



# The Culinary Art of Hungary

- by - LOUIS SZATHMARY



## AH, SWEET CHRISTMAS!

I arrived in the United States right after Christmas — on the 27th of December — in 1951. So I had been living here for a full year before I experienced my first American Christmas.

In October and November, I began to feel much more at home than before. But right after Thanksgiving, when the loudspeakers started to blare "Jingle Bells" and other Christmas tunes, and Rudolf the Red-nosed Reindeer looked at me night after night from the TV, I felt homesick. I missed the more dignified European Christmas.

It took a few years before I caught up with the American Christmas spirit. I started to appreciate American Christmas customs, which were, I am sure, no more strange to me than our Hungarian Christmas customs would be to any American transplanted to my native country.

It has been very difficult to hold on to the Hungarian Christmas traditions in the past 35 years. Among the few customs I have kept most are food-related. I couldn't possibly imagine Christmas without the ham, the poppyseed and walnut pastries, and the fish in aspic on Christmas Eve.

Whether I want to or not, I seem to be getting more and more away from the old customs. But one tradition I have clung to through all those years, and intend to keep for years to come, is the preparation of a pastry dessert that I used to help my grandmother with as a little boy.

At first my help consisted of licking the bowls after the three mixtures for the Christmas bars were made. Then as I grew, I had the task of shelling and grinding the walnuts, bringing in the eggs from the barn. Later I added beating the eggs (in our kitchen, electricity was used only for the light bulb). Eventually I was given even more responsibilities, such as taking care of the fire in the oven, spreading glaze on the bars, and even cutting them into small squares.

I have worked out this recipe almost to perfection. People have asked me for the recipe so many times, I have demonstrated it so often on television and have included it in one of my cookbooks, that I really feel that it cannot go wrong.

One asset of this dessert is that you can make it as long as a couple of weeks before Christmas. It will keep very well in the freezer, and when served will be as fresh as if you had baked it that day.

You can cut the bars into squares, an inch or even smaller, so they will not fill you up but will make a wonderful accompaniment to a glass of champagne or a cup of coffee.

I can offer the same advice that I give with any recipe. Read it twice before you start. Be sure that you have all the ingredients on hand.

Enjoy a Merry Christmas!

## HUNGARIAN CHRISTMAS BARS

16 to 24 pieces

### *First Mixture:*

- 1/2 cup butter
- 1 3/4 cups powdered sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2 1/2 cups ground walnuts
- 4 tablespoons bread crumbs
- 3 tablespoons cocoa
- 7 egg whites

### *Second Mixture:*

- 4 egg yolks
- 1 cup powdered sugar

### *Third Mixture:*

- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons cocoa
- 1/4 cup water
- 5 tablespoons butter

1. Preheat oven to 375° F.
2. For the first mixture, cream together the butter and half the powdered sugar. Add egg yolks and vanilla.
3. In a separate bowl, mix together the ground nuts, bread crumbs, and cocoa.
4. Whip egg whites and remaining powdered sugar until stiff peaks form.
5. Alternately fold the butter-egg mixture and the nut-cocoa mixture into the egg whites.
6. Pour batter into a 9 by 13 inch pan which has been greased and lined with waxed paper. Bake 15 to 20 minutes.
7. Raise oven temperature to 425° F. Whip the egg yolks from the second mixture with the powdered sugar until lemon-colored and light. Pour over the baked layer and bake for an additional 15 minutes. Cool.
8. Prepare a chocolate glaze as follows from the

third mixture: Combine sugar, cocoa, and water and cook over low heat for 5 to 6 minutes.

9. Remove from heat and keep stirring from 2 to 3 minutes, then add the butter.

10. Pour the glaze over the top of the baked chocolate bars.

11. When cool, cut into squares or rectangles.

When the bars are cut into pieces, they freeze extremely well wrapped first in plastic wrap, then in aluminum foil, or wrapped in plastic wrap and then placed in a tight-fitting plastic container. They defrost in about an hour at room temperature if cut into 1 1/2 to 2-inch squares.

The ground walnuts should be a fine bread-crumbs or flour-like substance, the same type of nut flour mentioned in other recipes. For this you need a European-type nut grinder that grinds the nuts into a fine powder without pressing the oils out of the nutmeats.



**WISHING YOU ALL A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A  
VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR**

