Chef’s Log 21 October 2012

Bountiful Harvest

Not only have my barbecue blog posts diminished in frequency, they have almost ceased to be about barbecue. Instead of triumphs of cooking, spicing, smoking, and presentation, they remain triumphs of petty little victories over cholesterol. Huge three-rib pork chops are gone. Small plates of tofu or fish have replaced them. Fortunately, the food continues to photograph reasonably well.

Today’s lunch was a cold salad of potatoes, grilled salmon, string beans, field greens, and cherry tomatoes. No dressing, in accordance with the demands of a low fat diet. I was not aware that very little of the cholesterol we eat is actually absorbed. Most of the cholesterol that circulates in our blood, hardens our arteries, scares our loved ones, and causes our cardiologists to lecture us is created in our own bodies. It is manufactured by our livers from more benign saturated fats that we eat, thinking that they are safe. Calves liver or eggs would be fine, despite earlier warnings. Cheese sauce is death. So my former favorite dish of veal kidneys with a Roquefort cream sauce is indeed verboten, but because of the Roquefort and the cream in the sauce, and not because of the organ meat on which it is poured.

But this is certainly the right time of year to start thinking about healthful eating. The bountiful harvest of heirloom fruits and vegetables makes this an easy season for a diet focused on fruits and vegetables. Heirloom tomatoes actually taste like tomatoes. Apples from a local orchard now carry the widest range of crispy, crunchy, sweet, tart, flavorful new apple hybrids like Mutsus. And centuries ago pumpkins were bred for eating, not for carving, or distance chunkin’, or weighing competitions.
Competitive pumpkin growers are closing in on the elusive goal of a one-ton pumpkin, with winning heavyweight pumpkins now routinely weighing-in well in excess of 1,500 pounds (http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/The-Great-Pumpkin.html). Punkin’ chunkin’ (or pumpkin chunking in Europe), is the sport of throwing a unit pumpkin from a cannon, air cannon, catapult, trebuchet, or other device, as far as possible (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pumpkin_chunking). Heirloom breeds of pumpkin, like the golden Hubbard, the blue, or the peanut, shown above are used more for their taste. They can be used in pies, of course, but they can also be used as a winter vegetable.

The peanut pumpkin got its name for reasons that should be obvious. Someone thought it looked like a regular pumpkin that was covered with peanut shells.