

## A Sense of Place - Chaffin Family Orchards - Fall

I know of no season that arrives the way fall does. No matter how prepared we are, watching the weather, and anticipating it's arrival, it always catches us off guard. One morning we will walk outside and it's crispness is there.

The first animals to notice seem to be the guardian dogs. They are extra frisky in the mornings, feeling truly comfortable in their long hairy coats after a summer of being warm. They try to entice the lambs and kids to play, bowing in front of them and jumping back and forth. These spring born babies feel too old for such silliness and it is a rare game that begins so the dogs just chase each other in the morning air. They occasionally get us to join in the fun when we arrive for their morning feedings.

Fall also brings with it a less hurried pace, many of summer's farmer's markets end and we have more time for planning and preparing for winter and the next year. There is time to enjoy the sights of olives gaining size and oranges and mandarins turning color on the trees. A final batch of baby chicks arrive; the last of the year, they are the hens that will lay for next summer's markets. Soon the brooder house will be put to rest until spring. We lift the fluffy little ones down to the shavings covered floor and watch them fill with food and water and run about stealing bits of nothing from each other. Laying hen chicks are much more active than the broiler chicks who filled this barn last. These chicks will head outside in two weeks to enjoy the last of fall's good weather until they are tucked up in the egg mobile to grow until spring. The large, roomy egg mobile is a mobile hen house that has all the furnishings chickens need to be happy. Each eggmobile is moved weekly to a fresh piece of pasture on our property. Two doors open to the outside with ramps for the birds to go in and out. Windows are open on sunny days and closed for rain. These young hens can choose which days to venture outside and which to enjoy the warm house. Come spring they will be veteran foragers ready to produce eggs for sale at the farmer's markets.

The fruits of fall show their vibrant colors and crisp textures as we organize the fruit stand. Beautiful red pomegranates fill boxes next to crisp Fuji persimmons and softening baking persimmons. All hold the promise of wonderful dishes to come. Next to a basket of deeply brown eggs, they display the best of fall's colors.

Calving season is here and there are new babies each day. Mother's search out perfect hiding places in the dry grass to tuck new babies until they are ready to move with the herd. By the spring they will be big enough to take advantage of the quickly growing grasses. Our Jersey has dropped her calf so now there is fresh milk for the house, so welcome after a two month dry period. With plenty of milk, mandarins, and oranges, we will stay healthy this winter.

Fall includes the preparatory work for winter. This is satisfying work as each task puts us closer to being ready. Loads of firewood are being cut and hauled daily. After a morning of work, everyone takes a break from cutting wood as the hay truck has arrived. Soon the barn is overfull with it's store of hay to get the cattle through the coldest months.

Following lunch, we begin a walk through the orchard accessing the conditions for work yet to be done. We develop a new grazing plan for the sheep as they move from cleaning up stone fruit orchards to citrus orchards. The ewes will need to increase their nutrition as we head through winter in preparation for spring lambing. Hopefully the

good quality forage they have consumed this fall has resulted in a large lamb crop. We cut the flesh of several types of olives, testing for size and oil content and looking for fruit fly damage. The decision has been made to harvest for olive oil and the discussion is now on how much of the oil to market ourselves and how much to sell to waiting buyers. We note the progress of ripening mandarins and oranges and think about harvest dates. We plan foliar feedings of minerals to nourish the citrus trees as the crop matures. The stone fruit trees are checked for leaf drop to see when they will be ready for pruning. We are excited to see the good germination of our legume cover crop in the stone fruits which will feed the trees with nitrogen in the spring, and provide winter forage for the sheep. We discuss our plan to mulch the tree trimmings into the soil and speak of it's timing. We decide to browse the goats in some of our border strips to thin out the blackberries and wild trees that are threatening to clog the creeks. We access the different types of browse available in these border strips and plan the timing of putting the goats into each area, choosing the areas with milder diets and more of the nutrient rich black berries for late pregnancy when the does will need maximum nutrition. We plan to be well away from the creeks and on higher ground with the goats before kidding begins and the little ones need to be away from swift water and near shelter. Egg mobiles are checked for winter hardiness. We chart out a course for them to head to dryer ground as the rains begin and the orchards become to wet for chickens. Returning back to the house, we are reminded it is fall when we realize there is time for a game with the children before starting evening chores and dinner.

