

Thinking Ahead to Thanksgiving

It's November. I'm in Portland. The leaves are falling. The winter rains have arrived. It's dark by 5pm. Those last two sentences sound somber and, indeed, make this time a year a bit trying, especially for someone who loves warmth and sun. However, my attention turns to Thanksgiving and that brightens my spirits on many levels.

My young adult children, both living in New York City, will come home for Thanksgiving weekend. My son, Eric, is bringing his girlfriend, Laura. Our closest friends, Harriet and Peter Watson, along with their son David will be joining us for dinner. (Plus, their pooch, my goddog, Charlie.) The dinner will also include my close friend Leslie Breaux. That makes nine--a boisterous fun group. My first list is complete--who's coming to T-Day dinner.

Now, I start my other lists. What's the menu? What am I preparing and who is bringing what. My daughter, Molly, now 22 and living in an apartment, wants to help. She has told me on several occasions that I am not allowed to start cooking until she arrives home on Tuesday night. In my planning world, that is a day too late. (Not to worry, Molly, there will be plenty left to do.) What type of turkey do I want this year (heritage, free-range and natural, free-range organic) and what size should I buy? (Likely, 18 pounds, this is a hungry group). I will order my turkey by November 10th--two weeks in advance.

The family's favorites, all from my original Thanksgiving cookbook, *The Thanksgiving Table*, will make the list: Praline Sweet Potato Casserole; Cranberry Chutney; Bread Stuffing with Apples, Bacon, and Caramelized Onions; Chiffonade of Brussels Sprouts with Diced Bacon and Oregon Hazelnuts; Gratin of Fennel and Tomato; Butter-Rubbed Roast Turkey with an Apple Cider Brine; Blueberry-Cranberry Pie and Pumpkin Pie with a Toasted Pecan Crust. I'll try to sneak in a few new things, perhaps some pre-dinner nibbles, a seasonal salad, and another vegetable side dish. Not wanting to fill up on soup, I thought it might be fun to have "soup shots" as a starter. With all the squash in the market, my recipe for Delicata Squash Soup with Roasted Apples sounds warming and perfect as a "shot" because it is pureed.

More lists to write, but that's the fun part and it helps keep the day fairly stress free. There is great satisfaction in crossing off a completed task. The grocery list is divided between an early shopping list for non-perishables and a Monday-before-list for the fresh produce. I'll organize another to-do list for planning my cooking and timing.

For me, with so many Thanksgiving dinners at home, I know I have plenty of dishes, glasses, wineglasses, and silverware. Heaven knows, I have enough cookware to stock a store. My All-Clad roasting pan and V-shaped roasting rack have held many a bird and lead my arsenal of holiday cooking equipment. When asked, I suggest cooks buy an instant-read thermometer, a carving board with a moat and well to catch the juices when carving a bird, and a thin long-bladed knife for carving.

All this is making me hungry. I'll have to do with a simple turkey sandwich for now, but the best ones are made from roast turkey leftovers, a big smear of mayonnaise and a dollop or two of cranberry sauce, of course.