

Less than a month ago, a furry, little fellow popped out of a hole in Pennsylvania and saw his shadow.

According to legend, the shadow meant we were in for six more weeks of winter. However, get this! This little pageant has been going on for more than one hundred years. Over all those decades, an early spring has been predicted all of seventeen times. (Nine years of records are missing so it could be a few more.) Now, some curious weather geeks did a few calculations to see how accurate that furry, little fellow is. Their discovery? Well, the groundhog was correct only thirty-nine per cent of the time.

That's less than a coin toss!

Anyone living in New Hampshire can predict winter's end with or without a furry friend or coin to toss.

Here in the Granite State, winter hangs around until it's good and ready to quit. Last week's glorious few days of spring skiing could be the start of warmer things to come ... or not. It's just as likely that the magnificent spring-like weather was nothing more than a blip in northern New England's decidedly fickle weather patterns.

New Hampshire skiers live for those wonderfully warm, end-of-the season days. We want nothing more than to ski in a t-shirt, even shorts. However, we all know that there are two sides to an early spring. We love the sun and curse the rain. Although we would happily greet one last blizzard, just the threat of a shower sends skiers into a tizzy.

To make matters worse, I was admittedly spoiled during all those years I lived in Switzerland. Spoiled rotten! Even in a mediocre snow year, the season lasted through the first or second weekend of April. In a spectacular year, skiing went on and on until mid-May. Of course, the elevations are a heck of a lot higher in the Alps; way up above the tree line higher.

This extended ski season did lead to a few misadventures. Most were due to the stubborn determination of my friends and I to ski from top to bottom. Just because the ski season lasted until Easter and beyond, did not mean there was snow cover on the bottom third or half of the mountain. By early April, skiers were advised to take the lift down from the mid-station. After a glorious day in the sun and snow, riding a chairlift to the bottom was nothing short of anticlimactic. A gondola was even worse. (The cliché packed in like sardines would be an apt description.)

I'm not one to let a TRAIL CLOSED sign stand in my way. Neither were my ski pals. After a quick peek left and right, we ducked under the rope and headed down. We had the trail to ourselves and it was fabulous. Well, fabulous until we hit a south facing, mud covered slope. Jumping from one small patch of snow to another, we clamored through trees and over a few rocks. Finally and inevitably, we ran out of snow. Off came the skis; we were in for a long slog to the car in our ski boots.

As the weather warms, on the slopes or not, enjoy some time outside! Bon appétit!

Susan



Spaghetti with Cauliflower & Olives

This recipe has its roots in sunny Spain and Sicily. It is a great dish when you are pining for a little sun and warm weather. Enjoy!

Serves 4-6



1 head (about 2 pounds) cauliflower, cut into small florets
Olive oil
Balsamic vinegar
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1/2-1 onion, cut in thin wedges
1/4 teaspoon or to taste red pepper flakes
2-3 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon anchovy paste
Zest and juice of 1 lemon
8-12 ounces spaghetti
About 1/2 cup pitted and roughly chopped green olives
3 tablespoons capers
Extra virgin olive oil (optional)
3-4 tablespoons pine nuts, toasted
Grated pecorino Romano cheese

Toss the cauliflower with just enough equal parts olive oil and vinegar to lightly coat, sprinkle with salt and pepper to taste and spread in a single layer in a roasting pan. Tossing once or twice, roast at 375 degrees until browned and tender, about 40 minutes.

(If you roast the cauliflower in advance, a delicious dinner will be ready in minutes.)

While the cauliflower roasts, heat a little olive oil in a skillet, add the onion and pepper flakes, season with salt and pepper and sauté until the onion is soft. Add the garlic and anchovy paste and sauté 2-3 minutes more. Stir in the lemon juice. Add the cauliflower, olives and capers, sprinkle with lemon zest and toss to combine. Cover and keep warm.

Meanwhile, cook the pasta in salted boiling water according to package directions. Drain the pasta, reserving a little pasta water.

Toss the pasta with the vegetables. If the pasta seems dry, add a little pasta water and cook on low for 1 minute. Transfer to a serving platter or individual plates, drizzle with a little extra virgin olive oil, sprinkle with pine nuts and serve with grated pecorino Romano.

