From Peasant to Pleasant

The Cuisine of Latvia
An Introductory Course - Latvian Cuisine

If anyone ever tells you that Latvian cuisine is boring, they are either ill-informed or are just lying, as it could not be further from the truth. But you do not need this booklet to tell you that, because, should you decide to explore the vastness that is Latvian food, you will experience it for yourself. So, read on, brave connoisseur, and take a plunge into Latvian cuisine!

Sure, you might have heard of Latvia being referred to as Potatoland, and, truth be told, we do love our spuds. But, when it comes to defining Latvian cuisine, there is more than meets the eye. In all actuality, it is really hard to pin down all the influences that historic events and foreign powers have left on the Latvians’ taste buds. But it is even harder to name everything that we have available for the forming of what is now the ever-changing, but consistently delicious, Latvian cuisine.

Now, the ingredients that have been at our disposal would not necessarily be considered exotic or unique by any means, we will give you that. But nowhere does the inherent Latvian ingenuity shine as brightly as in our kitchens. You see, Latvians have always been a modest people. We make use of what we have. No fuss, just make it happen – that could be our national slogan, for that is how we endured through some rough times in our history (and even established our own country… twice).

But being down to earth does not mean Latvians did not like filling their tummies with delicious food. No, sir, it does not. And whilst not exotic, we found ways to best enjoy the available resources as well as ways to keep them well stored for a rainy day. So consider this an insight, a beginner’s guide, if you will, into the gastronomic labyrinths of the Latvian people. We are sure you will emerge better informed, equipped with quirky facts and most probably salivating… You have been warned.
To Beet or not to Beet – Ancient Latvian Cooking

Of course, as with most national culinary arts, the Latvian one has always been affected by climate. Very harsh winters combined with bountiful summers meant we had to work hard all year round in order to provide sustenance. As Latvians have always been an agricultural people, we learned pretty early on that we would have to spend hours in the field with our backs bent during the scorching summer heat to grow the necessary grains, and spend early mornings foraging for berries and mushrooms to have enough food to survive through the year.

So, when one hears about Latvians being hard workers, what it boils down to is actually working to provide food, heat and shelter. Food has thus always been assigned great value among Latvians.

Looking back a millennia or two, one would discover that the Baltic and Finno-Ugric tribes inhabiting the territory of Latvia subsisted mainly from grains - rye, wheat, barley, oats, millet and hemp. Patties and leavened bread were made from these grains.

Subsequently bread was the most commonly found product in the ancient Latvian’s diet. Due to it being safe for consumption over a longer period of time and its provided nutrition, bread had an almost sacred standing in the Latvian mentality. It still retains a special place in the collective Latvian consciousness, and respect for it is encouraged from early childhood. For instance, if a piece of bread is dropped on the ground, it should be cleaned, kissed and eaten – not thrown away.

Bread was baked in loaves, using finely ground flour. It was often the go-to product for longer travels. If rye, barley and wheat were scarce, oats were used to bake bread.
Grey Peas with Bacon

If you would like to try your hand at making an eternal classic of the Latvian cuisine, enjoyed by ancient and modern Latvians alike, why not start with grey peas with bacon.

You will need 200g (7oz) of grey peas, 60g (2.1oz) of smoked or unsmoked streaky bacon, 40g (1.4oz) of onion and a pinch of salt.

Soak the peas overnight, and then cover them with hot water and boil until tender. Dice the bacon and onion, and sauté. Serve the drained peas in individual clay bowls, adding the fried bacon mixture to each serving. Serve with a glass of rūgušpiens (curdled milk or clabber). Beans with fresh bacon are also prepared in this way.

Ancient method of cooking dumplings demonstrated at the Latvian Ethnographic Open Air Museum

Heartiness and richness was brought into the ancient Latvian cooking by cereal grains. Barley and buckwheat groats served as a basis for making soups and porridges.

People ate beets, peas, beans, black radish, linseed and its oil, and garlic. But due to the intense work regime of the ancient Latvians, farming developed alongside agriculture, and the Latvian diet thus also consisted of fowl, beef, horse meat and pork, and even goat meat – considered to be a special delicacy. Game also played a part in providing Latvians with protein, beaver, deer, wild boar, duck and goose were enjoyed by many.

Dairy was also plentiful with large goat herds being a sure sign of a wealthy household. Goat and cow milk was used in making butter, cottage cheese and cheese.

