



When the Going Gets Rough ... The Tough Throw a Party & Mixed Greens with Roasted Beets & Lentils

Winter 2012/Volume 282

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It's a world gone mad or at the very least a very strange winter. It gets warm and rains. Then the temperature plummets. When I wrote about this odd phenomenon a week or so ago, I figured (make that hoped) that the story would hit newsstands in the middle of a blizzard. Even if I looked a little silly, I'd be grinning all the way down the mountain. I



guess the law of opposites can't be summoned on demand.

Living in Switzerland for a lot of years spoiled me. The Alps are a skier's paradise. Droughts are few and far between. Snow falls early and continues through April. However, I do remember one winter when it refused to snow. No, it was not unseasonably warm, it didn't rain either. The New Year came and went. Dejected

skiers shared stories and pictures of holiday hikes and picnics on brown slopes under bright blue skies. January passed into February, still no snow.

Geneva is surrounded by mountains and during the drought a temperature inversion created a layer of fog. With each passing day, the fog grew thicker and thicker. There was no snow, no rain or even wind to clear the air. Just day after day of dreary, damp fog. Pollution levels skyrocketed and city health officials sounded the alarm. No one sounded an official Cranky Alert but they should have. Both then and now, I have a tendency to get cranky when winter does not act like winter. Same goes for summer and the rest of year

Anyway, it was my fourth, maybe fifth, year in Switzerland. I was young, single and had happily embraced the habit of skiing most (okay every) weekend. The exercise and fresh air was great and it was a fun way to meet people. Without snow, I was at loose ends and didn't know what to do with myself.

I wasn't alone. Everyone I knew was grumbling. Yes indeed, *the going had gotten rough*. But what to do about it? Take up skateboarding? Or hang gliding? Camp out at the movies? The perfect solution hit me around 11:30 on a Friday morning. *The tough (that would be me) throw a party*. There was no reason to delay; the next night was not too soon. I dubbed it my *There's-Still-No-Snow-&-I'm-Cranky Party*. It was last minute so I figured I'd probably round up a handful of people. I thought wrong.

Two were tied up for dinner but promised to be there by 10:00. Everyone else accepted enthusiastically. Delighted for any distraction from the dreary weather, about a dozen queued up in less than an hour. My boss got very little work out of me that afternoon. Voicemails were returned and a few more calls were made. Word got out and not just a few extras asked to tag along. By the end of the day at least twenty people were looking forward to cramming into my little apartment.

All were commanded and promised to bring good cheer. Most brought a bottle of wine, an hors d'oeuvre, salad or desert as well. It was great fun, a welcome respite from too many grey days. The food and wine were good, the company and dancing better. The party lasted far into the wee hours. Around dawn, I threw the last few stragglers out.

Now you're probably thinking (maybe hoping) that this impromptu get-together generated some kind of kismet or good karma and broke the drought. You're picturing those last few guests stumbling out the door into a winter wonderland. Sounds like a Hollywood movie, doesn't it? I could write that, it would make a nice story, but it wouldn't be true.

Think snow, have fun and bon appétit!



Mixed Greens with Roasted Beets & Lentils

I discovered lentil salad when I lived in Switzerland. This recipe is my latest rendition of the classic French favorite. Enjoy!

Serves 8 as an appetizer and 4 as a main course

- 4 medium beets, red or gold or a mix, peeled and cut into wedges
- 1 medium red onion, roughly chopped
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Sherry vinegar
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- About 8 ounces mixed greens
- Sherry Vinaigrette (recipe follows)
- 3-4 ounces feta, crumbled
- 1/2 cup pumpkin seeds or chopped and toasted walnuts

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Put the beets and onion on separate sheet pans. Drizzle each with just enough equal parts olive oil and vinegar to lightly coat, season with salt and pepper and toss to combine.

Tossing once or twice, roast the beets for 30 minutes or until lightly caramelized and tender and the onions for about 15 minutes or until tender-crisp. Cool slightly.

To serve: Toss the greens with enough sherry vinaigrette to lightly coat. Put the greens on individual plates or a large platter. Spoon lentils on the greens, top with beets and onion and sprinkle with crumbled feta and walnuts.

Serve the lentils and beets warm but not hot or at room temperature. Both can be made ahead, cooled to room temperature and refrigerated. Remove from the refrigerator about 30 minutes before serving.

Lentils

- Extra virgin olive oil
- 4 ounces thick-cut bacon, diced
- 1 cup dry lentils
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 carrot, finely chopped
- 1 stalk celery, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 1/2 cups chicken stock
- 2-3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons sherry vinegar
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Drizzle a little olive oil in a medium saucepan, add the bacon and cook until crisp. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoon and drain. Add the onion, carrot and celery and cook for 5 minutes or until the onion start to become translucent. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute more.

Add the lentils, chicken stock, thyme and bay leaf and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low; cover and simmer for 20 minutes or until the lentils are tender but not mushy. Remove the thyme twigs and bay leaf and drain

any excess liquid. Add the vinegar and bacon to the lentils and season to taste.

Sherry Vinaigrette

Makes about 1 cup

- 1/4 cup sherry vinegar
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 tablespoons chopped shallot
- 1/4 teaspoon or to taste hot pepper sauce
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- About 3/4 cup or to taste extra virgin olive oil

Put the vinegar, mustard, garlic, shallot and pepper sauce in a blender. Season with salt and pepper and process until smooth. With the motor running, slowly add the olive oil and process until smooth.

Transfer the vinaigrette to a storage container with a tight fitting lid. Let the vinaigrette sit for 30 minutes or more to let the flavors combine. Give the vinaigrette a vigorous shake before using.

Store extra vinaigrette in the refrigerator.



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