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In spite of the warm weather, both the lovely sunny days and the not so lovely almost-tropical showers, it's beginning to look a lot like fall. Splotches of red and yellow are becoming more pronounced on the hills surrounding Pleasant Lake. Leaves have begun to



ever-so-gently fall from the trees. They float like tiny boats along the lake's edge and skitter across the beach in the afternoon breeze. It's lovely, tranquil, with just the right touch of poetry and romance. Until I happen to glance out my window. Those lovely autumn leaves have been making a beeline to my yard.

Then again, all those leaves remind me of Saturday afternoons on Jackson Road. I remember the cool air, the warm, golden sunlight and my dad, rake in hand. Before the lunch dishes were even cleared, Dad was out in the garage grabbing his rake. He'd spend the entire afternoon raking and piling up the endless supply of crackling, dry leaves that always found their way into our yard. Unless we were quick and disappeared, he always recruited, make that drafted, my sister Brenda and me to help. I seem to remember that my sister was much better than I at disappearing. While I was lazily dreaming up ways to spend the afternoon, my sister was quick out the door to a friend's house or a Girl Scout meeting.

Dad would grab his big rake and a cute little one for me (and Brenda if she hadn't managed to give him the slip). More toy than tool, I wielded my rake with courage and determination. Well, not exactly. Throughout the long afternoon, I divided my time between pretending to rake, complaining and, the best part, jumping into the enormous piles of leaves which Dad created.

As soon as the sun began to set, the air shifted from cool to downright chilly. Dad and every other father on the street made quick work of their hours of raking. Within minutes the leafy piles were reduced to small mounds of ash and the wonderful smell of burning leaves filled the neighborhood.



The ashes cooled quickly as dusk fell. We put our rakes away and hurried inside. If we'd turned to inspect the freshly raked yard, we would have seen that a late afternoon breeze had brought in a thick, new covering of leaves. But there was always another day and Mom had dinner on the stove and warm water running for a tub.

It's been a few decades since most communities allowed it but I don't know a single person over forty who doesn't miss the sweet smell of burning leaves. Without the promise of that smoky perfume, our motivation to flex our muscles and get out the rake is gone. Instead we rev up the leaf blower or lawn mower. I know my grass needs to be cut at least one more time before the snow flies so why not combine two jobs in one?

These noisy power tools are a lot less enchanting than the picture of dad and daughter with rakes in hand. Their noisy roar plays havoc with the tranquility of a golden afternoon but the work is done in an hour or two not four or five. Instead of ash and smoky perfume, the great leafy piles will be turned into compost. And maybe, just maybe, some will feed a father-daughter vegetable patch or stand of sunflowers next summer.

Bon appétit!

Susan



Apple Crumb Cake

While the smell of burning leaves on an October afternoon is nothing more than a distant memory, the warm and wonderful aroma of apples and spice can fill your kitchen today. Enjoy!

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus extra for the pan
 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for the pan
 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
 1/2 teaspoon salt
 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
 1/2 teaspoon ginger
 Grated zest of 1/2 orange
 Pinch nutmeg
 1 cup granulated sugar
 1 large egg
 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 3/4 cup sour cream
 1 apple, peeled, cored and chopped
 1/4 cup dried cranberries or raisins
 Crumbly Topping (recipe follows)
 Apple Cider Crème Anglaise (recipe follows)

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Butter and flour a 9-inch springform pan or deep dish pie plate.

Whisk the flour, baking powder, spices and orange peel together in a small bowl.

In a larger bowl, beat the butter and sugar until pale and fluffy with an electric mixer, about 3 minutes. Add the egg, vanilla and sour cream and beat until smooth. Add the dry ingredients, a little at a time, mixing until just smooth. Fold the chopped apple and dried cranberries into the batter. Spread the batter into the prepared pan and sprinkle with the Crumbly Topping.

Bake the cake for 10 minutes then reduce the oven temperature to 325 degrees and bake the cake until golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 45-50 minutes. Let the cake cool in the pan on a rack for 10-15 minutes. Remove the springform collar and continue to cool. Serve the cake at room temperature with a spoonful of cold Apple Cider Crème Anglaise.



Crumbly Topping

1/4 cup all-purpose flour
 1/4 cup light brown sugar, packed
 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
 1/4 teaspoon ginger
 Pinch nutmeg
 Pinch kosher salt
 3 tablespoons cold, unsalted butter, cut in pieces
 1/3 cup oatmeal

Put the flour, sugar, salt and spices in a small food processor and pulse to combine. Add the butter and pulse until the mixture resembles coarse corn meal. Add the oatmeal and pulse until the topping starts to come together in small lumps.

Apple Cider Crème Anglaise

3 cups apple cider
 6 large egg yolks
 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
 3-4 tablespoons brown sugar
 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
 1/2 teaspoon ginger
 Pinch nutmeg
 Pinch salt
 Grated zest of 1/2 orange
 2-3 tablespoons Calvados or Apple Jack (optional)

Put the cider in a small sauce pan and bring to a boil over medium high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until reduced to 1/2 cup.

Set a small bowl in a large one. Surround the small bowl with ice water and set aside.

Put the eggs, cream, brown sugar, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg and salt in a blender and process until smooth. With the motor running, very slowly add the reduced cider and process until smooth.

Transfer the sauce to a small pot, add the orange zest and cook over low heat, stirring almost constantly until the sauce reaches 170 degrees on a candy thermometer. Stir in the Calvados. Pour the sauce through a fine-mesh sieve into the bowl in the ice bath. Stirring frequently, cool the crème to room temperature, cover and store in the refrigerator until cold.