Of course, due to Latvia’s geographical position, for the people living along the 500 kilometres of the Latvian coastline fishing has always been a part of life and fish were an integral part of their diet. Fish were also caught inland, with freshwater species being considered more of a delicacy alongside crayfish. Among coastal dwelling families, smoking fish at home is still popular, and in many areas people eat home-smoked eelpout, flounder, eel, lamprey and cod.
Cooking 100
Years Ago

More detailed information about the traditional Latvian diet stems from the 19th century. At this time a vegetable from North America was spreading quickly - the potato. Thanks to potato farming, Latvian peasants no longer had food shortages in winter and spring, when stores of grain had been depleted. It is believed that the most common meal for Latvian coastal fishing families in the 19th century consisted of boiled potatoes with cottage cheese and herring or pilchards. Today potatoes, prepared in different ways, are still a very popular component of the Latvian diet.

In autumn, the cellar of each farm stored dried sausages and pork, and barrels of salted cabbage, cucumbers, mushrooms, meat and herring. These constituted the ingredients for meals throughout the winter.

In summer, when there was a lot of outdoor work to be done further away from home, people would eat a moderate breakfast, for example, porridge. Lunch consisted of food brought from home such as rye bread, cottage cheese, rūgušpiens (curdled milk or clabber), and sometimes also fried meat or patties. After lunch, people would usually have a nap before continuing to work. Upon returning home in the afternoon, soup or porridge was eaten with a glass of rūgušpiens. On Sundays, the diet consisted of stewed meat, white bread, pīrāgi (bacon rolls), pancakes, sweetened cottage cheese or berry jelly with milk.

Left: Traditional meal of baked pork ribs with sauteed sauerkraut and boiled potatoes.
Below: Latvian bacon rolls or spēka pīrāgi.
Hammer and Pickle - Soviet Latvian cuisine

There aren’t many positive things one can say about the 50 years of occupation, as the Soviet times left many scars in Latvia.

But unlike most things associated with living behind the iron curtain, the cuisine turned out to be a rather colourful one. Having borrowed elements from all of its annexed and occupied countries, the Soviet cuisine looked more like an intercultural all-you-can-eat buffet rather than a strict and stiff culinary art.

And the Soviets made sure to introduce this assortment throughout all of the “friendly republics” – partially as a way to celebrate the undeniable diversity that was the USSR, but mostly to ensure that one single national cuisine did not stand out.

Drawing on modern parallels, the Soviet cuisine was more or less like McDonald’s. It did not matter how far you travelled within the borders of the USSR, because one knew that the familiar staples of Soviet cuisine could be found in any roadside cafe or restaurant.

And although the meat and potatoes of the Soviet diet were... well... just meat and potatoes, the cuisine offered a wide variety of choices in the soup, salad, first and second course items.

Number one was certainly pelmeņi with a touch of sour cream to be served everywhere from railway station buffets to street “zabegalovkas” or drop-ins. Other popular offers ranged from the internationally known borsch or stroganoff, to the more obscure “herring in a fur coat” - a layered ‘salad’ consisting of diced salted herring covered with layers of grated boiled potatoes, carrots and beet roots, chopped onions, and mayonnaise.
Presumably the biggest paradox rises from the fact that, as per usual in the command economy ruled USSR, the store shelves were usually empty. When and if a delivery came of such “luxurious” goods as butter or sausage, one had to wait for hours on end in seemingly eternal queues. Oh, and did we mention store goods were rationed? Meaning, even in the slightly more progressive and “western” Latvia, one could only purchase a certain amount of foodstuffs. That is, of course, if you did not happen to know the lady behind the counter, who could do some secret under-the-table salami dealings.

However, the resilience learnt at times of war, refugee and deportation years, had given housewives the skill to cook something from nothing, and to serve it in a charming way. This also taught people to be self-reliant, as they grew their own vegetables, fruits, berries and greens. It also brought families closer together. Because, if a city dweller wanted to enrich his or her diet, good standing with their countryside relatives was a must. This also meant semi-obligatory volunteer work in endless potato and beetroot furrows, though for Latvians this was always a way to reconnect with Mother Nature and served almost meditative purposes. Plus, it was a great way to get some sun and physical activity. So meeting a colleague on Monday morning with sun-bleached hair and a sunburnt neck (aka the kolhoz tan) just meant they had visited mum’s allotment over the weekend.

