

## WAS ESSEN DIE DEUTSCHEN? (Knödel)

What do the German eat? (dumplings)

**dumpling: der Knödel, die Knödel  
der Kloß, die Klösse**

### Dampfnudeln—steamed dumplings savory and sweet

counterpart in Bavaria—and the Bavarians backed down, at least for the moment. Although some of the steam went out of the debate, the pot of competing claims continues to simmer on the back burner in both regions.

Some sources say that the first published recipe for this type of dumpling appeared in a German cookbook in 1811, where the dish was identified as “Bavarian Dampfnudel.” However, the Pfälzers have a longer historic claim. Legend says that during the Thirty Years’ War between Catholics and Protestants in Europe (1618 to 1648), a Swedish cavalry squadron arrived in the small town of Freckenfeld in Germany’s Pfalz-land. The Swedish captain demanded a large amount of money from the citizens, or his troops would plunder the town and kill its inhabitants. When he learned that the town’s mayor was Lutheran, like the Swedes, the officer tempered his demand and offered to spare Freckenfeld if his hungry soldiers were treated well there. A local baker and his wife came to the rescue. Using only their supplies of flour, water, yeast, and salt, they made one thousand two hundred eighty-six large steamed dumplings—one for each soldier—and tarted them up with a big pot of sauce spiked with the local white wine. The soldiers’ bellies were filled, and the town was saved.

That event is commemorated in a double archway in Freckenfeld, the *Dampfnudeltor*, constructed of red sandstone and decorated with one thousand two hundred eighty-six carved round bumps representing those historic dumplings. (Another similar, single-arch *Dampfnudeltor* is located in the nearby village of Kan-

del.) Freckenfeld also holds an annual *Dampfnudel* festival to celebrate the role of these dumplings in saving the town. And *Dampfnudeln* with white wine sauce (*Woissos*, in the Pfälzer dialect) are a popular food sold at the many wine festivals held every year throughout the entire region.

Whereas the Bavarians tend to prefer sweet *Dampfnudeln* cooked in milk, the Pfälzers like their dumplings savory, steam-poached in a mixture of salted water and butter or oil. After the water has evaporated, the *Dampfnudeln* are left in the pot for a short time while the remaining hot fat forms a crisp, golden-brown, slightly salty crust on the bottom. (That’s the tricky part about making them.)

Known as *Pälzer Dambnudle* (or *Pälzer Hawwedambnudle*) in the local dialect, these savory dumplings in the Pfalz are customarily eaten as a main dish, accompanied by mushrooms or vegetables (asparagus, carrots, peas, kohlrabi) swaddled in béchamel sauce. Or they can be served with chicken or pork ragout, beef goulash, Sauerbraten, meat gravy, or sauerkraut. Unadorned *Dampfnudeln* are also a traditional side dish for a bowl of potato or vegetable soup. Even *Dampfnudeln* garnished with a sweeter wine sauce or vanilla sauce are considered legitimate main dishes for lunch, as I discovered on a recent trip to the Pfalz. And the Pfälzers overlap with their neighbors to the east when they eat their own savory-steamed *Dampfnudeln* accompanied by applesauce, berry sauce, or fruit compote.

In the February/March 2003 issue of *German Life*, I wrote about the Bavarian version of *Dampfnudel*, with

a recipe for making these dumplings by hand, the old-fashioned way. (See “Dampfnudel: This Dumpling Is No Wet Noodle,” in the February/March 2003 issue.) At German supermarkets you can also buy packaged *Dampfnudel* mixes and frozen *Dampfnudeln* ready to heat and eat. Many cooks now take advantage of these convenience foods because *Dampfnudeln* can be tricky to make from scratch. The difficulty lies in the last stage of steam-poaching, when the liquid has mostly evaporated and the fat is supposed to form a crust on the bottom. But wait just a minute too long, and you’ll end up with a burned pot and all your *Dampfnudeln* stuck to it.

With contemporary cooks in mind, I’ve developed an easier *Dampfnudel* recipe that uses a standard bread machine for the initial mixing, kneading, and rising of the dough. Then I cook the dumplings on a rack in a steamer, and finish them off in a skillet to produce the nice crispy crust. Traditionalists in the Pfalz might well cry, “Foul!”—but my modernized technique produces a creditable *Dampfnudel* without risking the life of your favorite pot.

If your interest in these big dumplings leads you to search for additional recipes, don’t be fooled by the oven-baked examples with brown tops that you sometimes see identified as *Dampfnudeln* on the Internet. Those are actually *Buchteln* or *Rohrnudeln*, baked breads more like American dinner rolls. The top and sides of a true *Dampfnudel*—from the Pfalz to Bavaria to Bohemia—should be nearly as white as freshly fallen snow.