



for the love of
DUMPLINGS

Take a deep dive into a universally beloved food. Plus, a handy dumpling index and where to find them throughout the region.

by francesca furey

ANY PEOPLE WAX POETIC WHEN IT comes to the subject of dumplings. From kids to adults, social media foodies to the toughest of critics, few would refuse a fresh, hot, fragrant dumpling (we'd bet money on it). No matter the country of origin or what they're stuffed with—they're a fan favorite.

There's a sort of magic when it comes to dumplings. The allure seems to come down to two things: 1) they are the ultimate comfort food, combining soft dough with hearty fillings like ground meat, seafood, potatoes, and vegetables; and 2) they transcend borders and cultures.

“There are some foods that just make sense no matter where you are. Dumplings are one of them,” says Willa Zhen, Ph.D., a liberal arts and food studies professor at The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. “There might be different ways to season dumplings or ways to fold and cook them. But at the core, humans aren’t that different. We all arrived at the same idea that fillings stuffed and wrapped into a dough are tasty.”

Simply defined, a dumpling is a dough wrapped around a filling. Perhaps the reason why people are enamored with them is because dumplings are so versatile: They can be boiled, steamed, fried, or baked and filled with pretty much anything you can think of.

We can probably thank the Silk Road for the globalization of dumplings (in addition to other favorite foods, like pasta and nuts). While Italian merchant Marco Polo traveled east and trekked along the trade route in the late 1200s, goods like textiles, spices, tea, porcelain, and even dumplings from China spread like wildfire to the West. Jiaozi—the crescent-shaped Chinese dumpling most of us are familiar with—first trickled into regions of Mongolia, Korea, and the Himalayas from China. It’s possible that merchants sold dumplings to passersby, or the recipe traveled by word of mouth. Over time, jiaozi adapted again and again and through changes in ingredients, shape, and folding techniques, they morphed into the dumplings that we know and love today, including momos, mandu, and pithas.

As dumpling love spread west, they evolved even more. In Turkey, manti is similar in appearance to its Asian cousins, but highlights regional delicacies like spiced lamb, beef and even pumpkin. The same can be said for Georgian khinkali—they’re purse-shaped, like Chinese xiaolongbaos (soup dumplings), though are stuffed with spiced ground meat or cheese, potatoes, and mushrooms.



“Dumplings are more alike than different. You’ll see similar shapes and sizes across different places. What makes dumplings feel like a particular group’s dumplings are the fillings and seasonings. As long as it tastes like your [country’s] food, it’s your food,” explains Zhen.

Zhen’s logic applies to dishes we might not directly connect to Asia, like pierogis and empanadas. Sure, they’re stuffed with potatoes, cheese, or ground meat and may not look like something you’d find on a dim sum platter—but they, too, have origins in the Silk Road and are dumplings by definition.

Beyond fillings, the biggest differences among dumplings are shape and size. The shape is determined by its desired presentation, pairings, and eating style. Wontons are small and dainty, meant to be eaten in one or two bites or dropped in soup; momos (Himalayan), har gow (Chinese), and pierogis (Polish)

are dense and doughy, making them more flavor-packed and more satiating; and empanadas can be so big, they’re considered meals on their own. “Dumpling shapes and sizes have a huge impact on the texture. A one-bite nibble is a different experience from a large hand pie,” says Zhen. Each dumpling shape and folding technique can change the taste, texture, and cooking technique.

There’s a reason why varieties look the way they do—they’re created to appeal to the culture that adapted them. “Can you imagine cooking a pierogi in a broth? It would be a disaster. It’s folded that way because it’s meant to be fried. Or imagine pan frying tortellini instead of cooking them in a broth or sauce? It just wouldn’t work,” continues Zhen.

But there is one thing for certain: dumplings are delicious. Read on for a dumpling primer, plus the best places around the Hudson Valley to enjoy your favorite varieties. ❖



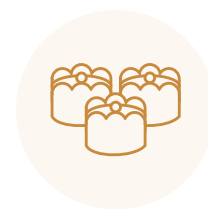
HAR GOW

Origin: Guangzhou, China

Main ingredient: Shrimp

There’s something otherworldly about har gow, so much so it’s considered one of the Four Heavenly Kings of Cantonese cuisine (along with shumai, char siu bao, and egg tarts). The dumpling is best known for its translucent dough—which appears almost crystal-like—and a delicate pink hue from the shrimp filling. “Har gow” translates to “wedding gown” in Cantonese, as its purse-like shape and color resembles traditional dresses worn in China. Its tender dough, made from wheat starch and tapioca flour, lets the shrimp shine in both presentation and flavor.

