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November is a cruel month. It starts with a sugar hangover and ends with the mother of all budget-busting shopping sprees. While it is still officially autumn in New Hampshire, the crimson leaves and golden sunshine are long gone. We can only hope that the sun is behind the blanket of fog that greets us most mornings. With a bit of luck, the fog might burn off in time to catch a ray or two in those last few minutes before the much-too-early sunset. Ready or not, it is sure to snow at least a couple of times in November. Then, before we skiers have finished our happy dance, a cold, wet rain blows through destroying any hope of an early ski season. Yes indeed, these are dark days.



Rather than suffer through the gray days of November, here are a few tips to embrace it gladly:

Play ... find a pal and an indoor court for a game of tennis, basketball or squash. Or scrounge through the cupboards and closets for the backgammon set or Scrabble board and play a few rounds. It doesn't matter whether you win or lose; it's the camaraderie that counts.

Explore ... fight the urge to stay huddled up at home. Call a few friends and organize an adventure. It doesn't have to be elaborate; a trip to the museum or dinner and a movie works just fine. Whether it's a favorite spot or someplace new, it's good to get out of the house.

Watch ... rent, buy, beg or borrow a stack of your favorite movies and enjoy an all-day marathon of laughs, romance, angst, gun battles, car chases and/or intrigue. Don't forget the popcorn.

Share ... don't keep what you know and love to yourself. Perhaps you've got an amazing recipe for brownies or just finished a fantastic, new novel. Share the wealth. Invite friends around to discuss the book over a cup of tea and one of those fabulous brownies. While you're at it, invite a few friends to your movie marathon.

Help ... lend a hand to someone in need. Give a senior a lift to the doctor's office or supermarket, volunteer at a local nonprofit or cook dinner for a harried single parent. Simple acts kindness will brighten your day as well as those you help.

Clean ... plow through your closets and get rid of all the stuff you never wear, pack it up and donate or dump it. Same goes with the kitchen cupboards and, if it's not too cold out there, the garage. Just don't toss the Scrabble and Monopoly games; you never know when they might come in handy! Cleaning is not a whole lot of fun but the feeling of satisfaction when you're done is wonderful.

Head out ... take advantage of any small glimmer of sunshine that peaks through the clouds. Sunny days are few and far between so bundle up and take a long walk, bike ride or drive. Turn your face to the sky and revel in the sunshine.

Relax ... don't worry, you've survived November before and you can do it again! Think of all the fun you will have with friends and family over the Thanksgiving weekend. (Especially if you skip the shopping frenzy commonly known as Black Friday.)

Keep your chin up and bon appétit!

Susan

Sweet Potato & Goat Cheese Crostini

Turn humble sweet potatoes into a not so humble hors d'oeuvre! Enjoy!

Makes 24 pieces

12 fresh sage leaves
1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves
1 clove garlic, chopped
Sherry vinegar
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
Extra virgin olive oil
About 1 pound sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 2 cups)
1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 small shallot, finely chopped
24 baguette slices, toasted
About 6 ounces goat cheese, at room temperature
1-2 tablespoons heavy cream or sour cream



Put the sage, thyme, garlic and 1 tablespoon vinegar in a small food processor or blender and process until chopped and combined. Season with salt and pepper, add a little olive oil and process until smooth. With the motor running, slowly add about 1/2 cup olive oil and process until smooth. Let the sage oil sit for at least 30 minutes to combine the flavors.



Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Put the sweet potato cubes onto a rimmed baking sheet or roasting pan, drizzle with equal parts olive oil and vinegar, season with paprika, salt and pepper and toss to combine. Spread the sweet potatoes in a single layer and roast at 400 degrees for 15 minutes.

Add the shallot to the potatoes, toss to combine and then spread back into a single layer. Return the vegetables to the oven and continue roasting until golden and tender, 10-15 minutes. *If not serving immediately, cover and refrigerate. Bring to room temperature before serving.*

Meanwhile, put the goat cheese and cream in a small bowl. Use a fork to combine/stir the goat cheese and cream until smooth.

To assemble: spread a generous layer of goat cheese on each slice of toasted baguette, top with a spoonful of sweet potatoes and drizzle with sage oil.

The crostini can be served warm or at room temperature. If serving warm, arrange on a baking sheet and place in a 350-degree oven for 5-10 minutes.

If you have extra sweet potatoes and sage oil, toss them with spaghetti or spaghetti squash and sprinkle with Parmigiano-Reggiano, toasted pumpkin seeds and freshly ground pepper for an easy pasta supper.

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