

Susan
Nye

Around
the Table



Let It Snow and Snow and Snow

Winter 2008/volume 69

Join Me in the New Year for an
Around the Table Cooking Class

January

18 French Country Cooking

February

1 Italian Country Kitchen

15 French Country Cooking

29 Italian Country Kitchen

March

7 Mediterranean Easter Feast

28 Tapas & Finger Food

April

4 Italian Country Kitchen

18 French Country Cooking

May

2 Italian Country Kitchen

16 French Country Cooking

June

6 Summer Salads

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Winter has barely begun and yet we have been inundated with snow. The frozen, white stuff in my yard is at least waist deep and the snow banks along the edges of my driveway tower above me. But if memory serves correctly, which it probably doesn't, these big mounds of snow can not compare to the snow banks at the end of our driveway on Jackson Road. Our house was on one corner of a five-way intersection and the town plows would pile up a great mountain of snow at the end of our driveway. My sister and I spent hours every winter climbing up and sliding down the giant snow banks.

Another favorite childhood sport was jumping off the deck. Even after a full day of skiing, we generally had too much energy to settle for a quiet game of Monopoly or cards. Ice skating was OK but could not begin to compare with thrill of leaping off the deck. With a drop of at least twelve feet, deck jumping required a lot of snow. Every weekend we would shovel off the deck to build up a safe landing below. Some years we were thwarted by drought, warm weather or ice. The winters when we could jump off the deck were indeed special.

This year is shaping up to be one of those magical years. December snowfall broke all records in New Hampshire. Unfortunately, my snow blower also broke down during a recent storm. With the help of a neighbor, we diagnosed a broken belt. On New Year's Eve, there was six inches of fluffy, new snow in my driveway and twelve people due to join me in the evening to celebrate the end of the old year and welcome in the new. I had no choice but to pull out my shiny new shovel from Christmas and go to work. As a result, I soon had both a broken snow blower and a broken back.

I am relatively handy and am happy to tackle little projects. I figured it could not be too difficult to change a snow blower belt and after several phone calls tracked one down. The snow blower manual warns that you should not change belts without assistance so I drafted my Dad to help me. After all nothing says "I love you Daddy" like spending an afternoon kneeling on a snowy garage floor fumbling around with spring clips, washers and bolts in the freezing cold. It came as no real surprise that the instructions for installing the belt were both convoluted and confusing. Drawings were provided but were surely designed to add to the confusion rather than to enlighten.

My snow blower must be almost totally dismantled before a belt can be replaced. Demolition is the easiest part of any job and we quickly took the snow blower apart. Our next step was to install the new belt. As neophytes we were delighted by how easily the belt slipped on the pulleys. We reassembled the big machine and then put it to the test. The first indication that everything was not as it should be was the lack of tension on the belt and auger control, the second was that snow dribbled rather than flew out of the chute. The third was an alarming, squealing noise.

With the help of my fearless side kick, we managed to take the snow blower apart again, reinstall the belt correctly and put everything back together. My snow blower is now poised and ready for the next big storm. While it did allow us to spend more time in the cold and maximize the father-daughter bonding experience, I would not recommend installing and then reinstalling belts.

My side kick has now headed off to Florida, happy to escape the cold. But I am an enthusiastic skier and in spite of frozen fingers would not think of leaving this winter wonderland. After all, kids of any age delight in magical winters with giant snow banks and too much snow. Enjoy the snow, the sunshine and the magic of a New England winter.

Bon appétit! - Susan

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Around the Table
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too little time?

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Penne Gratin

Need to warm up after a cold day shoveling or playing in the snow? Try this penne gratin for an Italian twist on mac and cheese. Enjoy!

Serves 8

1 pound dried penne pasta
8 ounces pancetta or bacon, roughly chopped
1 small onion, chopped
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup heavy cream
2 ounces grated Fontina cheese
4 ounces mozzarella cheese, diced
2 ounces grated Parmesan cheese
1 teaspoon dried sage
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
Freshly ground pepper, to taste
Olive oil

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Butter a large, shallow baking dish.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Cook the penne according to package directions, less 2 minutes. Drain and keep warm.
3. Meanwhile, sauté the pancetta in a little olive oil a large skillet over medium-high heat until crispy. Remove and drain on paper towels.
4. Drain off all but 1 tablespoon of the fat. Reduce heat to medium, add the onion and sauté until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1-2 minutes.
5. Add the pancetta, onion, garlic, cream, sage, thyme, pepper, all of the Fontina and mozzarella and 1/2 of the parmesan cheese to the pasta. Toss to combine. Transfer the pasta to the prepared baking dish.
6. Sprinkle the remaining Parmesan cheese on top and bake uncovered at 350° for 30 minutes or until the top is golden brown.