

Suzanna Catalovski (left) with her grandmother "Baba" Tala Laskovski.



THE KEEPER of the recipe



WORDS SUZANNA CATALOVSKI PHOTOGRAPHY JOE WIGDAHL

For Suzanna Catalovski, it wouldn't be Easter without her Baba's koinjak. Now, she's sharing this sweet bread and other traditional Macedonian recipes for the next generation to treasure. Here's her story.

baba tala's kozinjak (macedonian sweet bread)

Serves 8

Prep 50 mins (+ cooling, 10 mins standing & 2 hours proving time) Cooking 55 mins

80ml (1/3 cup) milk, warmed
6 tsp (21g/3 sachets) dried yeast
2 tsp plain bread flour
1/2 tsp caster sugar
3 eggs, at room temperature
140g (2/3 cup) caster sugar, extra
160ml (2/3 cup) milk, extra, warmed
80ml (1/3 cup) vegetable oil
2 tsp vanilla sugar
1 1/2 tsp finely grated lemon rind
750g (5 cups) plain bread flour, extra
Plain flour, to dust
Cooking oil spray
145g (3/4 cup) raisins
1 egg, extra, lightly whisked
3 tsp sesame seeds
Butter, to serve

1 Combine milk, yeast, flour and sugar. Set aside in a warm, draught-free place for 7-10 minutes or until frothy.


2 Whisk eggs, extra sugar, extra milk, oil and vanilla sugar in a bowl until combined. Stir in the lemon rind, extra flour and yeast mix. Use your hands to bring dough together in bowl. Knead dough with one hand and rotate the bowl with the other. Continue kneading for 10 minutes or until smooth and elastic. Dust with flour. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside in a warm, draught-free place for 1 hour or until dough doubles in size.

3 Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead for 3-5 minutes or until smooth and elastic. Return to the bowl. Cover and set aside in a warm, draught-free place for 30 minutes or until the dough doubles in size.

4 Preheat oven to 200°C.

Position an oven rack in lowest shelf of oven. Spray a round 24cm (base measurement) cake pan with oil. Line with baking paper. Turn dough onto a lightly greased surface. Add raisins and knead for 5-7 minutes. Divide dough into 3 portions. Roll each portion into a 60cm-long rope. Gather the 3 ropes together and fold over each other to form a plait. Trim ends of the plait and reserve. Shape plait into a ring. Place in pan. Roll reserved dough into a 20cm-long rope. Tie rope into a knot. Place in the centre

of the ring. Cover. Set aside in a warm, draught-free place for 30 minutes.

5 Brush the dough with extra egg and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Bake for 10 minutes or until golden. Cover with foil. Bake for 10 minutes. Reduce oven to 150°C. Bake for 15 minutes. Reduce oven to 100°C. Bake for 10 minutes. Remove foil and bake for a further 5-10 minutes or until dark golden and bread sounds hollow when tapped on the base. Set aside to cool slightly. Serve warm with butter. 



“Baba Tala’s kozinjak is incredible and everyone adores it – so much so that my cousin has renamed it kozin-yum.”

“Every Easter, in the early hours of the morning after midnight mass, my family would devour my grandmother’s kozinjak, a heavenly, raisin-studded sweet bread. The whole family would be there – 10 of us in total. My grandmother – my Baba – was a bit naughty. She brought it to the church! She’d make it in the evening, so it was still warm when we ate it.

Now my sister and I have small kids, so it’s hard to get to midnight mass, but we still have kozinjak every year.

Kozinjak is like the Macedonian version of hot cross buns. It’s so fluffy and light, and sweet from sugar and raisins. A lot of people don’t put them in, but those juicy raisins make it really special. Baba makes a very wet dough, too – it’s harder to work with, but makes the bread so soft.

Not long ago I had this fear that Baba would disappear and no-one would know how to make her kozinjak, and all the other things she does. She’s a master at breads, and anything she makes with her hands. I wanted to preserve those recipes.

Learning to make Baba’s food is a challenge, though, because she has

always cooked by feel and sight, not from recipes. She works at lightning speed, too. Baba will dump in the flour and I’ll say ‘STOP! Let’s weigh it before you add the water.’ It’s the same with all the ingredients.

Watching her knead the dough is incredible, you can tell she loves it. Pulling, scrunching, turning – it’s hard work, but at 81 she’s still going strong.

It amazes me that she learnt to make hard things when she was just a child. She learnt to make bread, and maznik – a baked dish with a delicate, filo-like handmade pastry – when she was 9. And my mum learnt to make bread at 11. That makes me a very late starter – I’m 34, and I didn’t learn to make bread until a few years ago.

Baba learnt to make kozinjak as a young bride in Macedonia – my grandfather’s sister learnt it from her husband’s family then taught my grandmother. So this recipe has been in my family for more than 60 years.

So many recipes are lost when we lose the people who used to make them. I’m so glad I have the chance to learn from my grandmother, and my mother and mother-in-law, and to share those recipes with others.”

FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY JEREMY SIMONS FOOD STYLING JANE HANN FOOD PREPARATION LUCY BUSUTTIL



Suzanna’s Baba Tala kneading the dough for her kozinjak. The wet, sticky mixture makes all the difference to achieving the end result: fabulously soft and fluffy bread.



 moreonline

• For step-by-step pics and tips for kozinjak, plus more of Suzanna’s family recipes, go to www.villagefeast.com.au
• To join our online club and share your family recipes, go to the Heirloom Recipes Club at www.australiangoodtaste.com.au