



Appetizers

Romanian hospitality revolves around the table. As a child you quickly learn the routine, and when visiting another Romanian home you know that arriving with an empty belly is a good thing. "How are you?" is quickly followed by "What can I get you to eat?" So many of the simplest and most delicious Romanian recipes are served as snacks or starters that a feast can result just by laying out a combination of these.

My grandmother was happiest when entertaining and, together with my great-grandmother, loved to present the best fare possible. My mother remembers that she did this with an apparent effortlessness that was amazing. Guests visiting my grandmother's home always knew they were guaranteed a satisfying meal.

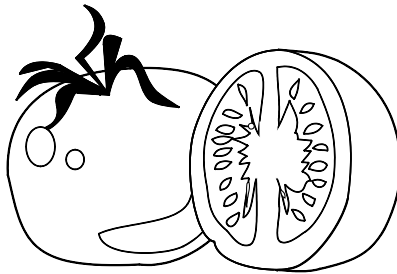
The following recipes are meal starters or can be served several at a time for light summer lunches. The first ones are exemplary of the Romanian practice of stuffing. Tomatoes and peppers are most commonly stuffed with flavored mixtures, either vegetarian or containing meat, but eggs, courgettes (zucchini), cabbage, and grape leaves are also used.

AUBERGINE-STUFFED TOMATOES

(roșii umplute cu vinete)

- 1 large aubergine (eggplant)**
- 3 tbsp. vegetable oil**
- 2 onions (finely chopped)**
- 2 tbsp. chopped parsley**
- Salt**
- Pepper**
- 12 small round tomatoes (very firm)**
- 12 sprigs parsley**

Wrap the aubergine in aluminum foil and bake at 400 degrees (200 degrees C) until it feels soft inside the foil (about 45 minutes). Remove the foil and peel off the skin. Chop up the soft flesh and transfer to a bowl. Mix the chopped aubergine with the oil, onions, chopped parsley, and salt and pepper to taste, until the mixture is smooth. Cut off the top of each tomato. With a small spoon, remove all the tomato seeds. Fill the tomatoes with the aubergine mixture and decorate each with a sprig of parsley. Serve on a mixed-leaf salad.



CHEESE-STUFFED PEPPERS (ardei umpluți cu brânză)

6 large green bell peppers
2 cups / 500 g. ricotta or cottage cheese
½ cup / 100 g. butter or margarine
1 tbsp. chopped chives
1 tbsp. chopped dill

Cut the tops off the peppers and clean out the seeds, then set aside. Beat together the cheese and butter, then add the chives. Fill each pepper with the cheese mixture and top with a bit of dill. Serve with toasted French bread slices.

EGGS FILLED WITH FISH PASTE (ouă umplute cu paste de pește)

6 eggs
1 tbsp. olive oil
2 tbsp. fish paste
1 tbsp. mustard
Shredded lettuce
White-wine vinegar
Olive oil
12 green olives (pitted)

Hard-boil the eggs and allow them to cool. Remove the shells and cut each egg in half lengthwise. Carefully remove the yolks and transfer to a bowl. Mix these with 1 tbsp. oil until smooth, then fold in the fish paste and mustard. (For the fish paste, use either a bought paste or see the recipe for herring and nut spread at the end of this chapter.) Arrange the egg halves on a bed of shredded lettuce sprinkled with a few drops of vinegar and olive oil. Decorate each egg half with half an olive.

EGGS FILLED WITH SOUR CREAM AND SAUCE

(ouă umplute cu sos de smântâna)

- 6 eggs**
- 1 small onion (minced)**
- 1 tbsp. butter**
- 2 tbsp. sour cream**
- Salt**
- Pepper**
- 1 tbsp. vegetable oil**
- 12 slices (1¾ inch / 12 x 2 cm.) French bread**
(soaked in milk)

Hard-boil the eggs (about 6 minutes) and allow them to cool. Remove the shells and cut each egg in half lengthwise. Carefully remove the yolks and transfer to a bowl. Fry the onion until soft but without browning, then add the cooled fried onion and the butter to the cooked egg yolks. Mix until they form a smooth paste, fold in the sour cream, and add salt and pepper to taste. Fill the egg halves with the mixture. In a pan containing the oil, fry the slices of bread until they become golden brown. Remove from the pan and cut out just enough of the center of each slice to allow each egg half to rest in the bread without tipping over.

