

The First Friday of the Month

Throughout the fall and the holiday season

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It's time to frost your beer mugs, get out the oompah-pah-pah music and brush up on your chicken dance. It may still be September but it is time for Oktoberfest. Every year on a Saturday in late September, this famous Volksfest kicks off at noon with a twelve gun salute. The first keg of special Oktoberfest beer is then tapped with a rousing cry of "O'zapft is!" ("It's tapped!"). And so begins sixteen days of singing and camaraderie; and lots and lots of beer.

The world famous beer festival started out as a wedding party for Crown Prince Ludwig and Princess Therese of Saxe-Hildburghausen in 1810. The wedding was held just outside Munich's city gate in a picturesque meadow named for Therese. From its earliest days, Oktoberfest has been held in Theresienwiese or Therese's field. However, I don't think that Ludwig or Therese would recognize the huge, internationally renowned extravaganza which Oktoberfest has become. Like most things Oktoberfest has changed and evolved over the years.

The first Oktoberfest ran for five days, starting with the wedding and ending with a day at the races. The party now goes on for more than two weeks and the horse races are a thing of the past. But don't despair; there is plenty of fun to be had at Oktoberfest. A full blown carnival can now be found on Theresienwiese with a full array of midway rides, Ferris wheels and games.

Weather can turn rainy in Bavaria in October so the practical Germans pushed the festival back into September to improve the chances of sunshine and clear skies. To avoid changing the name to Septemberfest, the fair ends on the first Sunday in October. This year Oktoberfest will be celebrated from the 20th of September through October 5th.

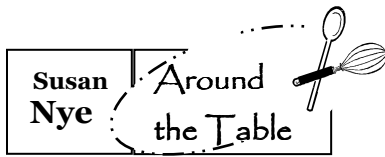
Munich is famous for its beers and the one constant at Oktoberfest has always been lots of beer. The largest and best know breweries have been nicknamed the Big Six and include Spaten, Löwenbräu, Augustiner, Hofbräu, Paulaner and Hacker-Pschorr. Every year these Big Six Bavarian breweries create special brews for Oktoberfest and serve them in one liter steins. These steins have become collector's items, prized by beer aficionados. They are made from heavy glass and decorated with the brewery's logo.

And the Big Six offer more than beer. Traditional, hearty German fare is never in short supply at Oktoberfest. Soon after the first celebration, local breweries set up booths to sell beer and bratwurst. Over time these modest booths grew to become huge tents and pavilions. Today fourteen giant tents serve beer and food to merrymakers. You will have no trouble finding Bavarian specialties like sausages, sauerkraut and cheese noodles or roast chicken, ox tails and apple pancakes.

The anniversary party has grown significantly over the years. Celebrants from around the world now make their way to Munich to enjoy the huge Volksfest. Last year more than six million visitors quaffed their thirst with Oktoberfest beers. Throughout the day bands play traditional music and instill good cheer. Over steins of frosty pilsner, strangers become friends and everyone lifts their voice in song.

Why not celebrate Oktoberfest this year? From the state of Washington to Acadia, Maine, cities and towns across the United States will celebrate fall with Oktoberfest. Why not you? Dust off your beer steins or pilsner glasses. Regional brewers and microbreweries offer an interesting selection of beers to sample and enjoy. Pair them with traditional Bavarian fare like sausages, sauerkraut and a slice of hearty rye bread! Bring your friends together for a little beer, a little singing and maybe even a little chicken dancing. Have fun and,

Bon appétit! – Susan



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Oktoberfest Sausages and Sauerkraut

Nothing says Oktoberfest like a beer with a sausage and a little sauerkraut. Add some mustard and a thick slice of hearty rye or country bread. Enjoy!

Serves 6

6 ounces smoked bacon, cut into 1/2-inch-wide pieces

1 large onion, cut in half and then thinly sliced

1 pound sauerkraut, rinsed and well-drained

1 cup beer

1 cup chicken stock

1 tablespoon caraway seeds

1 tablespoon gin

2 pounds kielbasa or bratwurst

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Put the bacon in a large, heavy ovenproof Dutch oven and cook over medium heat until it releases enough fat to coat the bottom of the pan. Add the onion to the bacon and sauté until onion is tender but not brown, about 5 minutes.
2. Add the sauerkraut to the pot and toss to combine. Add the beer, chicken stock, caraway seeds and gin and stir. Bring to a simmer. Cover and transfer the pot to the oven and bake for 1 hour.
3. Add the sausage to the pot and cover with sauerkraut. Cover and bake for an additional 1 hour. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve.

Can be prepared 1 day ahead. Cover and refrigerate. Re-warm over medium heat, stirring frequently.