**INGREDIENTS**

**RECIPE**

*Pelmeni (Dumplings)*

Dough: 500g (1.1 lb.) all-purpose flour, 125ml (4.5oz) cup warm water, 1 egg and a pinch of salt. Filling: 500g (1.1 lb.) ground meat, 75g (2.6oz) large onion, 2 – 3 cloves of garlic, 2 tbsp milk, 1 tsp dried dill, 1 tsp dried parsley, 1 tsp basil, 1 tsp marjoram, 1 tsp crushed red chili flakes, a pinch of salt and pepper.

In a bowl combine the flour, salt, egg and a bit of the water. Mix the dough, adding more water. Knead until smooth and elastic. Let the dough rest for 30 minutes. For the filling, grate the onion and garlic, then mix all ingredients together thoroughly. Roll out the dough. Using a glass, cut out as many rounds as will fit. Spoon a small amount of filling into the center, then stretch the dough over it to form a half moon shape. Crimp the edges shut, then bring the ends together and pinch. Cook the pelmeni for 10 minutes in just enough boiling, salted water or chicken broth to allow them to float. Serve them with sour cream.
Reconciling on the Food Front

Some of the once alien foods have been welcomed to stay and are now widely available at any Latvian supermarket. As with most things, Latvians usually put their little spin on the recipes of these Soviet classics, but their tried-and-true nature remains unchanged.

“Šašliks”
Lamb, pork, beef or poultry. If it’s meat and can be put on a skewer, Latvians will call it šašliks. Much to the dismay of Eastern nations, Latvians don’t really care about the fine nuances of traditional šašliks making. Mangals, BBQs, pans and bonfires all serve their purpose well when it comes to getting the meat done. Popular marinades include wine, beer, vinegar, Greek yoghurt, mustard and even kefir.

“Rasols”
The ultimate universal soldier amongst salads, rasols is a great way to empty the fridge as it will take almost anything you throw at it. Sausage or any other meat, boiled potatoes, carrots, onions, pickles, green peas, even fresh apple, all covered in that iffy mayonnaise found behind the untouched jars of jam, with optional added dill and spring onions. But it really is yummy and should not be frowned upon. Plus, it is super easy to make.

“Plovs”
At its essence plov is nothing more than rice cooked in a meat or poultry broth with added carrots, onions and some herbs. But it possesses all the rich and hearty properties Latvians value in their food, so this Caucasus classic tastes, smells and looks right at home on the Baltic Sea shores.
Meat dumplings or “pelmeni”
The name says it all, really. Put some minced seasoned meat in small pockets of dough and boil them. Of course, they are now mainly sold pre-made and frozen, so all one has to do, for a blast to the Soviet past, is boil some water. The ultimate student food, as it lets you enjoy a hot, proper meal in a matter of minutes with no cooking skills required.

“Solyanka”
If there was a popularity contest among Soviet soups in Latvia, solyanka would probably take the crown. It can be found on the menu of most catering establishments and probably gained its ground due to the fact that, like with rasol, there really is no wrong way to make it. With ingredients like beef, ham, sausage, potato and cabbage, salted mushrooms, tomatoes, onions, olives and parsley no solyanka is alike. Also it contains pickles and dill. Latvians love pickles and dill.

“Kefirs”
Drunk “straight” or with added seasoning or water, and even jams, this fermented milk drink, rich in calcium and probiotics, is not only refreshing and good for you, but also tastes great. Kefir also sometimes serves as the go-to choice of beverage after a longer Friday’s night. A truly multifunctional drink.

“Kvass”
If there is one thing Latvians are proud of, it is their rye bread. So it should be of no surprise that this fermented beverage of our Eastern neighbours made out of rye bread is a popular choice of drink on hot summer days. It also holds sentimental value, because for many Latvians born in the USSR kvass poured from big yellow canisters by street vendors is the taste of their childhood.
If we tried to define what Latvian cuisine is all about today, it would not be the easiest of tasks. It is a question of whether we take all the influences from the past, draw certain inspiration and then mix them up, reinvent the old recipes and serve something redefined, or do we reshuffle the deck completely and go with food that is made from local ingredients but bears no resemblance to its previous counterparts.

That is the beauty of the modern Latvian culinary art – one can do as they please. There are no strict rules and regulations, and, if you happen to visit Latvia, you will see both schools of thought represented in the menus of our best restaurants. And good restaurants, we have plenty!

