



Zacusca from Romania

– George and Larisa



Description of area

Romania is far from the open sea so experiences a continental temperate climate, similar to ours but with warmer summers and colder winters. It has the Carpathian mountains, many lakes and the Danube Delta as well as the Black sea.

Background to George and Larisa

George and his daughter Larisa come from near Bucharest, the capital of Romania. Where they lived, they grew and made all of their own produce including vegetables, fruit and cheese.

“When you go back in the garden in Romania and pick up a tomato, you just wipe it off from dust and then you bite from it and you feel like oh my god!”

Crops grown in the region

All the Mediterranean vegetable crops such as peppers, aubergines and tomatoes will grow outside in the summer months.

“Home-made zacusca, it’s a Romanian stew. It’s made from... mainly onion, tomatoes, and then you boil it with salt and pepper and you make it in a paste that you eat on bread... it’s very healthy and very, very good...”

Growing and Preserving

George arrived more recently and has taken to growing a range of herbs such as loveage, chillis and black radishes on his balcony. They also store a lot of their produce preserved in jars.

“He eats onions like we eat apples! I’m not joking. I stand next to him and I’m crying while he eats an onion and he enjoys it as well!”



Preparing Zacusca

Romanians have a tradition of keeping produce preserved in jars over the winter. This is a good way of using excess produce from gluts over the summer and it reduces the need to freeze or refrigerate produce which consumes a great deal of energy. It is important to use sterilised jars and heat the produce thoroughly so that it is sealed within a vacuum in the jars.

Zacusca is a traditional Romanian spread. It is often made from roasted peppers and aubergines but other surplus vegetables can be used too.

Ingredients

4 large aubergines

4 peppers

3 onions

4 tablespoons oil

4 tablespoons tomato puree

salt to taste

Steps

1. Roast the aubergines and peppers over a flame until the skins start to crack and blister.
2. Remove the skins from the peppers and aubergines and the seeds from the peppers over a tray. This is time consuming!
3. Peel and chop the onion into small pieces and lightly fry in the oil until golden.
4. Add the peppers, aubergines and tomato puree.
5. Simmer for 10 min.
6. Transfer to heated sterilised jars, clean the rims, and fasten with sterilised lids.
7. Place the jars in a large pan of boiling water up to the lids and boil for 20 minutes.

The mixture will store unrefrigerated until opened. It can be used in cooking or just eaten with bread. Many other vegetables such as peppers, tomato puree or pumpkin pieces can be stored in jars to keep a store of produce over the winter.

