

Diane's Blog
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The Changing Seasons and What I Hunger For

Every spring and summer my palate is teased by all the sensational produce at the farmers' markets. I'm delighted when local asparagus becomes available, passionate about making tarts and preserves when the Oregon strawberry season is in full swing, and then it is one glorious procession of cherries, raspberries, blueberries, peaches, plums, and every other luscious summer fruit imaginable, week after week, until the first glimpse of apples and Italian prune plums arrive in the market.

For me, the sight of Gravenstein apples signals the changing of the seasons. I feel momentary sadness about the passing of summer when I first notice the peaches getting less sweet and a bit mealy in texture, but with that first tart, crunchy taste of these early green apples, I remember all the glories of the fall harvest.

My palate and appetite transform at this time of year, not necessarily because the days turn cloudy or crisp – actually, September has been beautiful in the Pacific Northwest – but rather because the sights and aromas at the farmers' market – bushel baskets full of apples, the rotating steel-mesh drum roasting poblano peppers over a live fire – make me hungry for fall foods.

I came home last week with a bag full of eggplants, peppers, onions, tomatoes, and zucchini, and I made ratatouille. I pulled out my dehydrator and filled the trays with pitted and halved Italian prune plums. I bought a flat of green tomatoes and canned green tomato chutney. The remaining tomatoes were sautéed and turned into a pasta dish accompanied by bacon and a shower of Pecorino cheese, thanks to a terrific recipe from my friend Jolene George.

The run of fall Chinook salmon, along with the abundance of tomatoes and basil in the market, had me turning to my *Salmon* cookbook for a favorite recipe: Slow-Roasted Salmon with Green Beans, Yellow Pear Tomatoes and Basil Oil.

I find that I'm now almost ready for baked apples, poached pears, stuffed acorn squash, butternut and sage risotto, persimmon pudding. Before you know it, it will be roast turkey, pumpkin pie, and my favorite holiday – Thanksgiving. Hmmm, maybe I'm getting a little ahead of myself. Early fall is a wonderful season to savor all on its own.