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 Chef's Apron**

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It may be late this year but it seems that it came awfully quickly. Just a few weeks ago we stood on a soggy beach watching the fireworks fizzle in the rain. Now it is suddenly Labor Day.

When we were kids, Labor Day weekend was always a sad time. It was time to pack up the station wagon and head south to the suburbs. But before we left we always tried to cram at least another summer into the three day weekend.

I can't say it never rained on Labor Day, at least once or twice, we packed up while the last vestiges of a hurricane blew through. But most of my childhood memories are of glorious sunshine. After weeks of heat and humidity, summer in New Hampshire ends with warm, dry days and cool nights. It is the perfect weather for tennis matches or sailing. Tennis tournaments and sunfish regattas kept our parents on the courts and on the lake and out of our hair for most of the holiday.

With parents occupied, a virtual army of kids and teenagers were free to do almost anything but play tennis or sail. Suddenly, we didn't have to be prompted to get moving. We went in search of amusement in and around Pleasant Lake. Grubby little boys and girls went on one last frog hunting expedition. Convinced that all those swimming lessons might have helped, a few young ones made one last, valiant attempt to pass the raft test. The results were generally mixed.

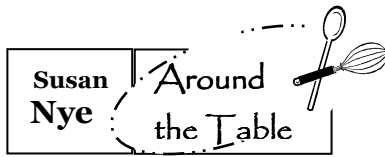
Teenagers did their best to dodge babysitting younger brothers and sisters. If successful, they rambled around the hills that surround the lake or took one last turn on water skis. I remember one Labor Day when I was determined to finish the summer on a single ski. I spent most of Saturday and Sunday falling as I tried to drop one ski and make at least one short pass by the beach. It took awhile but my tenacity, and the boat driver's patience, paid off. Finally exhausted but triumphant, I took a very quick victory lap. I then completed the effort, arms and legs flailing, with one final, dramatic tumble into the lake.

The long weekend will be packed with activity but there is a sweet sadness to Labor Day on Pleasant Lake. Everyone will take one last swim, sail, ski and paddle before docks are pulled up and out of the water. Boats of all shapes and sizes will be hauled to dry land. Sandy beach towels will be collected and thrown in the washer. Grills will fire up for one last cookout before cottages are swept clean for the winter. After sharing one last sunrise or sunset or both, beach chairs will be stored away. Long, teary farewells will be exchanged. Hugs will be shared. For the summer people, it's the last hurrah and time to go home. So maybe it's just sad and not so sweet after all.

Unless you live here. If you are lucky enough to live here, you won't spend Labor Day cramming duffels, bikes, kids, cats and dogs into the SUV or mini-van. The day after Labor Day will not be another day of insanity and rushing around in bumper to bumper traffic. It will be another day in paradise. It will be another great day to listen to the loons, to ramble through the woods, to kayak on the lake to play tennis or golf or both in the early fall sunshine.

We may need to add an extra blanket at night and find a sweater on chilly mornings but it's time to celebrate one of New Hampshire's best months ... September. Enjoy!

Bon appétit! ~ Susan



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Roasted Caponata

Caponata is incredibly versatile and perfect for the holiday weekend. Make up a batch and serve it with swordfish hot off the grill, pop some into a pita for lunch or spread it on lightly toasted ciabatta bread for a delicious hors d'oeuvre. Enjoy!

Serve 8

About 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
About 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
1 medium eggplant, chopped
1/2 large red onion, finely chopped
18 grape tomatoes, chopped
3 cloves garlic, finely minced
1-2 teaspoon anchovy paste
1/2 teaspoon hot pepper sauce or to taste
1/4 cup Sicilian or Greek olives (or a mix), pitted and chopped
2 tablespoons capers, drained
1/4 cup currants or raisins
2 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted
3 tablespoons finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
Olive oil

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Whisk the olive oil and vinegar together in a medium bowl. Put the eggplant in a large bowl and toss with about half of the oil-vinegar mixture. Put the eggplant in a single layer on a non-stick baking sheet and roast until lightly browned and tender, about 30 minutes.

Add the onion, tomatoes, garlic, anchovy paste and red pepper flakes to the remaining oil and vinegar, toss to combine. Put the onion mixture in a single layer on a non-stick baking sheet and roast until lightly browned and tender, about 20 minutes.

Place all the vegetables in a bowl and add the olives, capers, currants and pine nuts. Toss to combine. Let the caponata cool to room temperature, add the parsley and toss. Refrigerate for several hours or overnight. Let the caponata come to room temperature before serving.