Today the capital of Latvia, Rīga, is a member of “Délice”, an international network of likeminded cities engaged in promoting the benefits of culinary excellence and good food. Alongside twenty other cities like Barcelona, Birmingham, Bordeaux, Brussels, Chicago, Lyon, Lisbon, Montreal and Turin, Rīga does its best to promote Latvia and the high value of its culinary heritage. And, of course, speaking of heritage, getting back to basics is an integral part, if you want to generate something new. So, as defined by the Latvian Chef’s club, the modern Latvian cuisine embodies respect towards the food that we eat, make and grow locally. It should serve as an innovative view of the existing traditions of cooking.
The main focus in the eating habits of a modern Latvian is consuming food according to the nature’s cycles, meaning one should eat what is available that season. But, of course, thanks to modern commodities, that does not mean surviving on potatoes alone during the winter. Instead Latvians are encouraged to consume grains, stews and soups, as well as frozen goods from the summer’s harvest – berries, mushrooms, greens, veggies and so on.

Undoubtedly, the heavy influences of the Soviet occupation left an impression on many things; the sense of national cuisine included. Culinary expert and journalist Signe Meirāne put it simply but clearly, stating: “I do not think we are the only country in the world at a loss of an identity of its national cuisine, but unfortunately we are one of the few who lost it for quite a while and are somehow afraid to regain it. [...] But we should not be because, in all honesty, Latvian cuisine and produce are excellent, proving to ourselves and foreign guests that we have plenty to be proud of.”

From caramelised beets served with hemp oil, to goat cheese and pumpkin salad topped with bilberry, and finished off with bilberry tarts, the modern Latvian cuisine is truly inclusive and respectful of everything that came before it, while maintaining a healthy dose of adventure and ambition. To sum up, the Latvian Chef’s club wrote a manifesto with its members all doing their best to implement their ideals in their kitchens, thus popularising modern but local foods. The main focal point of the manifesto is the manifestation (see what we did there?) of taste, quality and healthy choices. This in turn allows to support local farmers and producers. The manifesto contains ten commandments and serves as the backbone of the Latvian Chef’s club.
As there are no sources of salt in Latvia, back in ancient times it was obtained through trade or barter, and was thus used sparingly. The scarcity was probably also the basis for some myths regarding salt. For instance, if a meal has too much salt added, the cook is in love. But, if salt is spilled on the table or on the floor, there will be a quarrel in the house.

Superstitions aside, food was creatively made more flavoursome through the use of caraway seeds, onions, garlic, dill and white mustard. We admit – food back then must have tasted rather differently. Nowadays, though, even city dwelling Latvians grow their own spices. If only in a flowerpot on the windowsill, including but not limited to basil, thyme, mint, parsley, coriander, oregano and rosemary. When it comes to sweeteners, though, the only thing available for a 1000 years was honey. But that did not necessarily mean Latvians lacked a sweet tooth. For example, there are unbelievably many ways of preparing the Latvian dessert plātsmaize – a delicious tart with fruit slices and berries.

But, as time went on, more and more options became available for seasoning, and now for instance no apple tart, a delicious masterpiece made by practically every grandma in Latvia (and that’s a fact!), would be imaginable without cinnamon. The same goes for powdered sugar on various pastries. When it comes to peppers and other hot spices, though, Latvians tend to be a bit more reserved. Albeit the name for gingerbread or piparkūkas has a direct reference to pepper, and, come Christmas time, the average Latvian can eat a few kilos of the spicy-sweet treat in its raw dough form, the hottest condiment found in the kitchen of most Latvians would probably be Russian mustard. The thing is, we don’t like showing emotion and the occasional spiciness induced tear would probably be written off as a sudden realisation of love for Latvia not an admittance of delicateness when it comes to hot food.

Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice

Left: Latvian top-chef Mārtiņš Piņķis
Below: Garlic serves as an integral part in Latvian kitchens
Layered Rye Bread Dessert

You will need 80-100g (2.8-3.5oz) dry rye bread, 20g (0.7oz) sugar, 15g (0.52oz) butter, 50g (1.75oz) cranberry jam (or any jam of sour berries), 60g (2.1oz) cream and vanilla essence.

Finely grate the rye bread, add half of the sugar and fry in melted butter on the pan, stirring frequently. Allow mixture to cool. Beat cream with remaining sugar and vanilla essence. Layer rye bread, jam and whipped cream in serving dishes, sprinkle rye bread on top and decorate with whipped cream.

