

# Grate Borsch

## Ingredients

Serves 6–8 (with leftovers)

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| 1 onion, roughly chopped   | 3 litres vegetable or chicken stock                |
| 2 garlic cloves, roughly chopped                                   | juice of ½ lemon                                   |
| 2 tablespoons olive oil  | salt and black pepper                              |
| 700g cauliflower (½ large one, or 1 small), or 2 heads of broccoli | ⅓ cup (80ml) sauerkraut or pickle brine (optional) |
| ½ small cabbage (or ¼ of a larger one)                             |  |
| 2 carrots, shredded  |  |
| 2 celery stalks, thinly sliced, tops reserved for garnishing       |  |
| 2 beetroot (400g), shredded  |  |

### To serve

- dill sprigs
- sour cream or crème fraîche
- grated garlic
- croutons or thinly sliced baguette

## Method

Whack the onion and garlic into a big saucepan with the olive oil. Let them start to sizzle over medium heat, then pop the lid on and allow the onion to sweat away in its own juices for 5–10 minutes until translucent, stirring occasionally.

Meanwhile, turn the cauliflower upside down and cut into the core at an angle, so that the florets all come off with a pull. Now pull them apart until they're bite-sized. Set aside.

Once the onion has sweated down and is fragrant, add the cabbage, carrot, celery and beetroot. Pour in the stock, then supplement with extra water (preferably filtered) until your pan of choice is three-quarters full. Squeeze in the lemon juice (to keep the brightness of the beetroot) and add a good pinch of salt.

Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for another 10 minutes. Add the cauliflower and cook until the shredded beetroot is easily bitten through, but not mushy, and the cauliflower softens slightly; keeping some “bite” here is the key for both flavour and texture.

Season to taste with the brine, if using, as well as salt and freshly ground black pepper. Garnish with dill and the reserved celery leaves, and serve with sour cream, grated garlic and croutons – or what you will!



### TIP

This is one dish where *schmaltz* (chicken or duck fat) enriches the flavour in a most delightful way. You could also add a little butter when sweating the onions, or a spoonful of jam for sweetness.





Tastes Like Home edited by **Anastasia Safioleas** IMAGES AND RECIPE FROM *IN PRAISE OF VEG* BY ALICE ZASLAVSKY PHOTOS BY BEN DEARNLEY



## Alice says...

**C**oming from the Soviet Union, our family kitchen was always full of frugality and innovation. I'd even go so far as to say that my mum, Frada, is a cooking hack *kween*. She's a very thrifty cook because she had to be, using every last skerrick of an ingredient, and not letting a single slick of flavour go down the sink. She'll save the water from boiling corn on the cob to bulk up a stock, or harvest the schmaltz (or drippings) from a roast for frying later.

Borsch was there for us almost every day when I was growing up. Ingredients were cheap and it was easy to make big batches – something that Mum could whip up on a Sunday night, then set and forget for the week ahead. I'd always relish the chance to go food shopping with my parents – it was (and continues to be!) one of my favourite weekend activities; dawdling among the aisles, picking up a bargain on bulk-buy seasonal produce. My babushka Zina taught me to shop the corners of the green grocers, where the mangy bits were on special, because once you got them home and trimmed off any slime and bruises, they'd be good as new.

It was this kind of knobbly veg that ended up piled into our biggest pot, the borsch bubbling away until everything was fork-tender and dyed magenta. All that my big brother Stan and I had to do when we got home from school was heat it up. I'd speedily scoff, washing down bites of garlic-rubbed rye bread, splashing splodges onto my school uniform in the hustle to get back to *Widget the World Watcher* on the telly. I suppose it was a little touchpoint from Mum too: "eat up, do your homework, we'll be home soon." These days, she'll leave a batch for us in the fridge so that my husband Nick, daughter Hazel and I eat a ladleful or so each with whatever's for dinner, to make it stretch the week.

It's no surprise that the stories here, like mine, almost always speak to the chefs' and cooks' childhoods. The food we eat in these formative years stays with us for life – for better or worse. Memories of overboiled brassicas, chalky peas and dish-water corn on the cob are hard to shift when they're ingrained in people's psyches like smoke stains in the wallpaper.

That's why I wrote *In Praise of Veg*, I suppose. Vegetables were such a joyous part of my childhood – and yet such a chore for many. I'd love to share that joy, to encourage people to see vegetables differently, to give a whirl to new ways of cooking that aren't a bother or an afterthought. To help a new generation to grow up without the baggage of bad beets, maligned mushrooms or wombok wobbles. It won't happen overnight, but every tiny taste helps. Perhaps you might like to start with a ladleful of borsch with dinner, too.

*IN PRAISE OF VEG* BY ALICE ZASLAVSKY IS OUT NOW.