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Chef's Apron

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More information the web at
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It may be late this year but it seems that it came awfully quickly. Just a few weeks ago we stood on a soggy beach watching the fireworks fizzle in the rain. Now it is suddenly Labor Day.

When we were kids, Labor Day weekend was always a sad time. It was time to pack up the station wagon and head south to the suburbs. But before we left we always tried to cram at least another summer into the three day weekend.

I can't say it never rained on Labor Day, at least once or twice, we packed up while the last vestiges of a hurricane blew through. But most of my childhood memories are of glorious sunshine. After weeks of heat and humidity, summer in New Hampshire ends with warm, dry days and cool nights. It is the perfect weather for tennis matches or sailing. Tennis tournaments and sunfish regattas kept our parents on the courts and on the lake and out of our hair for most of the holiday.

With parents occupied, a virtual army of kids and teenagers were free to do almost anything but play tennis or sail. Suddenly, we didn't have to be prompted to get moving. We went in search of amusement in and around Pleasant Lake. Grubby little boys and girls went on one last frog hunting expedition. Convinced that all those swimming lessons might have helped, a few young ones made one last, valiant attempt to pass the raft test. The results were generally mixed.

Teenagers did their best to dodge babysitting younger brothers and sisters. If successful, they rambled around the hills that surround the lake or took one last turn on water skis. I remember one Labor Day when I was determined to finish the summer on a single ski. I spent most of Saturday and Sunday falling as I tried to drop one ski and make at least one short pass by the beach. It took awhile but my tenacity, and the boat driver's patience, paid off. Finally exhausted but triumphant, I took a very quick victory lap. I then completed the effort, arms and legs flailing, with one final, dramatic tumble into the lake.

The long weekend will be packed with activity but there is a sweet sadness to Labor Day on Pleasant Lake. Everyone will take one last swim, sail, ski and paddle before docks are pulled up and out of the water. Boats of all shapes and sizes will be hauled to dry land. Sandy beach towels will be collected and thrown in the washer. Grills will fire up for one last cookout before cottages are swept clean for the winter. After sharing one last sunrise or sunset or both, beach chairs will be stored away. Long, teary farewells will be exchanged. Hugs will be shared. For the summer people, it's the last hurrah and time to go home. So maybe it's just sad and not so sweet after all.

Unless you live here. If you are lucky enough to live here, you won't spend Labor Day cramming duffels, bikes, kids, cats and dogs into the SUV or mini-van. The day after Labor Day will not be another day of insanity and rushing around in bumper to bumper traffic. It will be another day in paradise. It will be another great day to listen to the loons, to ramble through the woods, to kayak on the lake to play tennis or golf or both in the early fall sunshine.

We may need to add an extra blanket at night and find a sweater on chilly mornings but it's time to celebrate one of New Hampshire's best months ... September. Enjoy!

Bon appétit! ~ Susan



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Grilled Swordfish & Caponata

Caponata is incredibly versatile and perfect for the holiday weekend. Make up a batch and serve it with swordfish hot off the grill, pop some into a pita for lunch or spread it on lightly toasted ciabatta bread for a delicious hors d'oeuvre. Enjoy!

Serves 4

1 – 1 1/2 pounds swordfish

Olive oil

Juice from 1/2 - 1 lemon or lime

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

Grilled Caponata (recipe follows)

Heat grill to high. Brush the swordfish with olive oil and lemon juice, season with salt and pepper. Grill for 3 - 5 minutes per side. Remove from the grill and serve with Grilled Caponata.

Grilled Caponata

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1-2 teaspoon anchovy paste

1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil

1 medium eggplant, thickly sliced

1 large red onion, chopped

10-12 grape tomatoes

1/4 cup large green olives, pitted and chopped

2 tablespoons capers, drained

1/4 cup golden raisins, plumped in hot water and drained

2 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted

3 tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

Olive oil

Combine the garlic, anchovy paste, red pepper flakes, vinegar, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Whisk in the extra virgin olive oil until the vinaigrette is well combined.

Heat grill to high. Brush eggplant with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Toss onion and tomatoes with a little olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Put the onions and tomatoes in a grill basket and grill for 6-8 minutes, stirring from time to time. Grill the eggplant for 4 to 6 minutes per side until golden brown and cooked through. Remove the vegetables from the grill. Chop the eggplant.

Place the vegetables in a medium bowl and add the olives, capers, raisins and pine nuts. Add enough vinaigrette to the vegetables to lightly coat. Add the parsley and toss. Let stand at room temperature for 30 minutes before serving.