### **The Meal**

Fall seems to just beg for the use of a slow cooker in preparing meals. There is time in the morning to set everything up and the warmer meal is welcome at the end of a chilly day. Cuts of beef, lamb, and goat such as roasts and stew meat have been waiting in the freezer for the arrival of cooler weather. A Chili made with stew meat warms and fills everyone after a brisk and active day. Adding an array of colorful fall peppers turns this ordinary chili into a full meal. A fall fruit salad makes use of fall fruits adds a sweet crunch.. This meal is best eaten on a Tuesday when a freshly baked loaf of Millers Bread is available. As the seasons change the diets of grassfed dairy cows change. The butter of each season reflects the diet of the cows. Fall's butter is mild and creamy reflecting the drying and mellowing of the grasses as they prepare for winter. The mild flavor of fall butter adds heartiness to the bread. This meal finishes with a slice of sweet persimmon bread dolloped with vanilla cream.

### **The Menu**

Grass Finished Stew Meat Chili

Fall's Fruit Salad

Millers Wundergrain Bread

Raw Fall Butter

Mary's Persimmon Bread

Sweet Vanilla Cream

### **The Strategy**

*For the Chili -*

After morning chores, about 9 hours before dinner; cut four pounds of grass finished lamb, beef, or goat stew meat into ½ inch squares. Warm four tablespoons of sesame oil

in a skillet over medium high heat and brown the meat on all sides. Transfer browned meat to a large slow cooker. Additionally add to the slow cooker; 8 ounces of tomato sauce, 42 ounces of diced tomatoes, 16 ounces of canned kidney beans, rinsed well, 2 cups diced carrots, 1 large chopped onion, ½ cup each chopped red, yellow, and orange peppers, ¼ cup minced parsley, 3 Tablespoons chili powder, 2 tsp sea salt, 1 ½ tsp cumin and 1 tsp freshly ground pepper. Stir well, cover slow cooker and cook on low for 9 hours or until meat is tender. Serve garnished with small chunks of Pedrozco Northern Gold Cheese and small dollops of fresh sour cream.

*For the Persimmon Bread-*

In the late afternoon prepare the persimmon bread so it will still be warm for dinner. In a large mixing bowl blend two farm fresh eggs, ¾ cup sugar, and ¼ cup warm coconut oil and ¼ cup sesame oil. Mix well and allow to stand. In a separate bowl mix the pulp of two soft baking persimmons with 1 tsp. baking soda, add to the sugar mixture. In another bowl sift together 1 ½ cups flour, 1 tsp cinnamon, and ½ tsp sea salt add ½ cup chopped walnuts and ½ cup golden raisins to dry ingredients. Fold dry ingredients into persimmon mixture. Pour into a greased 3” x 4” x 9” pan. Bake at 325 degrees F for 1 hour and 15 minutes until loaf tests done. Turn out from pan after 10 minutes and allow to rest in a warm place until serving. (if persimmons are not soft enough yet to use, place in the freezer and allow to become solid, then take out and thaw, upon thawing, fruit will be soft enough to use)

*For the salad -*

Just before the meal peel and chop 4 Fuji persimmons into ¼ inch squares. Place in a large salad bowl. Hold a large ripe pomegranate under cold water in a large sink. Peel the pomegranate and loosen the jewel like seeds, remove all of the white peel and husk. Place seeds in bowl with persimmon. In a pan over medium high heat toast 1 cup of chopped pecans until crunchy, add to fruits in bowl. In a 2 cup glass measure mix one cup of whole milk plain organic youghurt, 1 tsp stevia or 4 Tbsp honey, and ½ tsp cinnamon. Mix well until smoothly combined. Taste, add more sweetener or cinnamon if you wish. Pour dressing over fruit and toss well.

*For The Bread and Butter-*

Thickly slice wonder grain bread and serve with raw fall butter.

*For Dessert -*

Place 1 cup of whole raw cream in a chilled mixing bowl. Add ¼ - ½ tsp of vanilla and ¼ to ½ tsp stevia leaf powder. Whip until firm enough to dollop but not overly firm. Slices of the persimmon bread can be laid on their sides, top each with a dollop of the cream and sprinkle of freshly ground nutmeg.

**The Experience**

With the fall comes shorter evenings, created to give rest to the farmer. We gather at the table to enjoy each other’s company and a warm meal. We look forward to a quiet and comfortable evening ahead enjoying each other’s company. We will turn in early, able to sleep well under comfy quilts as fall nights are perfect for sleeping.