

We've all heard the rhyme, "April showers bring May flowers." Except in northern New England where "April showers bring May showers." The Old Farmer's Almanac suggests that spring begins on March 20 and continues until June 20. If you live here, you know that's nonsense. Warm winter, cold winter, it doesn't matter. As far as I can tell, spring is either a myth or a scam perpetrated by Madison Avenue to lull us into buying cute shoes and overpriced sunglasses.

I generally divide these so-called spring months into four unequal parts. First, there is *still winter*. The skiing is usually at its best during this period. Next comes *mud season* followed by *black fly season*. These two are both pretty ugly. Finally, we will have a glorious week or two when the *lilacs are in full bloom*. If we are lucky, the lilacs will bloom against a backdrop of bright, blue sky and sunshine.



But there is no need to grumble about mud or flies. There are countless advantages to a cold, rainy spring. For instance:

Where else can you splurge on ridiculously colorful rubber boots and rain slickers? And, even better, actually wear them? Too much? How about some cool leopard-print rain clogs and a trench coat?

So what if you're stuck with a choice of stir-crazy or a rainy walk. You can wear your dazzling rain gear. Better still, after the walk you can reward your virtue with a luxurious, guilt-free bubble bath.

There's no rush to pack away your heavy sweaters and fleece. Admit it, hit a warm day, even two and you're tempted. Don't fall for it. As soon as you haul those boxes up to the attic, the thermometer will plummet. When in doubt, wait a week. In the meantime, enjoy the free time. Cozy up to the fire with a good book, finish the sweater you started knitting last November or ...

Stir up one last batch of your favorite soup. Potato-Cheddar? Beans and Greens? Tired of soup? You can always braise one last pot roast or make a batch of those wonderful short ribs.

A rainy day is perfect for a trip to the museum. Think of it as another good excuse to don your spiffy rain gear. Once summer comes, you won't want to spend a minute inside. There is a must-see *Killer Heels* exhibit at the Currier in Manchester.

Afterwards, spend a lazy afternoon in a café, sip espresso and pretend it's April in Paris instead of May in New Hampshire.

Then again, you can always stay home and binge watch that television show that everyone's talking about but you somehow missed.

Sound too indulgent? Well then, reorganize your pantry. You never know what delicious goodies you'll find tucked behind the oatmeal and boxes of pasta.

Reward you hard work by whiling away an evening with friends and a bottle of great wine. Perhaps some of the goodies you found in the back of the pantry will inspire you to try a spectacular, new tapas recipe or two.

Don't worry summer will come, eventually. Bon appétit!

Crostini with Fig, Stilton and Walnuts

Look! You found a jar of Fig Preserves in the back of the pantry. Put it to good use with quick and tasty crostini. Add a bottle of great wine and a few friends. Enjoy!*

Makes about 2 dozen crostini

1 tablespoon butter
 About 2 tablespoons minced red onion
 3/4-1 cup fig preserves
 2 tablespoons dry red wine
 1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
 Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
 1-2 teaspoons or to taste balsamic vinegar
 1 baguette, thinly sliced on the diagonal
 About 1/23 cup chopped walnuts
 About 6 ounces stilton, crumbled and at room temperature

Melt the butter in a heavy saucepan over medium-low heat, add the onion and, stirring frequently, cook until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the fig preserves and wine, season with thyme and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer for 2-3 minutes.

Remove from the heat, transfer to a serving dish, stir in the vinegar and cool to room temperature. Let sit for at least 20 minutes to combine the flavors. *Can be prepped several hours in advanced, covered and stored at room temperature.*

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Arrange the baguette slices on a baking sheet and bake at 375 degrees until golden, about 5 minutes per side. *Can be prepped several hours in advanced, cooled to room temperature, covered and stored at room temperature.*

Spread the walnuts onto a baking sheet and bake at 375 until lightly toasted, about 3 minutes. *Can be prepped several hours in advanced, cooled to room temperature, covered and stored at room temperature.*

Serve the crostini warm or at room temperature. Spread a small dollop of preserves on each toast, top with stilton, sprinkle with walnuts and serve ... or bake the crostini at 375 degrees for 2-3 minutes and then serve. The crostini should be warm not bubbling hot.

** If you found dried figs instead of preserves in your pantry, simmer up a batch of jam. My recipe for Savory Fig Jam is on my website.*