Order here: *Aberdeen Seafood and Dim Sum, White Plains; Hong Kong Bakery & Bistro, Colonie; Yobo, Newburgh*



SHUMAI

Origin: Guangzhou, China or Hohhot, Inner Mongolia

Main ingredients: Ground pork and shrimp

This vase-shaped dumpling joins the har gow as one of the Four Heavenly Kings. Unlike most dumplings, which are completely wrapped by dough, shumai filling peeks out from the top, often layered with peas and crab roe. Regional varieties go beyond pork and shrimp; the paper-thin wrappers can be stuffed with ginger, shiitake and wood ear mushrooms, scallions, and water chestnuts. Shumai translates to “burn-sell,” and was originally sold as a snack that paired with Mongolian milk tea on the Silk Road. In ancient times, it was almost always eaten as takeout.

Order here: *Cho Cho San Noodle House, Nanuet; Miso, Kingston; Mizu Sushi, Hyde Park; Momiji, Rhinebeck; Plum House Restaurant, Monroe*



JIAOZI

Origin: Northern Song Dynasty, China

Main ingredients: Minced protein (pork, tofu, shrimp, fish) or vegetables

Possibly the most iconic and common form of dumpling, the jiaozi has been credited as the inspiration for many of the dumplings on our list. According to legend, a Chinese physician named Zhang Zhongjian invented the jiaozi during a brutal winter to help nourish friends and family suffering from frostbite, especially around their ears. Zhongjian combined lamb, black peppers, and medicinal herbs and tucked them into crescent-shaped dough. The dumplings were originally called “jiao ‘er,” meaning “tender ears” for their shape and healing properties. Jiaozi are extremely flexible in cooking style, and can be boiled, steamed, pan fried, deep fried, or served in soup. (In the U.S., jiaozi are often called potstickers.)

Order here: *Goosefeather, Tarrytown; Kanda House Thai Kitchen, Cornwall; Mei’s Handmade Dumplings, Hudson; Palace Dumplings, Wappingers Falls; Twisted Soul, Poughkeepsie*



XIAOLONGBAO

Origin: Changzhou, China

Main ingredient: Pork

Colloquially known as the acronym XLB, soup dumplings have taken the world—and probably your Instagram feed—by storm. Dumplings and soup are a perfect pair, but when the soup is literally *in* the dough, it’s a tastebud explosion. XLB are usually steamed in bamboo baskets, called “xiaolong,” and date back to 19th-century Shanghai. They didn’t dominate the globe until revered Taiwanese restaurant Din Tai Fung opened in the 1970s. You may be wondering: How does the soup get into the dumpling? The meat filling is mixed with aspic, a savory gelatin made with stock; when steamed, the gelatin liquifies. The best way to tackle XLBs is by placing it on a spoon, biting the tip, and then sucking the soup from the opening. (Some XLBs are made so big that you can drink the broth with a straw!) In 2006, Shanghai listed them as a protected national treasure.

Order here: *Ala Shanghai Chinese Cuisine, Latham; Mister Chen, Mamaroneck*





DUMPLING DIPS

Though many dumplings are perfect eaten plain, certain varieties (such as jiaozi, gyoza, and momos) benefit from a sauce. Here are some to keep on hand for your next dumpling take-out:

- BLACK RICE VINEGAR
- SOY SAUCE
- CHILI OIL
- GARLIC CHILI OIL
- TOMATO CHUTNEY
- PEANUT SAUCE
- PLUM SAUCE



GYOZA

Origin: Japan

Main ingredients: Ground pork, nira chives, ginger

The gyoza is directly connected to jiaozi—and happens to be the Japanese pronunciation of it, too. During World War II, Japanese soldiers first tasted the dumplings at military bases in China. When they returned, the soldiers desperately wanted to experience the flavors of jiaozi at home. Gyoza are mostly stuffed with pork and ginger, but vegetarian renditions featuring green dough made from spinach are widely available. Some gyoza even have less conventional ingredients like mushroom, cheese, shrimp or shiso (perilla) leaf. Gyoza is especially beloved in the cities of Utsunomiya in Tochigi Prefecture and Hamamatsu in Shizuoka Prefecture, which annually compete for the title of “city with the most gyoza consumption.” Like jiaozi, gyoza are ear shaped and usually pan-fried.

Order here: Hokkaido, New Paltz; Okaeri Sushi Hibachi, Monroe; RameNesque, Peekskill; Tuxedo Sushi, Tuxedo

GYOZA →



MANDU

Origin: Goryeo Dynasty, Korea

Main ingredients: Ground pork, kimchi, Napa cabbage

In the 14th century, Yuan Mongolians traveled south to Korea, and brought their dumplings along with them. The Goryeo Dynasty practiced Buddhism, so early recipes first lacked meat, though bans on consuming meat became laxer over time. For decades, mandu were only eaten by the Korean royal court before they became popular throughout the nation. Like most dumpling names, mandu is a cognate—it shares a similar name with Turkish or Uzbek manti, Afghan mantoo, and Uyghur manta. They’re distinct in shape, with circular molds and hollow middles—this makes it easy for steaming, boiling, or pan frying. Pork and kimchi mandu are widely consumed at markets and restaurants.