SAUCE

- 1 tbsp. butter (melted)**
- 1 tbsp. flour**
- 1 cup / 250 ml. vegetable stock**
- 2 egg yolks**
- 2 tbsp. milk**
- 1 tbsp. chopped dill**
- Salt**
- Fresh parsley (chopped)**

To make the sauce, mix the butter and flour in a saucepan and allow to come to the boil. Then add the stock and simmer

for 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the egg yolks, milk, dill, and salt to taste. Place the prepared bread slices on a presentation plate, drizzle sauce over them, and sprinkle with parsley.

BAKED FILLED BREAD ROLLS (chifle umplute)

For any child who grows up with a working mother, the weekends are greatly anticipated. This is a time when I would wake up and find my mother dressed casually, looking relaxed, chatting, and making breakfast with my grandmother. One of the best weekend treats would be *frigănele*, or what is also known as French toast—slices of white bread soaked in milk, dipped in egg yolk, fried lightly in butter, then served with sugar sprinkled on top. The smell of the frying bread was enough to guarantee that the day got off to a good start.

This recipe is for another dish that we sometimes had on these lazy weekend mornings.

6 small bread rolls
1¼ cups / 300 ml. milk
¾ cup / 150 g. ricotta cheese
1 egg
Pinch salt
1 tsp. chopped dill
1 tsp. chopped chives
½ tsp. chopped oregano
½ cup / 100 g. butter or margarine
½ cup / 100 ml. sour cream

Cut the bread rolls in half (like sandwiches) and dip them in a shallow bowl of milk until they are soaked through to the

crust. In another bowl, mix the cheese with the egg, salt, dill, chives, and oregano. Cover each half-roll with the mixture, then top with another half-roll.

Cut the butter into 12 equal pieces. Place 6 pieces in a casserole, put each roll on top of one of the pieces of butter, then place another piece of butter on top of each roll. Now cover each roll with a good tablespoon of sour cream. Bake at 400 degrees (200 degrees C) for 20-30 minutes. Serve hot.

MOSAIC BREAD (pine mozaic)

- ¼ lb. / 125 g. sardines**
- ½ loaf French bread**
- Few tbsp. milk**
- ⅔ cup / 150 g. butter or margarine**
- ¼ lb. / 125 g. Emmenthaler or Swiss cheese**
- ½ pickled red pepper (see Peppers Pickled in Vinegar)**
- 10 black olives**

In a food processor, mix the sardines, a handful of bread hollowed out from the baguette and soaked in milk, and the butter until it becomes smooth and pasty. Cut the cheese and pepper into small cubes and fold into the paste. Refrigerate the mixture. Hollow out the rest of the baguette until only about ⅓ inch (1 cm.) thickness is left inside. With a spoon, fill the crust with the cooled mixture. Refrigerate again. Serve when set by cutting ⅓-inch (1-cm.) slices. Serve with black olives. This can be prepared several days in advance.

VEGETABLE-STUFFED BREAD CUPS (cupe de franzelă umplute cu legume)

1½ tbsp. butter
8 oz. / 250 g. French bread (cut into 6 slices)
1 large potato
8 oz. / 250 g. peas (canned or frozen)
Salt
3 tbsp. chopped parsley
Pepper
4 tbsp. shredded Swiss or cheddar cheese

Melt 1 tbsp. of the butter in a pan, then add the bread slices and fry on one side only until golden brown. Fit each slice into a small ovenproof bowl, forming cups with the bread. Boil the potato until cooked but still holding its shape. Cool, peel, and cut into thin slices. Warm the peas in a pan, in the remaining butter. Assemble the dish by first covering the bottom of each cup with potato slices. Season with salt, parsley, and pepper. Next add some peas and cover with shredded cheese. Bake at 350 degrees (180 degrees C) for 15-20 minutes, until warmed through and the cheese has melted over the vegetables. Serve hot.

BASKETS FILLED WITH “BOEUF SALAD” (coșulete umplute cu salată de boeuf)

Salată de boeuf is one of those recipes that is useful when meat is left over from a big meal. In my family, when we have roast chicken or a big beef roast, this will be on the menu for the next day. These days my father is the specialist—it’s his job to have this ready for anyone who gets hungry. Sometimes we have it as a salad on its own, but the baskets are a nicer way of presenting it as a starter.

