

Harvesting the Season “A new look at Fall Foods”

Every September I am challenged with the topic for this fall issue. When a Chef feels the final harvest coming on and knows the days will get shorter and his market choices will grow slimmer, he seems to explode with new ideas and an unbridled passion for creating dishes that will touch the soul of his guests. Maybe it is the fear that if he does not become more creative he will die with the season as well. Maybe it is that fall represents the traditional gateway to the holidays and he knows he will be challenged with many expectations in the upcoming months. For me it is that fall represents the earth and home. To me all food is about coming home home.

I have said way too many times that everyone is an expert on food. We have been eating our entire life and we know what we like. Those likes and dislikes come from the home. They come from upbringing and maternal or paternal giving. They come from family traditions and celebrations. They come from the home. Fall foods represent the comfort of the home. Fall is the time of year when we all come back together after a scattered summer of activities when rarely we eat together as a family. Now school is back, vacations are over and the days are shorter. It is time to be comforted again by what we eat. It is time for Fall Foods.

So how does a Chef create that home feeling while striving to be on the edge and striving to continually excite his team and his guests? He does so by staying grounded and rising up to create. For example, if we look at this list of fall foods that are fresh and readily available to us, we can begin with them, but then create new combinations that are a bit daring, yet they must make sense. When tasted, these dishes should still give us a feeling of home.

Root Vegetables- Beets, Turnips, Carrots, Onions
Potatoes- Yukon Gold, Fingerlings, Idaho
Mushrooms and Truffles
Pork- Shoulder, Loin and Hams
Duck- Breast and Confit from the legs and thighs
Fois Gras
Salmon- Wild Pacific, Norwegian, Coho, Farm Raised
Shellfish- Scallops, Shrimp, Oysters, Mussels
Preserves and Marmalades– Apricot, Peach, Orange, Cherry
Dried Fruits- Prunes, Raisins, Cherries
Cheeses- Bleu, Tallegio, Parmesan

Hors' d'oeuvres and First Course ideas:

Roasted Beets have long been a great food for this time of year. They are easily found and often preserved. The problem with Beets is that most people have only come across them at a salad bar and are used to the vinegar based sometimes mushy beet. When roasted, Beets are natural sugar cubes with an earthy flavor that makes the guest stand up and take notice. Try this little rendition of a "Beets hors d'oeuvres" for your fall and winter cocktail party. Peel large Red and Yellow Beets. Rub liberally with Sea Salt and Olive Oil. Roast in 350 degree oven until fork tender. After they are cool, dice into ¼ inch cubes, cover and set aside. Find a real salty bleu cheese and bring to room temperature. Poach medium size Shrimp (26-30 count) and cut in large chunks. To serve place a chunk of shrimp on a Chinese spoon and top with a thin slice of Bleu Cheese and garnish liberally with the Roasted Beet gems. The salty and sweet flavors will bring that otherwise flavorless piece of Shrimp alive. This Bleu Cheese and Beet topping also works very well with Shredded Duck Confit or Pork shoulder.

Fois Gras is a very controversial item these days and many cities or states are outlawing the sale of this long time gourmet delicacy. Personally, I feel that we as Chefs and caterers should be spending our energy looking at sustainable foods. We should be concerned about the over-fishing of specific species and the possible extinction of other wild animals. Our menus should become more educated in that area. Aside from the politics, Foie Gras is an amazing item that when prepared in the following fashion goes a long way and will also amaze even the Foie Gras neophyte. Purchase Pate de Foie Gras or a Mousse that contains Foie Gras. Chill till almost frozen about 34 degrees. Dice into small cubes. Next make some marmalade by sautéing diced onions in butter with a touch of sea salt to let the water out until they almost become a smooth puree. This take at least an hour over very low heat, you will need to add small amounts of water during the process to maintain that smooth texture. Add your favorite white fruit preserve like apricot, pineapple or peach. The final touch is to toss some Panko crumbs in a hot pan of butter to toast. Serve by placing one teaspoon of the cold Foie Gras down on a plate, spoon or Demi tasse cup top with hot Marmalade and Panko crumbs.

Side Dish idea:

The Ultimate Comfort Food of course is Mashed Potatoes. I am not a great fan of them, but in the fall when whipped with a bit of Truffle Oil and topped with Grated Parmesan Cheese, there are not many things better. For an amazing presentations, Make the Potatoes as you normally would, add the truffle oil (you will know when enough is enough), then add 1 eggs to each pound. Scoop the mixture into a 4 ounce Ramekin or foil cup and top heavily with grated cheese. Bake just before serving to create a crisp crust of cheese and turn out onto the plate. Top with more shaved cheese and a dash of truffle oil. This alone will make the meal and make you a star.

Entrée ideas:

Now for a dish that will fill the center of the plate. We are all called on to make Salmon and many times it is just not special. The key to Salmon is not to overcook it and to serve excellent complimentary side dishes. The better tasting Salmon is going to be Wild Salmon as opposed to farmed Salmon, but with this technique of preparation, either will taste great. Make a marinade of melted Apricot preserves, Sea Salt, White Pepper, Sliced Apples, Rice Wine Vinegar and Brown Sugar. Marinade Salmon for up to three hours. Procure cedar planks and soak them in water of at least 24 hours (making sure the cedar planks are untreated). Lay the Salmon on the planks and place on a grill. Cover each filet with a lid or foil and let grill for about 15 minutes, until the Salmon is very rare in the center and the outsides are opaque. To serve later, reheat until the center is medium to medium rare. Serve with side dishes that compliment the smoked flavor with natural sweetness. A few that I love are Creamed Corn, Roasted Wild Mushrooms, Grilled Plums or Figs or Roasted Baby Beets.

It was always the fall when farmers would kill the pig to serve throughout the winter. He would have it butchered into many cuts, some smoked and others to be prepared in their natural state. When a Tenderloin of Pork is cooked perfectly, there is no better satisfaction from cooking. The technique on this dish is a bit challenging, but the rewards tremendous. Season and sear a Tenderloin of Pork in Grapeseed or canola oil, still raw in center. Let cool and pat dry. Saute some spinach in olive oil with Sea Salt and white pepper, just till wilted. Set aside to cool. Prepare some mashed potatoes or mashed sweet potatoes adding 2 eggs per pound of finished potatoes. Cut a piece of aluminum foil about 15 inches long by 12 inches wide. Spray the foil with pan spray liberally. Lay the mashed potatoes out in a 12" by 6 inch rectangular on the foil, spreading evenly to a thickness of about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. Lay the Spinach in a thin layer over the potatoes and then place the Pork Tenderloin in the center. Roll up the foil as if you were rolling sushi, then twist the foil ends until you have a very even tube. Roast in 350 degree oven for 25 to 30 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before removing foil and cutting for service. Serve with a Dried Cranberry or Cherry Demi Glaze and Roasted Onions. *Many of us have a difficult time selling pork because our clients may have special dietary requirements, so this next dish can use Lamb Loin as a substitute.

These fall dishes are certainly not ones that Mom would have made yet they are comfortable and dynamic in flavors. That is just the point in today's catering. To stand apart, you must serve foods with great flavor. You must also serve ideas that are new to the guest but when they take that first bit, they feel like they are still at home.

For detailed recipes on any of these items, please feel free to email me at jerryedwards@chefsexpressions.com. Create a fall feast menu this year that inspires and comforts.