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Contact Susan Nye at  
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More information the web at  
[www.susannye.com](http://www.susannye.com)

Think about mid-summer and you come up with images of sunshine, fun, parties and romance. Maybe even a little magic. Shakespeare celebrated mid-summer with a dream-filled play. But think about mid-winter. What do you get? Not much. Mid-winter is celebrated with Groundhog Day.

Even when I was little, Groundhog Day seemed like a rather silly holiday. Or maybe non-holiday is a better word for it. I understand the concept. The groundhog wakes up in the middle of his winter sleep, pops his head outside, looks around and maybe takes a quick stroll. If it's sunny and he sees his shadow, he dives back in his hole and winter will last another six weeks. If it's cloudy the groundhog will cancel the rest of his nap and hang around in anticipation of an early spring. It seems counter-intuitive. If it were me, I'd stay out and play in the sunshine. A cloudy or grey day is a good excuse to stay inside and read a book or take a nap.

For anyone living in New England, the story doesn't make any sense. We've all heard about hibernation. We know that groundhogs are one of those animals that climb under the covers in late fall and don't come out again until spring. In February the groundhog's lair is covered with at least a foot or two of snow, maybe more. Even if for some unfathomable reason a groundhog gets frisky in the middle of his long winter's nap, what's he going to do? Dig his way out? I am sure that New Hampshire groundhogs just roll over and go right back to sleep.

So who came up with all this stuff and nonsense?

Hundreds of years ago the Celts of Ireland and Scotland celebrated something called Imbolc. By early February, the Celts were getting fed up with the long nights and grey skies. As the days started to get a little longer and the air a little warmer, they grew both hopeful and impatient. The Imbolc festival celebrated any sign of eagerly awaited warm weather.

When compared to New Hampshire, winter in Ireland and Scotland is practically balmy. It's more chilly than cold, more rainy than snowy. True or not, legend has it that as the days got a just bit longer and the rain just a bit warmer, a few critters got restless. Insomniac hedgehogs (the groundhog's European cousin), began to sneak a peak to see if it was time to get up. Spying a hedgehog was a good omen that spring was just around the corner and cause for jubilant celebrations.

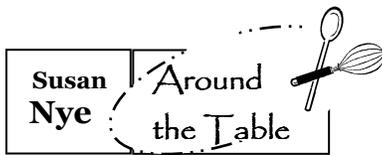
Fast forward a few centuries and Imbolc has been transformed into Groundhog Day. At least in the United States, it's just a bunch of guys in top hats pestering a groundhog somewhere in Pennsylvania. That and a lot of speculation on when winter will finally end.

As if there could be any doubt. At least in New Hampshire, winter will continue until it's good and ready to quit. Let's face it, winter is here for eight maybe ten more weeks. You can harass groundhogs, you can speculate, you predict all you want. I'll bet you a dollar there will still be snow in my yard on April Fool's Day.

If you hate the cold and snow and all that goes with it, Groundhog Day is cause for celebration. Winter is half over. Spring, while still distant, is on the horizon. If you love winter, Groundhog Day is a reminder to get out and ski, skate, snowshoe or just play in the snow. Enjoy it while you can. The end of winter, while still distant, is on the horizon.

Bon appétit! -

Susan



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### Caribbean Fish Stew

*Whether you love it or hate it, winter will be around for several more weeks. Bring some sunshine into your kitchen with a taste of the Caribbean. This warm and cozy dish is perfect on a cold night. Enjoy!*

Serves 8 - 10

1 large onion, chopped  
2-3 sweet potatoes, peeled and cubed  
1 carrot, chopped  
1 red bell pepper, chopped  
1 tablespoon minced jalapeno pepper or to taste  
1/2 teaspoon each of paprika, cumin, cayenne pepper, dried oregano, dried thyme, kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
2 cups fish or chicken stock  
2 cups crushed tomatoes  
Juice of 1/2 lime  
1 pound cod or scrod filets, cut into 2-inch pieces  
1 pound scallops  
1 pound large shrimp  
Olive oil  
Garnish: chopped fresh cilantro and chopped green onions

1. Heat a little olive oil in a soup kettle over medium heat. Add the onion, sweet potatoes, carrot, red pepper, jalapeno and spices. Cook, stirring, about 10 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook another 2 to 3 minutes.
2. Add the stock, tomatoes and lime juice. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover and simmer for about 5 minutes or until the potatoes are tender.
3. Check for seasoning. Add the fish and cook for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the scallops and shrimp; simmer until the scallops are opaque, the shrimp are pink and the fish is cooked through, an additional 3 to 5 minutes. Garnish with cilantro and green onions and serve.

*The stew can be made ahead through step 2. Cool to room temperature, cover and refrigerate. Bring the vegetables and broth to a simmer and continue with step 3.*