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Kids' corner

Räbeliechtle

Traditionally held around St Martin's day (11 November), Räbeliechtle is one of the highlights of the year for young Swiss. Children hull out Räben (similar to a large NZ swede) and cut patterns on the outside to make a lantern. Tea light candles are placed in the lanterns and children walk together in a parade in the dark of the early evening.



Background

Historically, the Räben were the last of the root vegetables harvested before the harsh winter arrived. It could be that the festival found its origins as a form of celebration of the harvest. Another possibility is that it is a celebration of St Martin's day. However, these days, the Räben are seldom eaten but grown for children to use for this special festival.

The Räbeliechtle Umzug (procession)

In each local area, there is a procession organised by the local board. The children meet together and walk through the streets behind a band. Traffic is stopped and the dark night is filled with dancing lights and excited chatter. In some cities such as Richterswil, there is a large procession with over a thousand children and in excess of 20,000 onlookers. At the end of our procession, we would gather around a bonfire singing lantern songs. One favourite is below. You can find the tune on YouTube.

Laterne, Laterne

Laterne, Laterne,	Lantern, lantern
Sonne, Mond und Sterne.	Sun, moon and stars
Brenne auf mein Licht!	Burn my light
Brenne auf mein Licht!	Burn my light
Aber nur meine liebe Laterne nicht!	But please not my lovely lantern
Laterne, Laterne	Lantern, lantern
Sonne, Mond und Sterne.	Sun, moon and stars

Make your own Räbeliechtle

- 1 Look out for a large flat bottomed swede and cut the top off about 2cm from the top. A thin skinned pumpkin can also be used.
- 2 Hull out the vegetable leaving about 1cm of flesh.
- 3 Using a sharp knife, draw patterns on the outside and scrape just the skin off inside your pattern. Younger children (and parents in a hurry) can use cookie cutters and press the shape into the skin.
- 4 With a skewer make 3 evenly spaced holes about 1cm from the top of the cut vegetable, and matching holes in the lid.
- 5 Get 3 lengths of string about 50cm long. Tie the string around your swede and feed it through the holes in the lid tying all three pieces together at the top. Adjust the length to the age and size of your child.
- 6 Children can hold the string or (my preference) tie the string to a strong stick. Again, try it for size on your child!
- 7 Place a lighted candle in the middle and you are ready to go. For younger children (and those who love to swing them around) you may want a bike light or battery operated candle. If not, make sure you are prepared to relight the candle very often.

By Jane Coughlan