4-5 small potatoes (boiled and cold)
1 carrot (boiled and cold)
5 celery stalks
2 pickles
½ lb. / 250 g. cooked boneless chicken or beef
(cold)
Chopped parsley
2 oz. / 50 g. canned peas
1 cup / 250 ml. mayonnaise
2 tsp. mustard

Make the salad by cutting the potatoes, carrot, celery, pickles, and meat into small cubes. Place in a large bowl and add the parsley and peas. Blend the 1 cup mayonnaise and the mustard in a small bowl, then add it to the vegetables and meat until they are all coated.

BASKETS

1 egg
1 cup / 250 g. butter or vegetable oil
Salt
2 cups / 500 g. flour
Mayonnaise
Olives

To make the baskets, whisk the egg and butter or oil together in a bowl. Add the salt and flour, and mix until a smooth dough is formed. Divide the dough into balls of 2 inches (5 cm.) diameter and roll out into sheets $\frac{1}{3}$ inch (1 cm.) thick. Place each sheet in a greased tartlet dish, cut off excess dough, and prick the base a few times with a fork. Bake at 350 degrees (180 degrees C) until the tartlets are firm and golden brown (10-15 minutes). Allow to cool completely and fill with the salad. Top with a dollop of mayonnaise and an olive. The salad and baskets can be made separately days ahead and assembled just before serving.

STUFFED GRAPE LEAVES (sarmale cu foi de viță)

This recipe clearly shows the influence of Turkey and Greece on Romanian culture. A similar recipe known as dolmas in Greek cuisine is as common there as it is in Romania.

25-30 grape leaves
1 small onion (chopped)
1 tbsp. white rice
4 tbsp. water
1 lb. / 500 g. lamb (minced)
½ tbsp. chopped parsley
Salt
Pepper
3 tomatoes
1 small can tomato paste

Wash the grape leaves and drain. In a saucepan, brown the onion and rice, then add water, cover, and simmer until the rice absorbs all the water. In a bowl, mix the rice, meat, parsley, and seasonings. Take 1 tbsp. of mixture and place in the center of a grape leaf, then roll (folding in the edges) to form a small sausage. In a pot, place a layer of sliced tomato. Add the stuffed grape leaves and finish with tomato slices. Dilute the tomato paste in water 3 times its volume and pour into the pot. Cover the pot and simmer on a small flame about 45 minutes.

SALAMI CROQUETTES

(crochete din salam)

6 tbsp. butter
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup / 150 g. flour
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups / 350 ml. water
4 eggs
1 tsp. salt
5 oz. / 150 g. salami (chopped)
4 tbsp. fine breadcrumbs

Melt 3 tbsp. butter in a saucepan. Dissolve the flour in the water and add to pan. Simmer and keep mixing to prevent lumps. After the sauce has thickened sufficiently, remove from heat and allow to cool. Add 3 eggs, the salt, and salami and mix well. With moist hands, shape handfuls into croquettes. Next roll the croquettes in a beaten egg and then in breadcrumbs. Fry in the remaining butter until golden brown.

TARTAR SAUCE

2 eggs
3 green onions
3 tbsp. chopped parsley
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups / 400 g. mayonnaise
3 tbsp. mustard
Salt
1 tsp. pepper

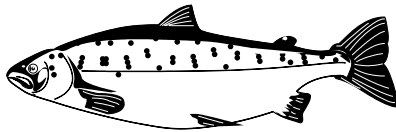
To make the sauce, hard-boil the eggs, then cool and cut into a fine dice, along with the green onions and parsley. Mix with the mayonnaise, mustard, and seasonings, until it is all smooth and creamy.

MUSHROOM AND FISH CROQUETTES

(crochete din ciuperci cu pește)

- ½ lb. / 250 g. button mushrooms
- Salted water
- 1 lb. / 500 g. fish fillet (any white fish)
- 1 onion (chopped)
- 3 tbsp. vegetable oil
- 2 slices white bread (soaked in milk with crusts removed)
- 2 eggs
- 3 tbsp. flour
- 2 tbsp. chopped parsley
- 2 tbsp. chopped dill
- ½ tsp. pepper
- 1 tsp. salt

Chop the mushrooms and bring to the boil in salted water. Drain and cool. Cut the fish fillet into small pieces. Fry the onion in 1 tbsp. oil until soft, then add the mushrooms, fish, and softened bread. Allow to cool, then add 1 egg, 1 tbsp. flour, and the herbs and seasonings. Shape the mixture into croquettes, roll through the remaining flour, dip in beaten eggs, then in flour again. Fry in hot oil. Serve with a tomato sauce.



