

## MEET THE AUTHOR: WILLA CATHER

When Willa Cather was 9 years old, her family moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska – largely populated with Czech and German immigrants. Willa became infatuated with her neighbor Annie Pavelka, a Bohemian immigrant who served as the inspiration for Cather's *My Antonia*. Annie was very active in the kitchen, passing her recipes down to generations of her family, as well as Willa, who continued to visit even after she moved to New York.

Like Antonia, Annie baked kolaches – pastries that were a staple of Czech households. Although they can be considered sweet or savory, Willa preferred sweet. In *My Antonia*, they're filled with plums, so Chef Branson has selected a spiced plum kolache recipe to share in honor of Willa Cather.



## WILLA CATHER: KOLACHES

Serves 24

### SPICED PLUM FILLING

#### INGREDIENTS

3 pounds plums, quartered, pits removed	$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon cinnamon
2 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups sugar	$\frac{3}{8}$ teaspoon ground allspice
	$\frac{3}{8}$ teaspoon ground cloves

### KOLACHE DOUGH

#### INGREDIENTS

10 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose flour, divided, plus more for kneading	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups unsalted butter
3 packages active dry yeast	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons ground nutmeg	3 teaspoons salt
3 cups whole milk, plus 3 tablespoons for egg wash	6 eggs, plus 3 for egg wash
	3 teaspoons lemon zest

## METHOD

**Make the filling:** Combine plums and sugar in a small bowl and let sit 1 hour. In a food processor or blender, purée plum mixture. Combine plum purée, cinnamon, allspice, and cloves in a medium saucepan over high heat. Stirring constantly, bring to a boil and cook 10 minutes, or until mixture has thickened. Cool completely.

In a large bowl, combine 3 cups of flour, the yeast, and nutmeg. Set aside. In a medium saucepan, combine 3 cups milk, the butter, sugar, and salt. Warm over low heat until mixture reaches 120 to 130°F. Add milk mixture and 6 eggs to dry ingredients, stirring until fully combined; then beat with an electric mixer on high speed for 3 – 5 minutes. Stir in lemon zest and remaining 4 ½ cups of flour.

Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Knead until dough is soft and elastic, adding additional flour if necessary. Place in a lightly greased bowl, turning once to grease the

surface. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, 1 to 1 ½ hours.

Punch dough down and turn out onto a lightly floured surface. Divide dough in 3. Divide each in half and roll out each half into a 16x8-inch rectangle, about ⅛ inch thick. Cut each rectangle into 8 4x4 squares. Should yield 24 4x4 squares.

Place 1 heaping tablespoon of plum filling on center of each square. Brush the corners of each square with water, draw them up, and gently press together. Secure with a toothpick. Place on greased baking sheets, 2 inches apart. Cover and let rise for 30 minutes. Preheat oven to 375°F.

In a small bowl, beat remaining egg with 3 tablespoons of milk and brush over each square. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until golden. Transfer to wire racks and cool for 10 minutes then remove toothpicks.

