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More information the web at

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Living abroad is a wonderful experience. You get to discover all sorts of new places, people and things. I did just that for seventeen years. I went over to Switzerland for an eight-week internship and, well, I guess I sort of forgot to come home. And who could blame me? It was a great life. I had a series of interesting jobs that took me all over Europe and beyond. I skied the Alps in the winter, played in and around Lake Geneva in the summer, hiked up hill and over dale in the spring and fall. I went white river rafting and canoeing in France and bicycled through several countries. I enjoyed an upfront and personal taste of cuisines too numerous to mention. Yes, it was a great life.

Wherever you live, you are constantly learning. With every new experience, you grow and change a little. At some point your brain, or at least my brain, gets so full of new stuff that some of what you used to know falls out. Like algebra and geometry, the periodic table, the name of the twenty-seventh President, the capital of Nebraska and identifying poison ivy.

I was reminded of this last memory lapse yesterday afternoon on my walk around the lake. There is a big field of poison ivy a few miles from my home. At least I think it's poison ivy. I still have a little trouble distinguishing it from some of the weeds and seedlings that pop up every spring.

This summer will mark five years in my house near Pleasant Lake. I made the move in the heat and humidity of midsummer. As soon as the temperature cooled down, I set to work creating gardens in front and back. I dug, tilled and planted at least 1,000 bulbs. One morning I discovered a few itchy bumps on my hand. I'd had something similar before, usually during times of stress. I figured that buying a house and moving were pretty darned stressful. Happily, my hand cleared up in about a week.

Fast forward to spring, I was back in the garden, enjoying my new blooms, planting and weeding. Again, my hand got a little red, a little itchy and a little swollen. I probably had two or three minor flare-ups over the course of the spring, summer and early fall. I chalked it up to entrepreneurial jitters and starting a new business.

Winter came and went. Soon I was back in the garden with a new project: tackling the tangled weeds, vines and brush in the side yard. I dug, pulled and hacked away, creating a small mountain of debris for the compost pile. The next morning the little red spots were back; but this time they weren't so little. This time both hands were enflamed; there were big splotches running up my arms, around my ankles and on my face. Finally, it dawned on me; it wasn't nerves, it was poison ivy!

Now, I mentioned that you learn a lot when you move to a new country. When you return home, you discover you've forgotten at least half of what you knew before you left. And for whatever reason, a few odd facts and recollections are more difficult to retrieve than others. In my case, my brain couldn't seem to recall poison ivy or connect it to the itchy red bumps that kept appearing on my fingers. As a kid, I had many run-ins with the wicked vine but it doesn't exist in pristinely clean Switzerland. Identifying poison ivy went from vital knowledge to superfluous information. Unfortunately, it took a pretty dramatic event to regain critical status!

I wish you a wonderful spring, whether you spend your free timing hiking in the woods or working in the garden, enjoy the warm sunshine ... and beware of poison ivy!

Bon appétit!

Susan

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Apron

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Bruschetta with Grilled Vegetables & Gorgonzola

Try these delicious bruschetta with a glass of wine at the end of a busy day. Whether you have a mob on your deck or just a few friends over to enjoy the sunset, it is a great warm weather hors d'œuvre. Enjoy!

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar or lemon juice
2 cloves garlic, chopped
1/3 cup fresh basil leaves
1 red bell pepper, seeded and thinly sliced
1 small red onion, thinly sliced
2 medium zucchini, sliced on the diagonal
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
12 slices baguette

Gorgonzola Spread (recipe follows)

Put the olive oil, vinegar, garlic and basil in a blender and process until well combined. Let it sit for about an hour and then strain the basil oil through a fine mesh sieve. Pre-heat the grill to medium-high.

Toss the pepper and onion in a little basil oil, season with salt and pepper. Grill in a grill basket for about 6 minutes, stirring 2 or 3 times. Brush the zucchini slices with a little basil oil, season with salt and pepper. Grill for about 2 minutes per side. Grill the bread on both sides until golden brown. Generously top the toasted bread with the Gorgonzola Spread, top with grilled vegetables and drizzle with a little basil oil.

Store any extra basil oil in a glass jar in the refrigerator.

If you prefer, you can roast the vegetables in a 375 degree oven until tender-crisp. Toast the bread in the oven as well.

Gorgonzola Spread

4 ounces Gorgonzola, at room temperature
2 ounces cream cheese, at room temperature

Crumble the gorgonzola into a small bowl; add the cream cheese. Mash the cheeses together with a fork to combine.

