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Treat Yourself to an Around the Table Chef's Apron

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More information the web at www.susannye.com

Last week I got to thinking (always a dangerous thing). I began mulling and wondering, "What are America's favorite foods?" Curiosity peaked; I did a little research on the internet. I figured I would find lots of top ten lists. I expected to see things like burgers and fries, ice cream, chocolate and chips, steak or roast beast or both and maybe Toll House® cookies.

Much to my surprise I couldn't find an answer. I got nothing. Zip, nada, bumpkis. There were lots of lists. There were lists of favorite comfort food, favorite junk food, best restaurants for burgers and pizza, most popular ice cream and on and on ... There were lists of healthy foods, super foods and worst foods. But there was no list of our top ten or twenty-five or even five all-time favorite foods. If I couldn't find a list I decided I could come up with my own. Even if it was only a survey of one! Several possibilities started to swirl around my brain. It was a picture perfect day, warm and sunny. I decided to take a walk and sort it all out.

First I decided that I needed to come up with some criteria. I made it simple. I did a little twist on the old desert island scenario and asked, "What foods would I want at my rescue/homecoming celebration?"

This question was pretty easy because although I've never been stuck on a desert island, I did live overseas for a long time. When I first moved to Switzerland, I discovered that many things I took for granted, did not exist there. Or if they did, they were hard to find, outrageously expensive, of inferior quality or all three. Take Toll House® cookies, Switzerland might be famous for chocolate and home of Nestlé® but I could not find those semi-sweet little morsels.

When I returned to the US, I discovered that many of the things I had grown to love in Switzerland did not exist here. For instance, I can't seem to find rampon, more commonly known as mache or lamb's lettuce. I know it exists here somewhere but not at my local supermarket, farm stand or farmers' market.

And so, as soon as I hug the Coast Guard goodbye, I will expect the welcome home committee to begin wining and dining me with my favorite vittles. I've discovered that most of the foods on my list fall into one of two categories. Seasonal. If something is only available for a few weeks or months, it is so much more crave-able. And luxurious. If I can't or can barely afford it, then yes please, I'd really like some!

Here goes!

1. **Fresh asparagus:** as far as I am concerned asparagus is synonymous with spring.
2. **Beef:** a filet, grilled and very rare or maybe beef tenderloin, also very rare.
3. **Really good cheese:** please nothing made of plastic, only perfect New England artisan cheeses or delicious imports from France, Switzerland or Italy will do.
4. **Chocolate:** and no, not Nestlé's morsels. Make mine a luscious Swiss milk chocolate champagne truffle.
5. **Fresh corn:** not frozen or from a can but on the cob and picked within minutes or at most a few hours of its plunge into boiling water.
6. **Lobster:** straight from the Gulf of Maine.
7. **Pasta:** maybe with asparagus, fresh tomatoes or lobster!
8. **A salad of mixed baby greens, arugula and yes, lots of rampon:** or maybe just rampon!
9. **Fresh, summer tomatoes:** the kind you can only find in the summer, the ones you grown in the backyard or find at the farm stand or farmers market.
10. **A lovely glass of wine or two to go with it all!**

I could go on and on but that seems to be as good a start as any.

Island rescue or not, it is a great time to bring friends and family together for a feast of your favorites. Bon appétit and enjoy!



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Apron

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Roasted Asparagus with Walnuts

This dish is elegant as a first course or delicious as a side dish. Serve it with your Easter lamb or a nice grilled filet. Enjoy!

Serves 8

2 pounds asparagus
About 2 tablespoons walnut oil
About 1 tablespoon champagne or white wine vinegar
1/4 cup chopped walnuts
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Snap off the fibrous root ends from the asparagus.

Place the asparagus on a large rimmed baking sheet; drizzle with walnut oil and vinegar. Sprinkle with salt and pepper; toss to coat. Sprinkle with chopped walnuts.

Roast in the oven for 8-12 minutes or until the asparagus is tender-crisp. Serve hot or at room temperature.

If you have leftovers, chop the spears into bite sized pieces and toss them with spaghetti or linguine. You may want to add a bit more walnut oil and vinegar and a few more toasted walnuts. Sprinkle with a little grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese and some freshly ground pepper. Serve immediately.

