

# Foodie

## Thanksgiving — some things never change

By Jeanne Ferris

Autumn is stunning in its cornucopia of butternut, delicata and acorn squashes, its rich sweet potatoes, ochre yams and of course, orange pumpkins at entryways everywhere. There are more varieties of pumpkins than there are flavors at Baskin Robbins. Pumpkins make up for sunny Southern California's fall foliage. San Diegans love when the blustery biting northern winds visit; it is a respite from a perfect day in Paradise. Really? Yes. It gives women an excuse to wear colorful scarves and boots made for walking. It gives the men an excuse to buy wood, build fires and drink blood-warming 30-year-old Scotch. Well, perhaps no excuse is needed for well-aged Scotch. "Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns." — George Eliot, in a letter to Miss Lewis, October 1, 1841.

Who would have thought a season when the garden's bounty has been hidden, growing in the dank underground, could be so appealing to a discerning palate?

Fresh chestnuts are also a signal of autumn; it is a culinary specialty served

warm. It can be found in most supermarkets, but check carefully for mold. Before roasting, each chestnut must be painstakingly marked with an "X" on the top to avoid exploding. Place each chestnut flat on a baking sheet, and roast at 400 degrees for about 15 minutes. If they are carelessly piled up, they will steam instead of roast. Handle the chestnuts with care when removing from the oven and put them in a big bowl and watch the people gather. Mr. Eliot was right. Ahh, delicious autumn.

Our casual and too busy lifestyle does not lend to using the formal dining room table too often except at Thanksgiving. The dinner table is rife with traditional harvest yields and it feels right to extend an open invitation to strangers and newcomers and share grace with gratitude.

In our home, it is traditional to always have a place setting for an unexpected guest. Vintage mishmash of china and mismatched chairs are symbolic of our holiday gatherings. The long, long table under Grandma's Irish lace tablecloth is comprised of hastily gathered pieces from the garage which have been waiting patiently the whole year to once again, become part of a happy household.

It is not unlike the long table depicted in the illustrations of the pilgrims' first harvest meal.

Another tradition we have in our family is someone chooses to make the laborious but memorable Great Grandma Felicia's Easter bread. This is special bread baked during the holidays in most Mediterranean cultures. When completed, with its golden caramel exterior and delectably sweet meat that pulls apart like challah, rarely do

the loaves make it to the Thanksgiving table the next day.

During the holidays, no matter how grand or modest a home, the kitchen becomes the popular gathering place. It doesn't matter that we jostle and angle for standing or sitting room. We like being close. There is a natural yearning for humans to gather in a circle and share the music of laughter around the fire. Some things never change. We call it: tradition.