Desserts

For ancient Latvians the most popular desserts were probably wild berries and hazelnuts. And wild berries are still all the rage in Latvia. They are bountiful in Latvian forests, and we sure love them. Wild bilberries, raspberries, strawberries – you name it! Latvians like to keep it simple and a traditional childhood recipe consists of pouring fresh bilberries in a bowl, adding milk and a pinch of sugar. If you haven’t tried this simple delicacy, you must!

But as time went on and sugar beets were introduced in Latvia, providing a cheap and stable source of sugar, the availability of more traditional desserts like tarts and pastries increased. And nowadays no visit to grandma’s is imaginable without crepes and strawberry jam, curd cakes, cinnamon and poppy seed buns and the like.
Although the Latvian cuisine as it exists today has a lot of borrowed foods and foreign influences, there are a couple of food items that make our national culinary art truly special.

**Rye Bread**

Latvian rye bread is a staple for most of the population and is one of Latvia’s most popular food ‘souvenirs’. Still made using ancient recipes, Latvian rye bread has been praised in the Gourmet Magazine by its former editor-in-chief Ruth Reichl: “This is powerful stuff that reminds you of why bread is called ‘the staff of life’. I am pretty sure you could live on it alone...” Rich in fibre, vitamins and antioxidants, rye bread most definitely is the monarch of Latvian cuisine, as you will not be able to taste anything quite like it anywhere else in the world.

**Caraway cheese**

Come June 23, many Latvians will make a traditional home-made cheese with caraway seeds for the Summer Solstice festival, known as Jāņi - a night of singing and dancing, beer drinking and jumping over campfires. And although mostly associated with the shortest night of the year, this natural semi-soft cheese is delicious anytime. Plus, it is really easy to make at home.

**Succades**

Although only gaining in popularity recently, succades from high-quality Latvian dried fruits, berries and vegetables made without artificial preservatives colourings or flavourings, have quickly become the local’s first choice of snacks. They feature exquisite flavours like dried rhubarb, quince, black currant, pumpkin and carrot, to name a few.

Left: Making of traditional cheese with caraway seeds before Midsummer or Jāņi celebration

Below: Most popular Latvian food souvenir - rye bread
Mushrooms

If you see a Latvian strolling through the forest with a knife, have no fear, he is just looking for some mushrooms. Come August, these little wonders of the earth become the hottest topic in Latvia. Usually till mid-October. Yeah, we are kind of crazy about them. And harvesting them is our unique way to relax and breathe in the fresh forest air. To our luck, there are countless different types of 'shrooms to be found in the vast Latvian forests.

Mushrooms are used extensively in Latvian cuisine as a delicacy with hundreds of recipes, depending on their specific type. They are also an excellent source of B vitamins and minerals. So what do we do once we cannot eat any more? We pickle, dry and salt them! This way, mushrooms do not disappear from Latvian kitchens throughout the rest of the year.

**Sklandu rauši (vegetable tarts)**

You will need 400-500g (15.75-17.5oz) coarse rye or wheat flour, 200g (7oz) water, 50g (1.75oz) lard, 10g (0.35oz) sugar and salt, 1 egg. Potato filling: 250g (8.75oz) potato, 25g (0.875oz milk, 15g (0.525oz) butter, salt. Carrot filling: 350-400g (12.25 -14oz) carrot, 50 g (1.75oz) sugar, salt, 25g (0.875oz) sour cream, 2 eggs, 15g (0.525oz) flour.

Sift flour onto a pastry board, mix in lard with your fingers. Heat water to 20-25°C, add sugar and salt and knead into the flour mixture until a stiff dough forms that can be easily rolled. Roll dough into a sheet of 2-3mm thickness, cut out round shapes 10-15cm in diameter. Fold up edges of each round to a height of 1-1.5cm, and place on a greased baking tray. Fill each case with potato filling and then carrot filling. Brush with beaten egg and bake in a moderate oven for 10-15 minutes, until the top has browned.

**Potato filling:** boil peeled potatoes in salted water, drain, and mash through a sieve. Add boiled milk and butter and mix well.

**Carrot filling:** boil unpeeled carrots, then peel, mash through a sieve. Add salt, sugar, sour cream and flour and mix well.
Sap and Tap – Latvian drinks

With all this talk about food, one can get rather thirsty. Well, Latvians have got you covered! As with most things in Latvian cuisine, we like to keep our drinks simple and natural, and you are sure to enjoy them.

