



HOMEMADE LUTENITSA (PEPPER, TOMATO SPERAD)

ДОМАШНА ЛЮТЕНИЦА

Makes 4-6 (8oz) jars

EQUIPMENT:

- 4-6 (8oz) jars with new metal lids
- Canning funnel
- Jar lifter (optional)
- Large cooking pot (at least 5" deep)

INGREDIENTS:

- 10 Roma tomatoes (or 8 Roma, and 2 heirloom)
- 10-12 Italian sweet peppers
- 1-2 tbsp sugar
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 4-5 garlic cloves, mashed
- 3 large carrots, peeled and boiled
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 3 tbsp sunflower oil
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1/2 - 2/3 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley



PHOTOGRAPHY AND STYLING BY IGLIKA PETROVA

DIRECTIONS:

Wash jars and lids and let them dry.

Tomatoes

Wash tomatoes and cut them in half lengthwise. Take a shallow (pasta type) bowl, or a plate, place a box grater over (or inside) the bowl so the bowl can easily collect the tomato juices. Hold a tomato half cut side towards the box grater (see photo) and grate the tomato half on the large holes of the grater until the only part left from the tomato in your hand is the tomato skin. Discard the tomato skin and repeat with the rest of the tomatoes. You might have to empty the bowl when full of tomato juices a few times in a large cooking pot. When all the tomatoes are grated and juiced in the cooking pot, add the salt and the sugar, place the pot over high-heat and bring to a boil, lower the heat to a medium-high heat and let the water to evaporate naturally, about 2 hours. It's important to keep the heat to a medium-height for the first hour during the cooking so the water can evaporate quickly. Stir tomatoes frequently, and after about 1.5 hours lower the heat to a low-heat to avoid tomato splashes over the stove top. Tomato sauce is thick enough when it is reduced to 1/3 of its original volume. Tested for thickness by running a spoon through the sauce, it should leave deep grooves. Turn heat off, place the lid on the pot to keep the tomato sauce warm, and set aside until you have the rest of your ingredients for the Lutenitsa all cooked, pureed and ready to go. If the rest of your ingredients are pureed and ready, keep the tomato sauce on the stove top on low and follow the directions under "Assembly" below.

Peppers

While the tomato sauce is simmering and thickening, wash and dry the Italian peppers. Arrange on a rimmed baking sheet (work in batches if needed), leaving at least 1/2 inch space around each pepper. Place peppers under the broiler (alternatively you can use the grill) and roast until their skin blisters and turns black. Check peppers every 3-5 minutes to make sure they are not burning. Turn peppers over when a side is blistered and with dark spots. Roast until all sides of the peppers are blistered and with black spots, 25-40 min depending on your oven type and broiler settings. Remove peppers from the oven and place in a large pot or bowl and cover tightly with a lid. Repeat with the remaining peppers, if any. Let peppers cool completely, the steam in the bowl/pot will loosen their skin. The skins should peel away off of the peppers easily when cooled.

Peel the pepper skins, remove the stem and the seeds. Seeds can be easily removed if the roasted peppers are cut open and the seeds are gently scraped with a spoon or back of a knife. Do not run peppers under water to clean, you'll lose most of the roasted flavor that you worked so hard to get.

Assembly

Place as many peppers as you can fit in your food processor (using an immersion blender works well too). Pulse a few times until peppers are pureed but still a bit chunky. Place the pureed peppers in the cooking pot with the thickened tomato sauce. Add the boiled carrots to the food processor and puree until smooth. Add pureed carrots to the pot with the tomato and peppers puree. Add the mashed garlic and balsamic vinegar to the pot with the rest of the ingredients (hold the parsley until the end), mix everything really well and add more salt, or balsamic vinegar per taste. At this point, if your mixture looks a bit runny or not quite thick, turn the heat on and simmer the mixture on very low heat for additional 10-15 minutes, stirring frequently, until the mixture looks thick enough. Add the chopped parsley, stir well and taste (I tend to love my Lutenitsa with lots of parsley, so I always add more, but you don't have to)

Canning

Use dinner plates or pasta bowls if serving individually, or a large serving platter if serving as an appetizer for a group. Take a clean jar, place the canning funnel on top, and fill the jar using a spoon. Make sure the jar is filled only to the point where the jar neck starts, don't fill it all the way to the top. Wipe clean the jar top, otherwise it might not create a solid vacuum with the lid. Close the jar with a lid and make sure the lid is tight. Repeat the process with the remaining jars until no Lutenitsa is left. Sometimes the Lutenitsa will not be enough to fill one last full jar, in that case place the mixture in a smaller jar, or just enjoy the fresh leftover Lutenitsa with some toasted bread.

Working in batches if necessary, place the closed Lutenitsa jars, standing up with lids up, in a large pot. Make sure that the pot is deep enough; you need at least 2 inches of space above the top of the jars. Fit as many jars as you can but make sure the jars are not touching each other. Fill the pot with water that is close to the temperature of the filled jars. Water should cover the jar lids by at least an inch. Bring the pot to a boil, lower to med-heat and simmer bubbling for 10 minutes (start timing after the water starts boiling). During the 10 minutes of canning make sure the water is bubbling but not super aggressive and splashing. Check the jars from time to time to make sure no jar is leaking.

After the 10 minutes of canning, pour the water from the pot carefully, it will be really hot! If some water is still left at the bottom of the pot that is ok, the most important thing is to be careful when pouring the hot water from a pot filled with jars. Let jars sit for 10 min to cool off slightly. Using a jar lifter or a thick kitchen towel, carefully remove jars from the pot and place them on a kitchen towel. Repeat the sterilizing process with the remaining jars, if any.

Cool the jars completely and store in a cool place. Lutenitsa can be stored for up to 1 year. Refrigerate opened Lutenitsa jars, and consume within 10 days of opening.

Enjoy Lutenitsa by spreading over a buttered thick-crust bread toast, and top with feta or goat cheese (Bulgarian style). Spread on burgers and sandwiches, or enjoy as a dipping sauce for French fries.