

We are cooking for friends tomorrow, so we decided to have a dinner of dishes that are typically Swedish. Perhaps, one should really say “traditionally Swedish,” since what is eaten there today is probably more like the menus most Americans have also become addicted to in recent decades—pizza, pasta, tacos, maybe some Thai or other Asian dishes, hamburgers, french fries and perhaps other foods I am not even aware of. Good or bad isn’t really the issue. It is fun to eat foods from around the world, and we try them occasionally, too. But, there is also value in sticking, for everyday eating, to the old tried and true basics of one’s particular cultural background, cooking and eating like our grandparents and great-grandparents did if they had the means.

So, we will have *kalops*. This is basically just beef stew, good meat in a sauce, slow cooked with carrots and onions. The only real difference is the addition of allspice.

Our potatoes will be boiled *mandelpotatis*. These almond shaped potatoes are a cultural treasure of northern Sweden. Our ancestors from western Sweden and eastern Norway probably did not have access to them and ate the same kind of potatoes that we mostly consume today, but a friend gave us seed for *mandelpotatis*, and we are enjoying this special treat.

We will make a casserole of *rödkål*, red cabbage and apples, sweetened with maple syrup—definitely not part of the Swedish dish—and made tart with vinegar. Beet relish made from beets we roasted yesterday will also be on the table along with lingonberry preserves.

And, for dessert we will make a pie of blueberries and raspberries—*blåbär* and *hallon*—and top it with a crunchy toska mixture of butter, sugar, and almonds. A little ice cream or whipped cream will mellow this fruity pie.

Our friends are polite people, and we will probably never know if our traditional Swedish dinner deserves a star or a less favorable rating. But, regardless of the success of the cooking, we know that the conversation will be worth the visit. Having good friends is a pleasure not to be taken lightly.