



Sons of Norway Mini Presentations

#371: ASTRI RIDDERVOLD- CONSERVING NORWEGIAN FOOD

Astri Riddervold is a true hero of traditional Norwegian food. Born in 1925, Riddervold has been one of the foremost experts on the subject and her ethnological research has been featured in a number of books, including one of her most distinguished works, *Food Conservation: Ethnological Studies* published in 1988.

Riddervold was born and raised in Haugesund, Norway, where fish was dominant and residents “were raised on herring-bones and shipping,” according to a local expression. She grew up believing that these foods, primarily fish and game, and the methods in which they were prepared were essential in understanding the Norwegian identity. She has been a forerunner in preserving the Norwegian heritage and culture. Food is undeniably a large part of any one culture, and the Norwegians are proud of their distinctive delicacies.

The story of food in Norway is one of tradition and nature. Like most cultures, the evolution of food in Norway developed in a rural setting. Foods and their unique flavors were made from the processes of drying, fermenting and smoking. Without a refrigerator or freezer preparation was extremely vital. In order to eat or preserve food, tedious work needed to be done so as not to make a mistake. Lye, for example, is a corrosive substance that is used in the *lutefisk* making process. If utilized wrong in the process, lye can be fatal.

Norway’s diverse and global society has welcomed foods from all over the world; foods from supermarket shelves and freezers that can be prepared in minutes pushing traditional Norwegian foods to the wayside. The conveniences in the food industry are welcomed and enjoyed but traditional, home grown, natural ingredients should not be forgotten. Riddervold is one Norwegian who takes

Learn a bit more about some of Norway’s favorite traditional foods:



Lutefisk

Cod is caught and dried on racks until it becomes thin and hard. It is soaked in water and then in lye or potassium carbonate for a few days when it is finally strained through water several times; a methodic process that eliminates the

taste of lye. After it is boiled the gelatinous textured fish is served best with melted butter.



Herring

Also known as ‘Norwegian silver’, herring has been a staple in Norway’s diet for many years. As one of the country’s first and biggest exports, this fish is predominately caught on Norway’s western coast.

The oily fish was prepared by drying it on north-facing outdoor walls or salting it in barrels. Various preparations and marinades can be applied, making this a popular treat.



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pride in the foods of the past. Her background at the University of Oslo in chemistry, history and ethnology combine for a unique perspective.

Lutefisk, Rakefisk, and Herring oh my! Her research, studies, and lectures on food conservation include the preparation of traditional Norwegian foods such as: *lutefisk* (lyed fish), *rakefisk* (fermented fish), *spekekjøtt* (cured meat), *smalahove* (preserved lamb's/sheep's head), *raudsei* (salted saithe preserved with blood and sale in the intestines) and *gamlesteik* (cured, roasted lamb). Except for holidays with grandparents, Sons of Norway dinners, and history books these foods have all but lost their place on the menus of recent generations of Norwegians. However, Riddervold's determination to conserve these time-honored foods and their preparation methods means Norway's history and culture will endure.

Riddervold's efforts in food conservation have been so revered, that in 1994 she was awarded the first ever Ingrid Espelid Hovig's Food and Culture Prize. The prize is named after Ingrid Espelid Hovig (b.1924), a Norwegian television chef and author. Hovig has been called the Julia Child of Norway and in 1997 she was presented the International Association of Culinary Professionals "Lifetime Achievement Award". She was the first non-American to receive the award. Riddervold and Espelid Hovig are examples of two exemplary Norwegian women who share a love and passion for food and its influence on culture. Their work has undoubtedly inspired one another and Norway will forever be grateful of that.



Salmon

Widespread in Norwegian waters, the salmon is the worldwide favorite fish to eat. Originally, salmon was cured but in the 19th century smoking became the popular preparation method. Norwegian smoked salmon is lightly salted. *Gravlaks* is a Norwegian delicacy of raw salmon cured in salt, sugar and dill and often served with mustard.



Reindeer

Reindeer herding is a part of the Sámi livelihood in Northern Norway. Only a little salt was added to reindeer meat for preservation as underground deep-freezers were accessible in the north. Today early recipes of *finnbiff* and *reinsdyrskav* are still prepared and eaten regularly.



Geitost

Goat's cheese or brown cheese has been prepared for ages. This peanut butter like, sweet and pungent cheese is an acquired taste but it is the most distinctive Norwegian cheese available. Made from whey (the liquid that remains from the milk after the curd is removed), it is cooked until the water residue is removed and it transforms into a caramelized residue.