

Thanksgiving for Non-Traditionalists

Story and photos by Tamara Enz

Cereal and Scotch whisky could seem like an odd choice for Thanksgiving dinner, but I had eaten the leftovers for breakfast; there was no other option. You might think otherwise, but this is not a sad story.

Love them or hate them, holidays come around every year — and I am solidly in the latter camp. For as long as I can remember, I have tried to work holidays so that when everyone else went back to work I could have a quiet day off. Yes, the name “Scrooge” has been bandied about more than a few times in reference to me.

When I was a child, holidays held the promise of being magical, but reality usually came crashing in uninvited, and the days lost their luster somewhere among mid-rare turkey and

homemade (but often runny) cranberry sauce. The crush of cleaning and relatives, good china and silverware — and a larger-than-usual mound of dishes — amid unfulfilled expectations and a desire to make these days perfect and memorable somehow made them less so.

In my adult years, I’ve run the gamut of holiday experiences in random locations. The most memorable one was here in Walla Walla and was tagged as “Thanksgiving for the town orphans who have nowhere else to go.”



We had jambalaya, martinis and chocolate-
espresso cheesecake for Thanksgiving brunch.
How could you go wrong with that menu?
Maybe I need to rethink this holiday-hate thing.

As a recent graduate of the Wine Country
Culinary Institute, I now feel somehow com-
pelled to take another look at holidays and,
especially, at the food associated with it.

Here is my proposal: Throw out the tradi-
tions. No, really. I think 393 years of turkey and
stuffing is quite enough. In the age of turkey
— frozen and available
at the local supermarket;
apples from New Zealand;
and pumpkin in a can,
we can have traditional
Thanksgiving food year-
round. Besides, turkeys
aren't even native to the
Pacific Northwest (says
the staunch biologist in
me).

We live in a region
packed with natural
food diversity, rich with
produce and fruit beyond
many other states' and,
for that matter, countries',
wildest dreams. It seems
time we bow to that and
give thanks for the wild
Pacific Coast, the grace
of the Columbia River,
the long growing season
and the multitude of local
people who bring beauti-
ful, fresh foods to us daily.

Full disclosure: I am
48 years old and, to date,
I have cooked one turkey.
Ever. When I put that bird
in the oven, I was asked,
"What's your backup
plan?" Humph. Letting
turkey go is not too hard for me.

With that in mind, here are some ideas for
marvelous holiday fare that might make you
wish you had ditched the turkey and potatoes
years ago.

To start, pass around a plate full of fried
oysters with crème fraîche and herbs, smoked-
trout dip with crostini, or mushrooms stuffed
with crab. Pumpkin soup, wild mushroom
soup or razor clam chowder would be a deli-
cious first course.

For the main event, try salmon, or look to
the producers of bison, lamb, pork and beef

that surround us in Eastern Washington and
Oregon for a choice cut of meat: tenderloin, a
rack of ribs, filet mignon, leg of lamb. For the
more adventurous, or those with generous and
skilled friends, go with elk or deer steaks or
tenderloin.

For non-meat eaters, try winter squash
gratin, stew or ravioli, or a savory tart (corn
and zucchini, maybe). Add baked apples, leafy
greens, winter squash or onion casserole, or a
salad of wild rice and chanterelles. Throw some

sauce made with a local Cabernet or Pinot Noir
sounds lovely.

In my opinion, the best breakfast ever is
pumpkin pie with whipped cream. Fruit (yes,
pumpkin is a fruit), some carbs and dairy — it's
the perfect breakfast.

For this non-Thanksgiving meal, let's go for
something just as comfortable as pumpkin pie,
but less predictable. Chocolate or maple bread
pudding, pear-apple or apricot-ginger crisp,
a cheese and fruit tart, or just a plate of local
cheeses and late-season
apples and pears would
finish the meal nicely.

Pass around some cof-
fee or tea, a glass of cordial
or brandy, and put your
feet up with satisfaction
and gratitude.

Breaking tradition, in
this case, is about work-
ing with what is available
and desirable. Cereal
and Scotch whisky were
available — and at least
the whiskey was desir-
able. Thanksgiving was
my first and only day off
while working through
long days of dawn-to-
dark cold on the Colora-
do-Wyoming border.

In my world, that
means one thing: road
trip! An early-morning
start (the before-men-
tioned leftovers for break-
fast; alas, no pumpkin
pie); a clear, blue, frosted
day; endless miles of open
road; and no one stirring.

I spent the day wan-
dering through Brown's
Park (hangout of many

legendary outlaws) and Dinosaur National
Monument.

About the time everyone else was tucking
into football and mashed potatoes, I stopped
high up on a canyon wall, tucked myself into
the shelter of a gnarly, old juniper, and enjoyed a
bowl of cereal with a Scotch whisky toast, grate-
ful for the amazing view, the unimaginable blue
of the sky, and the intense late-autumn sun.

It was a good day, a day for which to give
thanks.



Cutline

goat cheese and candied pecans in with almost
any of these items for extra flavor and crunch.

If you must do stuffing, try something sa-
vory and sweet with apples or pears and root
vegetables.

The one thing I do love about holiday food
is the cranberry sauce. With no resemblance
to any natural food substance, even the stuff
out of a can has a little bit of a hold on me.
Perhaps as a result of the often-fruitless effort
my mom made to get cranberry sauce to set
properly, I prefer cranberry chutney or relish
to the traditional sauce — though a cranberry



Above: Cutline. Left: Cutline



**An early-morning start;
a clear, blue, frosted day;
endless miles of open
road; and no one stirring.**