

**Flipping the calendar from July to August sends the message home.**

Holy smokes, summer is half-over. I suppose some might say it's more than half. In a few weeks, life in our little town will begin to get very quiet again. Moms, Pops and their kids will head south for pre-school soccer practice and back-to-school buying binges. But that's them. For me, the first of August will always be summer's midpoint.

**Of course, I may be confused** but I seem to remember that summer vacation always began the last week in June. I think the final school bell rang on Wednesday but it could have been Tuesday or Thursday. Ten weeks later, on the day after Labor Day, we returned to cinderblock walls and linoleum floors. By the way, if this description suggests that I attended reform school or kiddie lockup, I can assure you that is not the case. Most of the schools in my suburban town were built quickly during the post-WWII baby boom. They weren't pretty but they went up fast. In any case, August 1 was more or less the midpoint of our summer vacation.

**The first day of August also commemorates** the founding of the Swiss federation. Having lived there for almost two decades, La Suisse will always be my second home. Le Premier Août (translation the first of August) is Fête Nationale Suisse or Swiss National Day. You might want to think of it as the Swiss equivalent of our Independence Day. You might but you'd be a bit off base. The day commemorates the peaceful start of the Swiss federation not the start of a revolution.

**The hoopla (or lack-of) dates back to 1291.** Maybe things have changed but to say that Le Premier Août festivities are understated would be an extreme exaggeration. At least when I lived in and around Geneva, celebrations were pretty low key. Then again, so are the Swiss. As a tourist wandering through, if you didn't know something was happening, you'd probably miss it.

**If you can believe it,** Fête Nationale Suisse was more or less ignored until 1891. (America held its first birthday party one year to the day of signing the Declaration of Independence.) For most of the time I lived in Switzerland, August 1 was business as usual. You might see a flag or two waving in a window box but not much more. (The flags did lend a cheery, patriotic air to the geraniums.)

**Now admittedly,** there was at least a modest amount of enthusiasm for the seven hundredth anniversary in 1991. Low keyed as they were, those celebrations triggered something. I'm guessing someone in Bern realized that a few festivities were good for the economy. So with very little fanfare, Fête Nationale Suisse was finally declared an official holiday in 1994.

**Now, I seem to remember celebrating Le Premier Août** at least a time or two. If nothing else, it was a nice excuse to spend an evening by the lake. We'd reserve a table at one of the lakeside, seasonal cafés and enjoy filet de perche or pack a picnic and head to the town beach.

**One year, it might have been 1994,** I returned home to find a cheerful crowd gathered in the field across the road. At the time, I was living in the countryside outside of Geneva. I loved that apartment. It was one of three in an ancient barn renovation. The apartment was huge with a view of fields and hills on one side and the Alps on the other. As I got ready to call it a night, I paused to watch several families celebrate. The kids danced around and their dads helped them set off fireworks. It was a jolly gathering, filled with fun ... and a bit of excitement. No ambulances were called but more than one fire was stamped out amid shrieks of glee.

Wishing you bonne fête and bon appétit!




## Szechuan Noodle Salad with Chicken or Pork

*So, no – this recipe is not Swiss. However, it was one of my favorite summer dishes to take along to a lakeside picnic when I lived in Geneva. Enjoy!*

Serves 8

8-12 ounces vermicelli rice noodles  
 3 garlic cloves, chopped  
 1 (2-inch) piece ginger, peeled and chopped  
 3 tablespoons soy sauce  
 3 tablespoons unseasoned rice vinegar  
 Juice of 1 lime  
 2 tablespoons fish sauce  
 2 teaspoons sesame oil  
 1 tablespoon or to taste chili sauce  
 Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste  
 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil  
 1 1/2-2 pounds cooked chicken or pork, thinly sliced or shredded  
 6-8 radishes, thinly sliced  
 1/2 English cucumber, peeled and thinly sliced  
 3-4 scallions, thinly sliced  
 1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro  
 1/2 cup chopped fresh mint  
 3 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds

Put the vermicelli in a bowl, cover with hot water and soak for 10 minutes. Drain, rinse under cold water and drain again.

While the noodles soak, put the garlic, ginger, soy, vinegar, lime juice, fish sauce, sesame oil and chili sauce in a small food processor or blender, season with salt and pepper and process until the garlic and ginger are finely chopped. Add the olive oil and process until smooth.

Put the well-drained noodles in a bowl, add enough sauce to lightly coat and toss to combine. Let the noodles chill in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

Add the vegetables and chicken or pork to the noodles and, adding more sauce if necessary, give everything a toss. Add half of the herbs and toss again.

Transfer the noodles to a serving platter or individual plates, garnish with the remaining herbs, sprinkle with sesame seeds and serve.

*Feel free to add more veggies – thinly sliced red pepper, carrot curls, pea pods, thinly sliced Napa cabbage and bean sprouts will all make great additions.*