

Diane's Blog
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Wimbledon, Fava Beans, and Pie Cherries

I bought a bagful of fresh fava beans at the farmers' market this past Wednesday. I couldn't resist – the pods were taut, bright green and full of plump beans. Thursday and Friday went by, and the chore of prepping the beans remained unfinished. Then Saturday came, and I realized that the men's final of Wimbledon would be on Sunday morning. I would save this rewarding but time-consuming task for match time.

It's not my style to set my alarm for 6 a.m. on an otherwise lazy Sunday morning, but my passion for tennis – and my further passion for the pure eye candy of watching Roger Federer and Andy Roddick play for the men's championship – was more than enough to get me out of bed. Federer would be playing for his fifteenth Grand Slam title, securing his place in tennis history by surpassing Pete Sampras's record of fourteen Grand Slam victories, while Roddick had staged an impressive comeback and was so close to securing his first-ever Wimbledon title.

As I set the oak stool near the kitchen counter in front of the TV and began to open the fava beans, it occurred to me that I was shucking favas last year while watching Federer play Nadal in what has often been called the best match in tennis history. It's the season – the perfect confluence of beautiful tennis and luscious, fleeting summer vegetables and fruits.

Last year, the match lasted nearly five hours, with intense play and a rain delay, and I had six pounds of fava beans to open. This year I had only three pounds. However, my friend Cheryl called on Saturday to say she had sweet cherries (Vans and Rainiers) and sour cherries, and did I want any. Indeed, I did. She came bearing just-picked fruit, stayed for dinner that now included a cherry crisp, and I promised her in return some tart cherry jam spiked with Kirsch.

Shucking fava beans requires busy work for the fingers but no mental strain. Stemming and pitting cherries – about the same. Like my grandmother crocheting, my hands stayed occupied (much better than the nail biting that these close matches justify) and my attention was glued to the screen. Five epic sets, fifty-one aces for Federer, amazing volleys and slices, and a fifth set lasting thirty games until Federer finally broke Roddick's powerful serve.

Thank goodness for the cherries, because by the end of the third set I was finished shucking, blanching, and removing the skins from the beans. Federer was up a set and I had three cups of glorious fava beans ready to use. Now came all the sour cherries – a huge bowlful that I planned to make into jam. By the end of the fourth set the match was tied, and I had pitted and stemmed about a third of the cherries. At commercial breaks I'd wash my sticky hands, empty the bowl of pits and stems, and drink some coffee; otherwise it was all game and all menial work.

What a morning! By noon in Portland, Federer held high his glorious Wimbledon trophy and I had served up three cups of fava beans and seven jars of tart cherry jam spiked with Kirsch. Score!