

Thanksgiving Thoughts

It occurs to me as I take time to think through next week's Thanksgiving holiday that most of us barely slow down long enough to enjoy that day much less ponder what it means and the opportunities it presents. What do you have to be thankful for?

Maybe its time for a reality check moment. Most of us can recall at least one of those "didn't appreciate it until it was gone" situations. Running through life at breakneck speed is a poor way of seeing all the blessings we have been provided. Take a moment and look around you.

There is a simple stone bench resting in the Scottish Highlands that was the inspiration for a poem by Samuel Woodworth in the early 1800's. Inscribed on the bench is the message, "Rest and be Thankful." What a wonderful image for Thanksgiving.

It is just about time to put the finishing touches on your menu for Thanksgiving and I'm going to skip the turkey or ham cooking tips this year and offer a couple of ideas for your side dishes. When you think about it, great accompaniments are a big deal and often the best parts of the whole feast.

The first recipe like most we all treasure has been passed down through the family. I got it from Lucille Jones, my mother-in-law from North Carolina, who went to be with the Lord this past March. It's a dandy and I'll always remember the first time it was served to me by Lucille. That's one of the great things about these old recipes; they come with memories.

Momma Jones' Sweet Potato Casserole

(Serves 6)



3 cups boiled and mashed sweet potatoes
1 cup white sugar
1 stick butter
1 teaspoon real vanilla extract
dash of ground nutmeg (optional)
dash of cinnamon (optional)

Mix all of the above ingredients thoroughly and place in a medium size casserole dish (roughly 13 x 9 x 2 inches).

To prepare topping mix:

1 cup dark brown sugar
1/3 cup all purpose flour
2/3 cup softened butter
1 cup chopped pecans

Mix all of these ingredients until you have a crumbly texture and sprinkle it evenly over the sweet potato mix in your casserole dish. Preheat your oven to 375°F and bake for approximately 30 minutes. The dish is ready to come out when it is heated through and the mix on top has formed a bubbly crust.

Don't be shy about doubling this recipe as this one is almost assured of being part of the "seconds" when you are having dinner. It offers rich flavors, great textures and a fun new way to bring your sweet potatoes to the table.

Now as long as I can remember, my grandmother's dumplings have been part of any special dinner, including Thanksgiving. Her preparation takes time and effort but "wow," what a dish.

Mow's Dumplin's

(Serves 6 to 8)

For your broth:

Place a fat stewing hen (3 to 4 lbs, cut into 8 pieces) in a large, heavy bottomed stockpot. Cover with approximately 8 to 12 cups water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low and cover. Allow hen to cook for about 45 minutes, until it is very tender and falling off of bone. Remove chicken from the pot and allow to cool enough that you are able to handle it. Remove and discard skin then tear meat from the bones and into small pieces ½ to 1 inch long. Keep 2 cups of meat to add back into the dumplings later and the remainder can be saved to use elsewhere. (It's great to richen up your dressing!)

For your dumplings:

3 cups all purpose flour
4 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
6 tablespoons butter (room temperature)
1 ½ cups whole milk
dash of ground sage
2 teaspoons onion powder
1 teaspoon ground pepper (to taste)
½ cup chopped fresh parsley

Mix all dry ingredients except for parsley in a large mixing bowl and cut in butter until your texture is that of course corn meal. Gently stir in your milk a little at a time until you have a fairly wet dough. Turn your dough out onto a floured surface until it is comfortable to handle and no longer sticky.

Bring your stock back up to medium high to just bubbling. If you need additional volume in your stock you can add canned stock to increase. Gently pinch off dough in 1 tablespoon amounts that are about ¼ inch thick and place into the hot broth. You do not want to stir your dumplings while you are cooking them as they will become tough and stick together. After all are in the broth, add reserved chicken pieces and your fresh parsley, lower heat to low, cover and allow your dumplings to gently cook for about 10 to 15 minutes. If your broth is too thin you can mix 2 tablespoons of flour with water to a thin paste consistency and add back in for a few minutes before lowering temperature and it will help thicken everything. Don't get carried away, however, as the dumplings will naturally thicken up as they simmer before serving.

Our top choice this year to serve with your bird and other goodies is a cold, refreshing Riesling from Germany that is a surprisingly good paring with the types of foods we normally enjoy for Thanksgiving. The **2004 Gysler Weinheimer Riesling Kabinett** is beautifully crafted with just the right amount of residual sweetness, a classic green apple character and rich tropical fruit in the bouquet. This is another delicious find from importer, Terry Theise and it will leave you satisfied and amazed at just how good German wines can be.

If you have any questions please be sure to call us or take a moment to stop in at our website at www.winedog.com. We love talking to you! Remember... "Rest and be Thankful." Cheers.