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Contact me at susannye@tds.net 603/526 7319

They come by the bus load, in automobiles, large and small and even on



bicycles. Neither rain nor sleet nor dark, gray clouds can keep them from New England's hills and colorful leaves. They are the leaf peepers. Affectionately known as the Dead Leaf Watchers in the Nye family, these visitors come from near and far to celebrate our New England fall. An industrious lot, they keep busy from dawn to dusk. Most start the day with a hearty country breakfast. Pancakes, waffles or French toast, it doesn't matter as long as the maple syrup is local and pure. At the end of the day, they'll lay their head to rest in a cozy, country inn. In between, they'll tramp through harvest festivals, pick apples, sip cider, choose the perfect pumpkin and enjoy that quintessential fall treat, the pumpkin whoopie pie.

It's a good thing that I live here; otherwise I would probably miss all the excitement. I have never been good at road trips. When I was little, lots of families in our neighborhood jumped in their cars and explored the highways and byways of New England. Some drove clear across the country to see the Grand Canyon. But not our family. To say that my sister, brother and I were not good in the car would be a gross understatement.

Forget the town line; we were barely out of the driveway before one or all of us whined, "How many more minutes?" We complained of boredom. We bickered. My sister drew imaginary lines down the seat. I edged over them. She nudged me back. A nudging match ensued. Cross words and cruel names were hurtled. I'm sure she would never admit it but my sister was both a bossy pants and a stupid head. (You can see that I was clever with words even back then!) On more than one occasion a blow, maybe even two, was exchanged.

It is no surprise that the Nye's took very few family car trips.

One exception was a Saturday morning when Mum and Dad decided that we should hit the road to look at foliage. To this day, I don't know what they were thinking. If I'd had my wits about me, I might have turned and asked, "Have you met your kids?" In their defense it was a beautiful day and the leaves were at their peak.

It felt like we drove for days although I am sure that it was no more than an hour, probably less. The three of us sat in the back seat of our big, blue station wagon, complaining and getting in each other's way. Eventually, we found a pond surrounded by colorful trees and tumbled out of the car for a picnic.

As is often the case in October, no sooner had we parked but the weather turned. Within minutes the sun was covered with dark clouds and the warm, sunny day turned cold and raw. I was eight and my unsolicited opinion was that the trip was hardly worth a bunch of dead leaves.

I'm still not great on car trips that last more than an hour. However, a long walk or bike ride through the countryside sounds wonderful. A couple of hours paddling my kayak on the lake is even better. Even on a gray day, the colors around Pleasant Lake are nothing short of brilliant, almost magical.

Gray skies or clear, rain or shine, I hope that you are enjoying all that fall has to offer.

Bon appétit!

Susan

Roasted Sausages with Caramelized Onions, Broccoli Rabe & Polenta



While it does require a bit of multitasking, this easy supper is great on a chilly fall evening. Enjoy!

Serves 6

2 red onions, thinly sliced
 Olive oil
 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
 6 Italian sausages*, sweet or hot
 1/2 cup dry white wine
 2-3 cloves garlic, cut in slivers
 1/4 teaspoon or to taste hot pepper flakes
 About 1 1/2 pounds broccoli rabe*, trimmed and chopped
 Juice of 1/2 lemon
 1 cup instant polenta
 1-2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons cream
 About 1 ounce Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated
 1 teaspoon fresh sage, finely chopped
 1 teaspoon fresh thyme

Sausages & Onions: Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

In a large, oven proof skillet, toss the onions with enough olive oil to lightly coat, drizzle with balsamic vinegar, sprinkle with salt and pepper and toss again. Arrange the sausages on top of the onions.

Roast the onions and sausages at 375 degrees for about 15 minutes. Add the wine, give the onions a stir and wiggle the sausages down to the bottom of the skillet. Turning the sausages once or twice, continue roasting for another 30 minutes or until the sausages are cooked through and the onions are nicely caramelized.

Broccoli Rabe: Lightly coat a large skillet or wok with olive oil, add the pepper flakes and garlic and cook on low until the garlic is golden. Add the broccoli rabe, season with salt and pepper and toss to coat with oil. Raise the heat to medium-high and sauté until tender, 5-10 minutes. Drizzle with lemon juice and toss to coat.

Polenta: Cook the polenta according to package directions. Add the butter, cream, Parmigiano-Reggiano and herbs and continue cooking, stirring, until the butter and cheese has melted.

To serve: Place a dollop of polenta and a spoonful of broccoli rabe on each plate, add a sausage and garnish with caramelized onions.

* *Broccoli Rabe looks like baby broccoli but has a wonderful bitter taste. If you prefer milder greens, try escarole or Swiss chard.*

* *For a leaner meal, use turkey sausages.*



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