



Home My First Thanksgiving & Rustic Apple Croustade &

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For the better part of two decades, I lived in Switzerland. Before settling down in Geneva, I spent a year in Bienne. While many know it as the country's watch-making capital, Bienne's true historical significance has little to do with time pieces. This picturesque lakeside town is the birth place of an annual tradition, Thanksgiving Dinner at Susan's.

Having grown up in Massachusetts, I have a special affinity for the harvest celebration. From kindergarten onward, my teachers proudly rolled out lesson after lesson on the Pilgrims. It started with construction paper hats and headdresses. A few years later, we learned that the Wampanoag taught the Pilgrims how to farm, fish and hunt in the New World. I for one will never forget the tip to plant dead fish with the corn crop. In high school we read the famous Longfellow poem about Priscilla Mullins' romantic triangle with Miles Standish and John Alden.

On top of all that, my family spent a lot of time on Cape Cod when I was a kid. Nana Nye took my sister and me to Plymouth to see the Rock and the Pilgrim Village at least once or twice over the years. In his day, Pop Nye made an important contribution to Thanksgiving tables across the country. After he retired, one of his many odd jobs was harvesting cranberries.

So even half a world away from Plymouth Plantation, there was no way I could ignore the harvest feast. I invited a dozen of my new friends and colleagues for dinner and promised them an authentic, New England Thanksgiving.

About a week before the party, I sat down with paper, pencil and the *Joy of Cooking*. Figuring out my menu was easy. I would serve the very same dinner that my mother, and grandmothers before her, had been making for years. Finishing up my shopping list, it hit me. For my first big party in Switzerland, I was going to serve a brown dinner. Brown turkey, brown gravy, brown stuffing and squash, well sort of orange, but more or less brown. Even dessert, a beautiful apple pie, was brown. Alright, to be precise with the mashed potatoes and creamed onions it was actually a brown and beige dinner. The only colorful note to my decades-old menu was the ruby red cranberry sauce.

So there you have it. Fresh from the land of fast food, weak beer and bad coffee, the new girl in town was going to serve a brown and beige dinner ... with cranberry jam.

But I'd promised authentic so, throwing caution to the wind, I plunged in. An Arkansas farmer shipped turkeys to Switzerland for Christmas and they arrived just barely in time for Thanksgiving. By lucky coincidence, the Swiss garnish their favorite fall feast of venison with cranberries. Familiar bags of Cape Cod berries were piled high in my local super market. There were apples and pumpkins in the Farmers' Market and fabulous bread for stuffing at my corner boulangerie. I chopped and stirred; peeled and mashed; stuffed, trussed and basted.

The night of the party I nervously greeted my guests. After some hemming and hawing, I explained that my authentic New England feast was ... in a word ... monochromatic. Could be they were curious or maybe just polite but my friends hid any trepidation. I've always suspected that they viewed the feast as an anthropological adventure.

In spite of, or maybe because of, the age-old menu, that Thanksgiving quickly turned into celebration of welcome and new friendship. I wish you all a wonderful Thanksgiving and bon appétit!





Rustic Apple Croustade

My version of a French country classic was such a big hit last Thanksgiving that I think I will bake one again this year. Enjoy!

Serves 8-12

5-6 Cortland or Granny Smith apples, peeled, cored and thinly sliced
1/4 cup brown sugar
Grated zest of 1 orange
2 tablespoons fresh orange juice
2 tablespoons Calvados or Cognac
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/2 teaspoon salt
8 ounces phyllo leaves, fully defrosted
6-8 ounces (1 1/2-2 sticks) butter, melted
About 2 tablespoon cold butter, cut into small pieces

Put the apples, brown sugar, orange zest and juice, Calvados, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt in a bowl and toss to combine. Reserve.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Lightly brush a 10-12 inch quiche pan or pie plate with butter. Unwrap the phyllo, stack and cover with a damp kitchen towel. Remove the first phyllo sheet and re-place the damp towel. Place the first sheet so it is about two-thirds-in and one-third-overlapping the pan; brush lightly with butter. Continue to line the pan with 1/2 of the phyllo, lightly brushing the sheets with butter.

Mound the apples in the pan. Dot the apples with the cold butter. Stack the remaining phyllo leaves on top of the apples, lightly brushing each with butter. Gently turn the edges of the phyllo up and pinch lightly to seal. Cut a few vents in the phyllo to let the steam escape.

Bake at 400 degrees until the crust is golden brown and the fruit is tender, about 40 minutes. If the phyllo gets too brown, cover it loosely with foil. Let cool for 10 minutes and serve. If making ahead, reheat for 10-15 minutes in a warm oven before serving.



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