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It's time for fall fashion. In fact, it's probably already pass time to hit the stores for the latest and greatest from New York, Paris and Milan. I confess I only give a passing nod to fashion. I like to think that I stick to the classics. My young nieces disagree and don't hesitate to remind at least a few times of year that I am hopelessly out of date. These young fashion police have tried to help me. They even walked me into a bunch of trendy boutiques in Newburyport one chilly afternoon last fall. I quickly steered us out and over to the book store. Infrequently, very infrequently, I somehow manage to redeem myself with a sweater or scarf which by pure chance meets their approval.

How did I become a fashion don't? First of all, when it comes to clothing I'm more interested in fabric, color, pattern and texture than what's in. To compound matters, I'm probably too independent or just too plain ornery to be told what to wear. And finally, I found a look I liked a long time ago and stuck with it. It all started with Diane Keaton and Annie Hall. With a few minor adjustments, I am more or less stuck in the eighties. When some combination of khakis, interesting hats and scarves, odd sunglasses, vests, sweaters, Brooks Brothers shirts and turtlenecks are in style, well so am I. Or as close to being in style as I get. On a few rare occasions I have strayed into something a bit more fashionable but it didn't take long before I stumbled back.

So that's what my nieces have to bear when I take them around town or to the movies or mall, a short little aunt trying to look like long and lean Diane Keaton. I usually spare them the interesting hats unless it's raining or snowing. And I never wear or wore a necktie. Okay maybe for a few weeks but it was right after I moved to Europe and people do strange things in foreign countries. Besides I was far away and the girls had not been born yet.

But that's just my casual look. For many years I had to dress like an Important Business Woman. I bought my first Important Business Woman suits in the mid-eighties. They had big shoulders which I could square importantly and pretend I was Joan Crawford or Katherine Hepburn. Both in the office and on the weekends, I always wanted to look like tall, elegant movie stars. Even though I fall short by at least four or five inches.

Luckily for everyone those oversized shoulder pads slowly deflated and women could wear a suit without looking like a linebacker. And those blouses with the bows and ruffles also went to fashion heaven or hell. Until now. I recently read that the eighties are back or at least those Important Business Woman suits with the big shoulder pads are back. Thank goodness I now spend my days writing in my little home office and testing recipes in my kitchen and get to work in my pajamas, a pair of jeans or khakis. It's been a while since I donned a suit so don't expect to see me looking important any time soon.

On the other hand ... I do like to pay at least a little attention to changes and trends in the food world (okay maybe more than a little). I'm not sure if it is an occupational hazard or occupational perk. One of my current favorites is eating locally. The farmers are busy harvesting squashes and pumpkins and apples are ripe for picking. It's time to get out and about and visit a pick-your-own orchard, your local farmers' market or farm stand. Enjoy the harvest and the autumn sunshine,

Bon appétit!

Susan



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Rustic Apple Tart

What could be better than an apple tart after a busy afternoon in the orchard? Enjoy!

2-4 tablespoons brown sugar
2 tablespoons all purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
Pinch of salt
4-6 apples, peeled (optional) and thinly sliced
Grated peel of 1/2 orange
Juice of 1/2 orange
1 tablespoon Calvados or applejack (optional)
Flakey Pastry (recipe follows)
2 tablespoons cold butter, cut into small pieces

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Combine the brown sugar, flour, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt in a small bowl. In a medium bowl, toss the apples, orange peel, juice and Calvados together.

Roll out the dough into a rough circle, about 14 inches in diameter. Add the sugar-flour mixture to the apples and toss to combine. Leaving a 3 to 4 inch border, arrange the apples evenly over the pastry dough. Gently fold the edge of the dough over the fruit.

Dot the top of the tart with butter. Bake until the crust is golden brown and the fruit is tender, about 40 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes and serve.

Flakey Pastry

1 cup all purpose flour
1 teaspoon sugar
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) chilled butter, cut into pieces
3 tablespoons solid vegetable shortening, cold
2-4 tablespoons ice water

Blend flour, sugar and salt a food processor. Add butter and shortening; and process until mixture resembles coarse meal.

Sprinkle with ice water, 1-2 tablespoons at a time, and process until dough comes together in a ball. Flatten the dough into disk. Wrap dough in plastic; chill until firm enough to roll, at least 30 minutes.