



# Indian Summer & Grilled Ratatouille Stacks

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[susannye@tds.net](mailto:susannye@tds.net)

603/526 7319

PO Box 1875

New London

New Hampshire 03257

I love September. Unfortunately this year, the month has had a rainy start but it's got to change! The days are usually warm and sunny. Summer's too often oppressive humidity gets wrung from the air. I almost feel sorry for the summer people who loaded up their SUV's and minivans and headed back to the suburbs on Labor Day. They are missing a very special time of year in New Hampshire.

Almost sorry, because with the summer people gone, I now have a bit of time to stretch and relax. Throughout the summer I am the chef at a private club. While I love to cook and enjoy the club members, this close-to-fulltime gig is stacked on top of my already busy writing schedule. Phew! I'm ready for a break!

After a too busy summer I suddenly have a bit of free time on my hands. So, how to spend it? I think I'd like to take it slow and sort of amble through Indian summer.

Instead of cooking for thirty, forty, sixty or one hundred, I'm looking forward to intimate dinners with family and friends. Instead of piling three shopping carts as high as the sky, I'll hobnob with local farmers. A leisurely stroll through the Farmer's Market in search of fresh ingredients will be a nice change of pace. I'll let the local harvest and my whim and fancy dictate tonight's menu.

I've got several deadlines looming but I'm also looking forward to some uninterrupted time to work on my growing collection of short stories. This project was just one of the many which was unceremoniously dumped last spring. Temporarily shelved but not forgotten, it's time to get back to Lizzie Grant's\* stories and adventures. It's great fun to let my mind to wander in, out and around new characters and their exploits. Incidentally, there is a silver lining to shelving the project for a few months. A couple of weeks ago while taking a walk, the proverbial light bulb clicked on and bunch of new storylines tumbled into my brain. Wow! Sometimes a break is good.

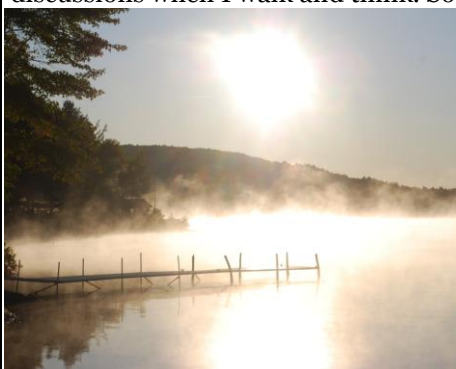
Since exercise clears my head and helps sort through the flotsam and jetsam, I'll be stretching my limbs and wandering through the countryside. With any luck a few more good ideas will pop into my head. I have a tenancy to carry on internal debates and discussions when I walk and think. So if you happen to drive or walk by a woman mumbling to herself, don't be alarmed. It's just me and my imagination out for a walk.

Then again you might spot the two of us out on the water in the kayak. Pleasant Lake is wonderful on Indian summer mornings. The cool early morning air hits the water which is still warm from the summer sun and creates a fine mist. Patches of fog float on the lake and rise up into the surrounding hills. When the early morning sun hits the water and mist, it is pure magic.

I guess that's as close as I'm going to get to a plan for the next few weeks. How will you spend Indian summer?

Bon appétit!

\* Lizzie will make her publishing debut in October in an anthology of short stories by New Hampshire writers.



### Grilled Ratatouille Stacks



*The trick to making good ratatouille is to cook the vegetables separately and combine at the end. Sure you can toss everything together but why not create elegant stacks for a beautiful side dish for grilled lamb or roast chicken. Enjoy!*

Serves 6

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar  
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil  
3 cloves garlic

1 pint grape or cherry tomatoes  
1 teaspoon herbs de Provence, divided  
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper  
1 red bell pepper, cut into large chunks  
1 small onion, cut into large chunks  
1 medium zucchini, cut crosswise into 1/2" slices  
1-2 small eggplants (about 1 pound), cut crosswise into 1/2" slices  
Freshly grated parmesan cheese  
Chopped fresh parsley

Put the vinegar, and garlic in a blender and process until the garlic is finely chopped. Add the olive oil and process to combine. Let the mixture sit for 10-15 minutes to mix and meld the flavors. (You will probably have leftover vinaigrette. Store it in a clean container in the refrigerator.)

Preheat the grill to medium high. If you have a huge grill you can cook everything at once. Otherwise, you'll have to cook in batches like I do.

Put the tomatoes in a large bowl, drizzle with a little vinaigrette; sprinkle with 1/4 of the herbs de Provence and salt and pepper to taste and toss to combine. Stirring once or twice, cook the tomatoes in a grill basket for about 5 minutes or until they are lightly caramelized.

Put the peppers and onions in the bowl, drizzle with vinaigrette; sprinkle with 1/4 of the herbs de Provence and salt and pepper to taste and toss to combine. Tossing a few times, cook the vegetables in a grill basket for about 5 minutes or until the vegetables are lightly caramelized but still tender crisp.

Put the zucchini slices in the bowl, drizzle with vinaigrette; sprinkle with 1/4 of the herbs de Provence and salt and pepper to taste and toss to combine. Arrange the zucchini slices in a single layer on the grill and cook 2-3 minutes per side.

Brush the eggplant slices with vinaigrette and sprinkle with the remaining herbs and salt and pepper. Arrange the eggplant slices in a single layer on the grill and cook 2-3 minutes per side.

To make a stack: start with a slice of eggplant, add zucchini, artfully top with a couple of tomatoes and chopped peppers and onions and sprinkle with a little parmesan cheese. Serve warm or at room temperature, garnished with a little chopped parsley.

*If it's cold and rainy you can make this dish inside. Use a grill pan or roast the veggies in the oven at 425 degrees.*

*You can grill the vegetables in advance, cool and store in the refrigerator. To reheat: put the stacks on the grill or in a 350 degree oven until the vegetables are warmed through and the cheese melts.*

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