MUSHROOM GELATIN WITH MAYONNAISE

(ciuperci cu gelatină si maioneză)

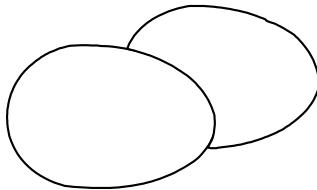
2 lb. / 1 kg. button mushrooms
1 onion (sliced into rings)
2 cloves garlic (minced)
Pinch salt
Pinch pepper
Water to cover
1 tsp. butter
Gelatin sheets
Water for gelatin
Mayonnaise
Chopped chives and parsley

Clean and cut the mushrooms into thin slices. Place in a deep pan and add the onion rings, garlic, salt, pepper, and butter. Cover with water and bring to the boil. Simmer on medium heat for 10 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and drain the mushrooms, reserving the cooking liquid in a saucepan. Discard the onion and garlic. Soak the gelatin sheets in cold water to soften them, then add them to the liquid (3 sheets per 1 cup / 250 ml. liquid). Heat the saucepan and keep stirring until the gelatin is completely dissolved. Divide the mushrooms into 6 small soufflé dishes and top with the liquid. Refrigerate until set. When ready to serve, turn the dishes onto plates and serve with a dollop of mayonnaise and a sprinkling of chives and parsley. (A trick for getting the gelatin to slide out in one nice piece is to dip the soufflé dish into a bowl of hot water for a second or two and then turn it onto a plate.)

EGG CROQUETTES WITH TARTAR SAUCE (crochete din ou cu sos tartar)

6 eggs
1 cup / 250 g. flour
1½ cups / 400 ml. milk
2 tbsp. butter
Pinch salt
1 tsp. pepper
¾ cup / 200 g. breadcrumbs
⅓ cup / 100 ml. vegetable oil

Hard-boil 4 of the eggs and cut into thick slices. In a bowl, mix the flour and milk. Melt the butter in a saucepan and add the flour mixture. Bring to the boil then remove from heat and allow to cool. Next mix in 1 raw egg, salt, and pepper. Now fold in the hard-boiled eggs. Crack the remaining egg into a plate and beat. Using wet hands, take large spoonfuls of the egg and flour mixture and shape to form thick sticks. Roll in the beaten egg and then in the breadcrumbs to coat. Heat the oil in a pan and fry the croquettes until they are golden brown and firm. Serve cold with tartar sauce (see Salami Croquettes recipe).



EGG ROULADE WITH SPINACH (ruladă din omleta cu spanac)

½ lb. / 250 g. large tomatoes

2¼ lb. / 1.2 kg. spinach

Pinch salt

1 tsp. pepper

4 eggs

4 tbsp. butter

½ tsp. salt

1 tbsp. melted butter

4 oz. / 100 g. fried onions

½ cup / 100 ml. sour cream

Cut the tomatoes into thin slices. Cook the spinach by boiling in salt water for 10 minutes. Drain, rinse in cold water, and chop coarsely. Transfer the spinach to a bowl, add pinch salt and the pepper, and toss. In a fresh bowl, beat the eggs with the 4 tbsp. butter and ½ tsp. salt. Pour into a large hot pan containing 1 tbsp. melted butter and cook the eggs until they set and form a thin omelette. Remove the omelette and cut in half. On one half spread a tablespoon of the spinach, then a layer of fried onions, then another layer of spinach. Roll the omelette in a clean towel and wrap in plastic wrap. Repeat with the second half. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour. Remove from plastic wrap and cut into ¼-inch (½-cm.) slices. Serve each roll on a slice of tomato with sour cream.

