let the broth cool. Remove the fish meatballs and place them on a flat dish. Pour some broth over the dish so it doesn't dry out. Cut the carrot into thin slices. Place a carrot slice on every fish ball. Cover the dish and place it in the refrigerator. Tomorrow the gefilte fish will be ready to eat. Add some grated horseradish and you have a delicious Jewish fish dish to serve.