



## SUVALKIJA REGION

Introduction: Suvalkija (Sūduva) is a region located in the south-southwestern part of Lithuania (without Lazdijai district). The wide variety of dishes – from Lithuanian sausage (*skilandis*) to *putra* – could be seen on the dining table of the inhabitants of Suvalkija region. A large part of the country's specialties – exceptionally tasting smoked meat, potato dumplings, potato sausages and other – later spread in Lithuania, as well as a dialect of Suvalkija region which became a common language.

In Suvalkija region, the potato pancakes "*bandos*" on a dried cabbage leaf were among the most popular dishes. The housewives baked this simple meal in an oven.

After the serfdom people gradually began to have better lives and there was an opportunity to eat more varied and better food. The fashion to drink tea, coffee with bread and butter or fried eggs, instead of soup or porridge during breakfast was taken from the landowners. More and more often, instead of the boiled meat in soup, meat rolls, beaten meat and other meat dishes appeared on a dining table. And, of course, sausages, Lithuanian sausage *skilandis*, must be mentioned. Suvalkija region was especially famous for the latter all over Europe. So, let's take a step back...

Peasants that lived in the fertile region of Suvalkija were more likely to eat meat than the residents of other regions. The traditional dish of this region is beetroot soup with Lithuanian sausage *skilandis*. Beetroot soup is nothing special, but *skilandis* deserves more attention. Inhabitants of Suvalkija region used only ham meat and hard flitch to make it. The ingredients were chopped, salted and pepper was added. The meat prepared this way for *skilandis* was tucked into a well-washed pig's stomach preventing any air gap. Tied product was cold-smoked in a special wooden cabinet mostly made of willow, to which the smoke from the chimney entered.

Similarly, a "*kindzelis*" was produced, but it was made from the pig bladder. It was usually cut during the period of potato digging, while *skilandis* was cut during the period of rye harvesting and after storing it for more than one year. *Skilandis* that was produced during the pre-war period in Suvalkija region had also reached eaters of the Western Europe. The region was also famous for its smoked sausages and bacon flitch. Still, people from outside Suvalkija region are looking for meat products, believing that they are the most delicious here – all the old traditions have been preserved.

Women of Suvalkija region used to cook greasy meat dishes – meat jelly, pig's head, shank for Easter and Christmas. The pig, usually of the Lithuanian white breed, was stabbed in November, taking into account the phases of the moon. Most of all, the best time was the end of full moon and the start of waning moon. It was said that the carcass then is tasty, soft, and the bacon flitch does not rust. They tried to use all the blood. They cooked a sweet soup – *juka* – the delicacy of carcass.

Traditionally, a variety of soups were put on the table of the inhabitants of Suvalkija region and they were cooked even three times a day. Soups were cooked from vegetables and wild herbs with different spices. They used to cook beetroot soup often – mostly from fermented beetroots and their juice. Every housewife knew how to cook a delicious soup. Fat soup with meat was often used for breakfast; for lunch there was a lean soup as addition to pancakes or porridge and one more soup – for dinner. In winter, housewives used to cook sauerkraut soup, which was sometimes flavoured with smoked pork ribs.

The food of Suvalkija region was rich in rye, barley and oat groats that were used to cook porridge. In this ethnographic region, bread has always been on the table. The bread was always put at the corner of the table as close to the sacred paintings as possible. To this day, the tradition of making *mutinys* remained during warm season. It is a dish from bread, water and sugar, flavoured with various grinded or not grinded berries. It cools and gives you the feeling of fullness on a hot day.

Dairy products were also popular in Suvalkija region. They not only drank fresh milk, but also pressed cheeses or cooked from sour milk. Typically, simple, acidic, sweet and fruit cheeses were made in Suvalkija region. For celebrations, housekeepers used to make the latter with raisins, dried cherries, and cinnamon, and covered with fresh mint leaves for good smell. This cheese was sometimes packed not into a cheese-bag, but directly into a plate or form, and often ate by spreading it on a slice of bread or a pie.

Fruit cheeses are still very popular in this region. Women used to dry cheeses up, even before the sun on special plates, attached at the ends of all houses. Dried cheeses were eaten on longer trips, they were given to relatives coming from distant places – to have a cheese on the trip. In summer, the churn to make butter was often needed. The butter was melted, poured into clay pots, stored in a cool room and kept for up to 4 months.

Introduction: the seasons influenced the meal for breakfast, lunch or dinner table in Suvalkija region. In autumn, after harvesting, people of Suvalkija region ate mainly vegetables, and as fresh as possible. If it was possible, housewives of Suvalkija region tried to pick mushrooms in forests. They ate them with cracklings and sour cream. They also tanned them and salted for the winter. Later on, when it was getting colder, more meat dishes appeared, and the food was better. In winter, they ate more sauerkraut and potatoes. In spring, when the first seedlings of sorrels, goose-foot or nettle appeared, the soups were cooked.

Summer dishes are the most different from dishes of other seasons. With the first berries, they ate them raw and also cooked sweet soups with flour dumplings *kleckuciai* (pieces of dough). Others ate berries in milk, and added bread pieces. In summer, people of Suvalkija region often ate cold beetroot soup with potatoes. They boiled them with peel, did not peel them off, because they thought that this way they are more delicious and retain more vitamins. People of Suvalkija region made cold beetroot soup a little bit differently than in other regions. They added water, chopped cucumbers and herring into the grated beetroots and their leaven. Pieces of herring were sometimes roasted in the fire.

The sweets in Suvalkija region have a unique history. Branch cake (*sakotis*) was started baking in Lithuania in the 20th century. Culinary specialists believe that this cake originated from Germany and became popular throughout Suvalkija region. The tradition of eating the branch cake was spread from the rectories – this, apparently, also influenced the tradition of the feast of St. George to offer eggs to the church. Farmers brought so many that the Church servants did not know how to use these eggs, and to bake a branch cake, many eggs are needed! After that, the cake can stay for a year without losing its shape or taste.

*In order to increase the awareness and popularity of Lithuanian culinary heritage, the Lithuanian Countryside Tourism Association is implementing the project "Traditional Lithuanian Food Guide". The aim of this project is to raise awareness among the public, especially the younger generation, about the interesting and diverse food culture in our country, and to express our respect for the people who follow the culinary traditions of our grandparents and parents, and cook according to old recipes and technologies.*

Project promoter

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