Order here: Go Ba Woo Kalbi, Tappan; Korpot, Poughkeepsie; Seoul Kitchen, Newburgh; Sook House Restaurant, Ellenville; Toro, Fishkill



MOMO

Origin: Nepal and Tibet

Main ingredients: Ground meat (pork, chicken, goat, buffalo, yak) or finely chopped vegetables (cabbage or carrot)

In Chinese, momo simply means plain, unfilled “steamed buns.” When the momo spread to Nepal, Tibet, and even India, the name stuck—but buns were stuffed with regional meats and vegetables. Momos were first filled with yak meat in Tibet, as it was extremely hard to find veggies at the base of the Himalayas (no kidding!). As momo recipes traveled west into India, plant-based renditions were quickly created to feed the population of vegetarian Hindus. They’re usually steamed and have exquisite, complex folds, adding to its texture and overall eating experience.

Order here: Jewel of Himalaya, Yorktown Heights; Momo Asian Fusion, Valley Cottage; Momo Valley, Beacon



PIEROGI

Origin: Poland

Main ingredients: Potato, meat, cheese

Did you know the Hudson Valley is a part of the “Pierogi Pocket?” Mrs. T’s, a famed pierogi manufacturer based in Shenandoah, PA, reports that over 68 percent of pierogis are consumed in this region, which includes New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, and the cities of Chicago and Detroit. Unlike its Asian cousins, this Polish dumpling is typically filled with potatoes, cheese, sauerkraut, or ground meat. Originally considered peasant food and typically consumed while in mourning or served at wakes, pierogis are an anytime treat. Europeans often top savory pierogis with sour cream and fried onions. Dessert pierogis are more of a delicacy and are hard to find in the Valley; sweet versions have fruit fillings of apple, plum, cherry, strawberry, blueberry, and even jam.

Order here: Gus’s Restaurant and Tavern, New Windsor; Helena’s Specialty Pierogis, Kerhonkson; New York Restaurant, Catskill; Northwood Inn, Carmel Hamlet; Public House at Urban Cowboy, Big Indian



EMPANADA

Origin: Galicia, Spain

Main ingredients: Ground meat (chicken, beef, pork) or cheese

The biggest (and crispiest) dumpling in our glossary, empanadas are adored in Spain and Portugal, as well as in South America, Latin America, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic. There are even varieties of empanadas in Indonesia and the Philippines, following colonization in the 1500s. This hand pie is derived from the Spanish verb “empanar,” which means “to coat with bread.” Empanadas are made with a thick dough and are filled with meat and/or cheese, and then baked or fried. In European regions of Catalan, Italy, and France, and even the Arabian Peninsula, seafood is a popular empanada ingredient. Galician and Portuguese empanadas are more interesting—with fillings like tuna, codfish, sardines, chorizo, and pork loin.

Order here: 52 Main, Millerton; Flores Food Truck, Wappingers Falls; Los Hornitos Bakery, Wappingers Falls; Somni, Monroe; The Cube Inn, Tarrytown



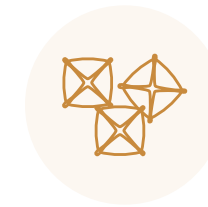
KHINKALI

Origin: The country of Georgia

Main ingredients: Spiced meat (beef, pork, lamb) or cheese, potato, mushrooms

Mongolia’s dumpling tour didn’t stop only in Korea—they landed in the eastern European country of Georgia, too. The khinkali is the XLB’s older cousin; warm water or broth is added to the spiced meat, making it extremely juicy. When eating a khinkali, you’ll need to suck out the juice before taking a bite or it will burst! It’s denser than other dumpling varieties and has a signature top, a twisted knob of pleated dough. In traditional settings, the top is removed and put aside (rather than eaten) and helps people keep track of how many khinkali they’ve eaten. The dumpling is best enjoyed plain or tossed in ground black pepper.

Order here: Badageoni, Mount Kisco



MANTI

Origin: Turkey

Main ingredients: Spiced meat (lamb, beef) or pumpkin, chickpeas

The oldest manti recipe dates to a 15th-century cookbook from the Ottoman Empire; it was filled with lamb, crushed chickpeas, cinnamon, and vinegar and then steamed in a basket. Today, manti is cooked in Turkey, Central Asia, and post-Soviet countries using a mantovarka (manti cooker/pot). The mantovarka is a multi-level steamer, making it perfect for restaurants with lines out the door. Manti are almost always topped with sumac and served with a garlic-y yogurt sauce.

Order here: Mazadar Mediterranean Kitchen, Colonie; The Turk, Mount Kisco



KHINKALI →