EGGS WITH LEEKS (ochiuri cu praz)

3 leeks
4 tbsp. butter
1 tbsp. flour
1 cup / 250 ml. milk
1 tbsp. white-wine vinegar
6 eggs
6 thick slices white bread (toasted)
Grated parmesan cheese
Salt

Cut away the green parts of the leeks. Slice the white parts into thin rings. Next melt the butter in a frying pan, add the flour, and mix. Add the milk. Simmer for about 5 minutes, then add the sliced leeks. Fry for 5 minutes and remove from heat. To prepare the eggs, boil water in a wide pot. Add vinegar. Break the eggs individually in a glass, then carefully allow each to slide out into the boiling water. When all the eggs are in the water, cover the pot and simmer on a low flame about 3 minutes. Then remove each egg using a slotted spoon and lay carefully on a plate. Butter a casserole, then lay the bread slices in a layer. Next lay an egg on each slice. Pour the leek sauce over the eggs, sprinkle with parmesan and salt, and bake at 450 degrees (240 degrees C) just until the cheese begins to melt, about 5 minutes.

CHEESE ROLLS

(rulou cu pastă de brânză)

This recipe is traditionally made with a mountain cheese called *cașcaval* (caschcaval), light yellow, semihard, and with a distinct flavor close to that of the Italian cheese provolone, which is what my grandmother used in this recipe after she left Romania. These days, it may be possible to find the real caschcaval in specialty shops that import Eastern European foods.

5 oz. / 150 g. butter
5 oz. / 150 g. margarine
1½ cups / 350 g. flour
1 tsp. salt
5 tbsp. vinegar
2 tbsp. water
1 egg (beaten)

Blend the butter and margarine until smooth. Shape into a ball and set aside in the refrigerator for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, pour most of the flour (reserve a few tablespoons) onto a board and make a well in the center. Into the well put the salt, vinegar, and water. Work into the flour to form a dough, adding water if necessary. Form into a ball and refrigerate for 20 minutes.

Next sprinkle the remaining flour onto a board and roll out the dough into a thin square. Put the butter and margarine mixture in the center, and bring the corners of the dough up to close the filling in. Roll again, this time leaving the dough flat but thicker, and refrigerate again for 30 minutes. Bring the dough out, roll and fold in 4, refrigerate 30 minutes again, and repeat twice more. Roll out the pastry, then cut into strips of 1x4 inches (10x2 cm.), brush the edges with beaten egg, and roll each up, forming a tube. Bake at 350 degrees (180 degrees C) for 20 minutes, then leave to cool.

FILLING

10 oz. / 300 g. cashcaval or provolone cheese

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup / 200 g. butter

10 oz. / 300 g. soft goat cheese

2 tsp. paprika

To make the filling, shred the cheese, then beat with the butter. Now add the goat cheese and paprika and mix well. Put mixture into piping bag with a thick nozzle and fill the rolls. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

SAVORY FRIED CHEESE PATTIES

(păpnași prăjiți)

8 oz. / 250 g. ricotta cheese

4 eggs (separated)

4 tbsp. flour

2 tbsp. minced chives

1 tsp. salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. pepper

2 tbsp. butter

In a bowl, beat together the cheese, egg yolks, flour, chives, salt, and pepper. Beat the whites separately until stiff, then fold into the cheese mixture. Using wet hands, shape spoonfuls of the mix into balls the size of apricots, then flatten them into patties. Fry in hot butter until lightly golden. Serve hot.

BREADED CASCHCAVAL (cașcaval pané)

½ cup / 100 ml. flour
1 egg (beaten)
½ cup / 100 ml. breadcrumbs
Pat butter
6 thick slices cashcaval or provolone cheese
½ lemon (sliced)

Place the flour, egg, and breadcrumbs in 3 separate dishes. Preheat a large frying pan containing butter. Flour each slice of cheese, then dip in the egg, then coat with breadcrumbs. Fry on both sides until golden brown and serve immediately or cold, with slices of lemon.

PEAS ON FRIED BREAD (frigănele cu mazăre)

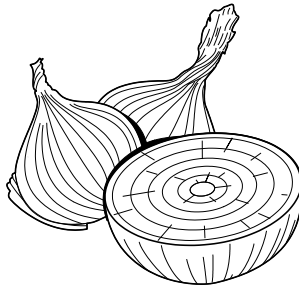
2 large cans peas (drained)
½ cup / 100 ml. water
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. pepper
1 tsp. sugar
3 shallots (minced)
2 tbsp. dill (chopped)
6 slices white bread (crusts removed)
¾ cup / 150 ml. milk
3 eggs (beaten)
2 tbsp. butter

Place the peas in a saucepan with water, salt, pepper, sugar, shallots, and half the dill. Simmer 10 minutes. Moisten the bread in milk, then dip in eggs and fry in butter on both sides until golden brown. Drain the peas and pour over the fried bread. Sprinkle with the remaining dill.

