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# Pierogi

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So you want to know how to make pierogies? **Good for you!** Pierogi making is an act of love and each cook has her or his own way way of making them. Fillings can be sweet or savory. Do you slather with sour cream or butter? Boil and fry or just boil them? Make them by hand the old-fashioned way or bring it into the 21st century. These are all interesting questions and I cannot presume to answer them all. But this is a good starting place and you can explore other resources to expand your pierogi making expertise later.

Oh, wait, you don't know what a pierogi is??? Every culture has a food like pierogi – you take dough and wrap it around some filling. Ravioli, pasties, dumplings, pot stickers, runzas – it's all the same idea. A pierogi is the Polish version. It's an everyday meal and a special feast all rolled into the most amazing delicacy. Enjoy!

My mother's family immigrated from Italy, my father's from Poland. While pierogies are quintessentially Polish, we take the pasta dough recipe from the Italian side of the family.



In “olden days”, everything was done by hand. Happily 21st century technology allows us some labor-saving options. This tutorial will include ways to cheat to make the process easier.

### 1.1 What you need – minimally:

- Rolling pin
- Biscuit cutter
- Large flat counter space
- Cutting board and knife
- Slotted spoon
- Masher
- Colander
- Small bowls
- Large pans
- One or more fillings
- flour, eggs, salt, water, olive oil

### 1.2 What you need – 21st century cheats

- Cuisinart or other food processor
- Pasta machine
- Pasta machine motor – you won’t even have to crank!

- Sandwich cutter – I have a Pampered Chef Cut N Seal

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### Making the dough

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Good pierogies start with good pasta dough. Not too moist, not too dry. Use a good flour.

#### 2.1 Making dough the old-fashioned way

For the dough, use a ratio of:

1 c flour : 1 egg : 1 eggshell olive oil : 1 eggshell water : a little salt (let's call it 1/4 tsp) Add additional water as needed to get the dough to the right consistency. For best result, fill a bowl with water and take out the eggs and let them sit out for a few hours so they are closer to room temperature.

Growing up in a pre-food processor world, we made the dough on a clean countertop. Sprinkle some flour around your dough area and measure out the flour. I suggest starting with 3 cups of flour. If you like, you can sift the flour and salt together over the counter. Now make a well in the center of the flour (think *making a moat of flour*). In the center of the well, add the eggs. Keep one of the halves of a cracked egg – a nice one. That is your measuring device for the liquids. I actually have no idea of the translation from *eggshell* to *tablespoon*. Add the olive oil and water to the well. If it's a humid day, you might want to start with only two of each instead of three. If it's dry, stick with the full 1:1 ratio.

**Carefully**, with a fork, whisk together the eggs, water, and oil in the center of the flour well. After the liquids are mixed, you slowly start scraping the inside of the flour well to bring the flour into the liquid mix. Keep slowly pulling in the flour into the liquid and mixing. Eventually, you will get to something about the consistency of pancake batter with a little bit left in the flour walls. At that point, get your hands dirty and start kneading the dough together. Knead until the dough is smooth, not too sticky, not too dry – dough should be *as smooth as a baby's bottom* according to family wisdom.

When you are finished, lightly moisten a tea towel and keep the dough in it to stay moist while making the pierogi.

Note: if you are a total klutz, you might want to use a bowl to mix two cups of flour with the liquids and then knead in the final cup on the countertop. It can be a catastrophe if the flour wall is breached.

## 2.2 Making dough the easy way

Use a Cuisinart (or other) food processor. You can use the dough blade or the everyday metal blade. Put the salt and flour in the food processor bowl and pulse to mix. Use a small pitcher or measuring cup with a spout for the eggs, oil, and water. Start the food processor and slowly pour in the liquids, pausing a few seconds after each egg drops in so it can get thoroughly mixed. Let the food processor do its thing to knead the dough. It will usually take a minute or so for all the dough to get thoroughly kneaded. It's done when it forms a nice ball of dough in the center. If there are scattered bits of dough on the walls, you may need to add more water. If the dough is sticky when you pull it out, sprinkle some flour on the countertop and knead in extra flour until the dough is smooth.

Note: The first batch of dough is always off somehow – too dry or too wet. Don't worry, the second batch will be perfect.

There are lots of different types of fillings you can make. Here are the ones that we use in my family:

### 3.1 Potato and Sauerkraut

The original family recipe is:

Makes 400 pierogi

- 5 large cans Sauerkraut
- 10 lbs potatoes – peeled
- 2 to 4 lbs onions
- 3 to 4 sticks butter or oleo – enough to brown the onions
- 6 to 10 slices American cheese – to bind together the mashed potatoes
- salt, pepper

Okay, not everyone needs 400 pierogi in their life so a useful rule of thumb is 1 lb potatoes to 10 oz of sauerkraut. Use a good crisp sauerkraut (not Libby's and not the one with caraway seeds in it).

