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I still remember my sister Brenda's first garden. It was a time, not unlike now, when there was a lot of interest in eating healthy and growing your own vegetables. While she is now a terrific gardener, at the time she probably had little if no idea what she was doing.

When we were little, we hung around my grandfather and his garden. He grew tomatoes, cucumbers and beans without a great deal of success. Pop gave them more than enough love and care, but huge oak trees blocked out most of the sun. Later, we spent our summers in New Hampshire. There were no oaks, but the house is surrounded by huge pine trees. The soil is good for more pines, blueberries and not much else. My mother kept a small flower garden in a half dozen oversized pots.

With youthful enthusiasm and strength, Brenda plunged into her first gardening adventure. A kindly farmer lent her a small piece of land for the summer. We were all grateful because in those days the nearest farm stand was at least thirty maybe forty-five miles away.

I'm sure she planted beans and peas. There must have been tomatoes. Maybe even corn. But all I remember is the zucchini. She showed up at the beach every day trying to unload zucchini. Bushels and bushels of zucchini. I think that was the summer my Dad went from barely tolerating to absolutely hating this prolific green squash. It's taken years to rehabilitate him. Decades later, he can now, just barely, tolerate it.

First timer or master gardener, it doesn't matter. It is a time honored tradition. We always grow too much zucchini. In case you're wondering, I grew enough to zucchini to sink the Titanic when I finally planted my first vegetable garden.

The proliferation of zucchini is so widespread that it prompted a Pennsylvania couple to declare August 8th: ***Sneak Some Zucchini onto Your Neighbor's Porch Night.*** Tom and Ruth Roy have a habit of creating quirky holidays. They have declared holidays for everything from a "Time's Up Day" (a day to right wrongs and reach out to neglected friends and family) to a "No Homework Day." Their goal is to create a little whim and whimsy and find solutions to some of life's simple problems, like a mountain of zucchini.

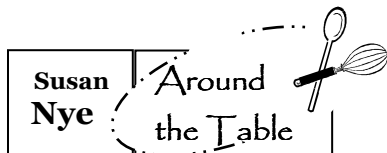
The Roy's even offer a list of hints on how to reduce, if not rid yourself, of that rapidly growing pile. You can start by cleverly hiding them in a bag with used clothing and donating them to the Salvation Army. In you don't have any used clothing handy, you can wrap them in white parchment paper to look like subs and have your children sell them the neighbors in the guise of a fundraiser. Parents are advised to hover close by in a get-away car. The list goes on and when all else fails, you can gather them up in the dead of night and drop them off on front steps and porches throughout the neighborhood.

Short antagonizing the Salvation Army or an army of friends, family and neighbors, what can you do with all that zucchini? Well you can sauté it, grill it or roast it. You can grate it and add it to bread, muffins or cakes. You can throw it into a sauce or add it to soup. You can postpone the problem by cooking it up and freezing it. When you get really desperate, you can throw it on the compost pile or look for a land fill.

And next year? If you have the strength and determination, you can will yourself to one, AND ONLY ONE, plant. And by all means serve lots of stuffed squash blossoms in early summer.

Enjoy summer's bounty and bon appétit!

Susan



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Grilled Antipasto

Catch your family and friends unaware. Surround grilled zucchini with a delicious assortment of vegetables, prosciutto, cheeses, olives and nuts. Enjoy!

Serves 8-12

2 or 3 medium zucchini, sliced thin on a bias
1 pint grape tomatoes
1 large red onion, thickly sliced
1 red bell pepper
1 yellow bell pepper
8 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto
Wedges of Fontina, Parmigiano Reggiano or your favorite cheese
A nice assortment of olives: Kalamata, Sicilian, etc.
Whole, unsalted, dry roasted almonds
1-2 baguettes, thinly sliced and toasted

1. Preheat the grill to medium high.
2. Put peppers and onions in a large bowl, drizzle with a little olive oil and balsamic vinegar; sprinkle with salt and pepper and toss. Cook in a grill basket until tender crisp, 5-8 minutes, tossing every 2-3 minutes. Remove from the grill and let cool.
3. Put tomatoes in the bowl, drizzle with a little olive oil and balsamic vinegar; sprinkle with salt and pepper and toss. Cook in a grill basket until they begin to brown, 3-4 minutes. Remove from the grill and let cool.
4. Put the zucchini slices in the bowl, drizzle with a little olive oil and balsamic vinegar; sprinkle with salt and pepper and toss. Arrange the zucchini slices in a single layer on the grill and cook 1-2 minutes per side. Remove from the grill and let cool.
5. Now all you need to do is assemble all of the ingredients, grab a large platter and create an artful arrangement.