CHICKEN-LIVER PATE (paté de ficat de pasăre)

1 lb. / 500 g. chicken livers
½ lb. / 250 g. lard or margarine
4 onions (chopped)
1 tbsp. vegetable oil
½ cup / 100 g. flour
4 eggs (beaten)
3 tbsp. Armagnac or prune brandy
4 tbsp. port or sherry
1 tsp. paprika
1 tsp. garlic powder
Salt
Pepper

Cut the livers and lard into small pieces. Fry the onions until golden in the oil. In a bowl, mix the livers, lard, onions, flour, eggs, Armagnac, port, and seasonings. Spoon the mixture into a greased terrine dish and smooth the top. Cover with aluminum foil, place in a roasting pan containing 2 inches (5 cm.) of water, and bake at 325 degrees (170 degrees C) for about 1½ hours. Allow to cool and refrigerate until ready to serve.



MARINATED OLIVES

(mășline marinate)

2 lb. / 1 kg. black Greek olives
1 lemon
3 bay leaves
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup / 200 ml. white-wine vinegar
1 tbsp. olive oil

Using a sharp knife, score the olives lengthwise. Place them in a large saucepan, cover with water, and bring to the boil. Drain off the water, cover with fresh water, and bring to the boil again. Drain the olives and allow to cool. Meanwhile, cut the lemon into thin slices. When the olives are cold, place in a large jar alternating layers of olives, bay leaves, and lemon slices. Bring the vinegar to the boil, allow to cool, and pour over the olives. Cover with a thin layer of olive oil. Seal the jar and allow to marinate 3 days.

TOAST WITH ROQUEFORT BUTTER OR BLACK BUTTER

(pâine cu unt de roqfort sau unt negru)

ROQUEFORT BUTTER
1 cup / 250 g. butter or margarine
2 oz. / 50 g. Roquefort cheese

BLACK BUTTER
1 cup / 250 g. butter or margarine
 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. / 250 g. pitted black olives

In a food processor, blend the butter and cheese or olives until the mixture becomes creamy and smooth. Keep refrigerated until needed. Serve on toasted baguette slices alternating black and white butters. Sprinkle with minced chives, if desired.

WHEY CHEESE WITH DILL (urdă cu mărar)

These last three recipes go well with crackers. This cheese is a very common variety in Romania. The closest thing in flavor found elsewhere is ricotta cheese, although urdă has a firmer texture.

8 oz. / 250 g. urdă or ricotta cheese
2 oz. / 50 g. butter
1 tbsp. minced dill
Salt

Blend the cheese and butter until it forms a paste. Mix in the dill and salt to taste. Can be served with sliced green onions or chives.

TIMISHOARA-STYLE SPREAD (liptauer timișorean)

Timișoara is a city in the Banat region of Romania, very close to the borders with Hungary and Serbia. It is a prosperous city, now best known for being the heart of the 1989 revolution. In this recipe the paprika reflects a Hungarian influence.

8 oz. / 250 g. feta cheese
½ cup / 100 g. butter
1 tbsp. sweet paprika
1 tsp. finely ground caraway seeds
Salt

Blend the cheese and butter until creamy. Add the paprika, caraway, and salt to taste and mix well. Serve with slices of radish on whole-wheat crackers, if desired.

HERRING AND NUT SPREAD

(pastă de hering cu nuci)

Crusts of 2 slices bread
4 tbsp. milk + few drops vinegar
1 herring
3 tbsp. olive oil
½ onion (diced)
2 tsp. vinegar
12 ground walnuts

Soak the bread crusts in milk containing a few drops of vinegar. Meanwhile, wash the herring and remove its skin and all the bones. (You may want to use a fillet prepared by your fishmonger.) Put the fish into a food processor along with the drained crusts and 1 tbsp. oil. Process, adding 1 tbsp. of oil at a time. Next add the onion, vinegar, and nuts and mix well. This can be served as a dip, spread on crackers, or on a fish-shaped dish with the real head and tail at either end for decoration.