Potatoes: Peel, cube, boil and mash the potatoes with salt and pepper only.

Sauerkraut: Bring to a boil then lower the temperature and simmer until tender, maybe 15-20 minutes. Pour the sauerkraut into a colander and allow to drain and cool. After it is cooled enough to handle, you want to squeeze as much moisture out of the sauerkraut as possible. One of the best ways to do this is pick up a handful at a time, make it into a ball and *squeeze*. Repeat until you don't get any more water out of it.

Onions: Chop onion and brown in a frying pan. This actually takes quite a while over medium to medium-high heat. You really want them brown. For me, growing up making pierogi every year at Christmas-time, the smell of browning onions is redolent of holidays and family and everything wonderful.

Add the sauerkraut and onions to the potatoes. Use the cheese to bind the mix together. Taste and adjust the seasonings as needed. The onions make it sweeter and there is a balance between sauerkraut and potatoes. If you have ever had the really heavy potato and cheese pierogi at a local fair, these are not like those. The sauerkraut makes it much lighter.

### 3.2 Blueberry Filling

2 cups of blueberries is approx 16 pierogi. Frozen blueberries are perfect for this. Put the blueberries in a pan and flavor with lemon juice, honey or cinnamon. Cook down over low heat. When they start to break down, you can mash them in the pan to help the process along. It will take a while (as in an hour or so) to cook them down and get rid of some of most of the moisture. Some people like to add dried blueberries which absorb the moisture and helps the process. When most of the moisture is gone, remove from heat and thicken with fine breadcrumbs. Do this filling a day ahead so it has time to set in the fridge.

### 3.3 Others

I can add others or feel free to clone the repo and add your own!

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## Making the Pierogi

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Now let's put them together!

### 4.1 The old-fashioned way

Roll out the dough by hand. Exhausting.

### 4.2 The 21st century way

Follow the instructions to set up the pasta machine motor. Cut a thick piece of dough, roll it out enough that it will go through the widest pasta machine setting. Use the pasta maker to roll the dough to an appropriate thickness. This will involve running the piece of dough through the pasta machine, lowering the width setting each time. Typically the appropriate thickness will be one or two settings away from the thinnest dough. If you hold up the round of dough and it starts to stretch a lot, the dough is probably too thin. When you determine the best thickness using your machine, **write that down** somewhere, maybe on the pasta machine box. Otherwise, it becomes a family tradition to argue about the correct pierogi dough thickness setting. On my machine, setting 5 is too thick but setting 6 is too thin so I run it through setting 5 twice and it's perfect.

Use a biscuit cutter to cut out rounds of dough from your long piece of dough.

Have a bowl of water ready to help seal the pierogi. Have your filling available with small spoons. Dip your finger in the water and lightly run it around the outside edge of the dough circle – this will help with sealing the pierogi. Put a small spoonful of filling in the top half of the circle and fold the bottom half up and over. Now you need to seal the pierogi. Do that by pinching the edges together but it's not just squeezing them together. There is a pinch and slide type of motion to blend together and seal the two pieces of dough. You can cheat and use a sandwich sealer to start the process.

Set aside on a floured tea towel until you have a batch to cook.



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## Cooking the Pierogi

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Bring a large pot of water to boil. Drop in about eight pierogies in the boiling water. Cook for 2-3 minutes. When they float up to the top, they should be done. Take them out of the water with the slotted spoon and drain in the colander. If you are making a lot of pierogi, you will want to keep that pot of water on low heat so you can bring it quickly to a boil when you need to cook another batch of pierogi. Change the water if you are switching to a different type of filling.

### 5.1 Frying the Pierogi

After boiling, put them in a frying pan or electric griddle with some butter and fry them until they are lightly browned.

### 5.2 Saving the Pierogi for Tomorrow

To store the pierogi for a short while, layer them in a plastic container. Brush the bottom of the container with melted butter and then put a thin layer of melted butter on the top of each **boiled** pierogi. Separate each layer with plastic wrap. This will make it easier to unstick

### 5.3 Freezing the Pierogi

If you want to save some pierogi for later, line a cookie sheet with parchment paper and place the **uncooked** pierogi on them. Put in the freezer for several hours until hard enough to throw all of them in a plastic bag.



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### How to serve the Pierogi

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#### **6.1 Melted Butter**

Serve with melted butter to pour over them.

#### **6.2 Sour Cream**

Top with a dollop of sour cream.

#### **6.3 White Sauce**

To make the white sauce, make a roux of 2 T butter and 2 T flour. Add 1/2 cup cooked diced onions, add 1 c milk and 1/2 c sour cream, whisking it all together. Heat over medium heat until thickened. Pour over the pierogi.



## 7.1 Gluten-Free

- Add gluten-free dough recipe and gluten-free-friendly advice

## 7.2 Lactose-Free

- Add lactose-free recipes and advice



## CHAPTER 8

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### Indices and tables

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