

The WellFem-in-Law ®

A column on well-being for I.O.W.A.

®

Column #12-2002:

Dear I.O.W.A.:

Reflections on the Coming of Winter...

The very last plants to give it up in my flower garden were the alyssums. They amazed me in staying green and in bloom for so long. The beets are now in and the onions have been moved to winter storage in the basement of my husband's shop building.

The chickens have been hard at work scratching through the fallen leaves, each day that I am able to let them out. I find a plain and simple pleasure in watching them dig through the leaves, especially in watching the mother hen with her 6 little ones. The deeper the leaves, the more they seem to enjoy it!

The cattle are on stocks and also getting hay regularly now. On a recent haying day, I went over to see the herd and found "Buddy," my bottle baby, who is now a good 400+ pounds. I talked to him and held out my hand and he immediately started sucking on my index finger. He's been weaned now for almost 4 months and he still remembers that I brought him his milk! He wanted to bump against my hand like when I had the bottle, so I decided a safer place was up on the gate where he couldn't knock me down! I did give him a good head petting and it was really clear that he remembered perfectly well who I was. I have seen daughters rejoin the herd after being raised for the winter in the barnyard and they seem to still know who their mothers are and are often seen together. Actually, I find our animals really interesting to observe from a sociological view. Buddy will stay with us in the feedlot as he still has a bit of a "hitch in his hip" and wouldn't do as well in a large feedlot. So, I guess I'll be watching him for quite a while.

Time for Warming Foods...

The following foods will work great as a base for a Sunday Brunch or an evening meal. If you have kids, enlist them to help. If you have guests, there's something for your guests to do, too. This is the kind of meal that lends itself to conversation in the kitchen while everyone is helping make the meal.

Menu: Roasted Tomato Soup with Creamed Spinach Filled Crepes
 Dinner Salad

Roasted Tomato Soup

The recipe for the Roasted Tomato Soup was in the Cooking.Com catalog. If you are lucky enough to have frozen tomatoes, these will work great. I happened to have a whole bag of fully ripe frozen Romas and these were the best. Normally the tomatoes would be cut in half and placed on the roasting pan. However, since mine were still frozen, all I did was take the stems off and put them in the pan. 3lbs. Slice onion over top. (Vandalia suggested, but I used 2 Spanish.) Sprinkle with *Herbs de Provence* and 1/3 cup olive oil. Sprinkle some coarse sea salt over all and add freshly ground pepper. Roast in the oven on the second rack from the top for 30-45 minutes at 425 degrees, turning it down a bit if the onions start getting too brown. Take a little at a time and put in a blender. Hold the lid on tight and gently pulse at low speed. I like to keep my soup more on the chunky side so I don't blend for the ultimate smoothness. Be careful doing this part as if you put too much in at once, it can pop the blender lid off and leave spots on the wall as well as be too hot on the fingers (been there, done that). I wouldn't put more than a couple tomatoes in at a time and some onion. After blending, put into a soup pan. Add 3 cups of either chicken stock or vegetable stock. (I have made it also using just 1 cup of veg. stock and the rest of the liquid came from the roasted tomatoes.) I add a small amount (1 -2 tbsp.) of brown sugar. 6+ drops of Tabasco completes the soup. Keep on a very low burner so it stays warm enough to eat when you are ready to serve it. (Alternatively, turn it off, and gently re-heat about 15 minutes before you are needing to serve it.)

Crepes from Molly Katzen's Sunlight Café

Combine in a blender: 1 1/4 c. milk, 1 cup white whole wheat flour (this is a whole wheat flour made from white wheat berries), 1 large egg (or 2 small pullet eggs), 1/4 tsp. Salt. Let sit for about 15 minutes after blending. When you are ready to make the crepes, very lightly brush a nonstick crepe pan and heat it on medium (I use 4 on my electric stove dial.) If it gets too hot, the butter will get brown, so just keep an eye on it. Use 1/4 cup of batter at a time and put in the crepe pan. Let it sit there for a few seconds and then gently swirl the batter around to make the crepe. Let it cook for a little bit and then gently turn it over. After maybe 10 seconds or so, put it on a plate that you have warming in the oven on very low heat. Close the oven door, return the pan to the stove, put in another 1/4 cup and make another crepe. Add it to the stack in the oven. These will keep warm nicely this way. (150 or less degree oven). This recipe should make at least 10 nice crepes.

Creamed Spinach Filling

Use frozen or fresh spinach. I had fresh on hand, so used that. If using frozen, thaw and drain very well. In a separate pan, heat 2 cups of milk to very hot, but not scalding. In a non-stick sauté pan, melt 3 tbsp. butter. Add 1/4 tsp. dried mustard and 1/4 tsp. freshly ground Nutmeg and whisk into the butter. Carefully sift over this 1/4 cup of flour and whisk in. Slowly whisk in the hot milk. Whisk to keep it smooth. Add the spinach. Cook over low heat for several minutes, stirring with a wooden spoon. If

the sauce doesn't get as thick as you need, add more spinach if you have it or add some more flour and whisk in. Add white pepper to taste. (Using fresh spinach made a very bright green creamed filling.)

Take 2 plates and lightly oil them and place them where they will get warm. (My idea was to take the lid off of the soup and put one plate there as a lid to warm up and the other I sat over the crepe pan and left the burner on low for the time I was making up the crepes. The main point is that a warm crepe onto a cold plate will stick! Also, it won't stay warm!)

Take a crepe from the plate in the oven and place it on one of the warming plates. Add some of the spinach sauce—you'll have to guess at this until you get the hang of it with the size of crepes you made—and fold or roll and then pull the other end over, completing the fold/roll and placing it on the plate in such a way that it stays sealed. (My husband did the crepe rolling honors while I prepared the next crepe for filling.) Continue filling and rolling the crepes until you have a plate full. (While you are making the crepes, you could put the eating plates in the oven to gently warm before serving the meal.)

Meanwhile, have your helpers prepare a dinner salad of your choice.

Serve the crepes with some of the Creamed Spinach over the top, drizzled down the middle. Serve any remainder in a separate bowl that folks can help themselves to as desired. Sprinkle some grated Tomato/Basil Feta over the Creamed Spinach Filled Crepes (or serve on the side so that folks can partake as they so chose.) The Tomato/Basil Feta adds just the right spark of taste to the mild flavored Creamed Spinach.

You can add other items to this meal as you wish, such as maybe a nice Chardonnay and a good crusted sourdough bread. All in all, this makes a colorful and tasty meal that is very satisfying and it is also a great “company” meal.

Remembering to take time for Joy...

Our overall health is affected not only by what we take in nutritionally, but also by the environment in which we live. Finding some time for fresh air each day is so important and while we are doing this, we can also take some time to reflect on the joy of “being.”

Meanwhile, be good to yourself. **Keep deep breathing**...new studies show a connection with weight loss. 'Til next time, when we'll explore more on body-mind-spirit issues affecting our health in “The WellFem-in-Law™” column.

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