Water
Yeah, you read that right – just plain water. Latvia is a land rich in clean, pristine, natural springs and rivers. And our water is as refreshing and rejuvenating as can be. So, when going for a stroll in Latvian forests, make sure to bring a cup or a glass with you – a sip of ice-cold spring water will surely be just what the doctor ordered. Speaking of which, a lot of springs have healing properties and have been considered to be sacred by ancient Latvians.

Rūgušpiens or clabber
Not a drink that will win any food beauty contests for sure, nevertheless, clabber is still very refreshing and is enjoyed throughout rural Latvia. Since the preparation of clabber is not an exact science, no two will taste alike. Rich in probiotics like its eastern cousin kefir, the drink is highly beneficial for your immune and digestive system.

Herbal teas
The tradition of gathering herbal teas in Latvia dates back millennia, and is a craft passed down from one generation to the next. Sure, we have our more simple picks of camomile, peppermint and linden blossom, but to truly experience the effect of virgin nature combined with ancient knowledge, one should consult herbal specialists who often have very intricate recipes for most of the common ailments of the modern man. The efficacy of these concoctions is the main reason even die-hard city residents reach for their tea rather than a pill at the first signs of illness.
Moonshine

If one would want definite proof of Latvian ingenuity, they should look no further than the art of moonshining. Although the precise time of the introduction of Latvians to hard liquors is unclear, it is evident that the craft is several centuries old. How else would Latvians have managed to distil the “brandavīns”, as it is locally called, from grains, potatoes, sugar, flour, even peas and jams! Although not readily obtainable in Rīga’s supermarkets, Latvian moonshine can be found most elsewhere with our recommendation being “šmakovka” from the Latgale region – well worth the trip.

Beer

Ah, if only one could transmit the taste that is Latvian beer through words alone! We would get a whole lot more tourists, that is for sure! The thing is, we have done it before – in our ancient folksongs called Dainas, many of which are dedicated to “beer – my elder brother” and celebrating the brew’s bitterness and sweetness. Latvians are indeed and have always been a beer drinking nation with many a recipe to spare. From traditional lagers to the misty and heavy, unfiltered variety – modern Latvian beers have something for everyone. If you get the chance (usually only possible by acquainting knowledgeable locals) try and get a taste of a Latvian homebrew, they are delicious.

Birch sap

If you see Latvians in March walking around with a big drill and a hammer, fret not. They are probably just looking for a suitable birch tree to drain some sweet, delicious sap. Now, do not freeze, if you have not tried it! The specific, but vital and pleasant flavour, will surely leave you wanting more. And we have more. Usually stored away in cellars where the sap is fermented into a light, sparkling drink – ideal as a refreshing pick-me-up on hot summer days. Although the sugar content of the sap is rather low, Latvians have managed to turn it into wine – a perfect souvenir, if you ask us.

Juices

Pressed from apples, redcurrant, buckthorn, carrots, beets, pumpkins, or anything else imaginable, Latvians sure love juices. Either served fresh or stored conserved in countless glass jars in the basement, juices from Latvian gardens are sure to give a jolt of the summer’s energy to a tired body in times of need. They also serve as great ingredients for desserts, jellos and other fun stuff.
Ancient ways in modern days

Latvian chefs work hard each and every single day to refine their mastery in preparing traditional dishes with new nuances, tastes and emotions added to the food they serve. Emotions are usually the one thing that defines the pleasure of eating. Because in this excitement-packed world, there is nothing new in dining by a table lifted by a crane high above the city’s skyline or bringing your blind date to dine in a restaurant set in complete darkness where the waters use night vision goggles. These extremes combined with the mundane day-to-day lunch routines inspire Latvians to sometimes just let go, leave for the countryside and get back to basics. And there is no better way to do that than to make a bonfire on a river bank, or kindle the stove in your grandmother’s kitchen. Trust us, at moments like these, no Michelin dish can compare to the taste of a freshly caught trout, cleaned and cooked right there by the river, using just a knife and some salt and pepper. And what better garnish to go with it than a potato straight from the furrow thrown into the hot ashes of the fire. It is at these very moments when the ancient Latvian awakens in us, and suddenly the yuppie marketing director of a big company becomes a primeval chef with the skill to feed an entire camping party. Just give Latvians some basic ingredients, and we are good to go - preparing a perfect and healthy meal with no restaurants or supermarkets in sight. No fuss, just making it happen...