

September 2006

## Welcome to Early Autumn in the Sweltering Quercy Heat!

It's supposed to be the season of mellow fruitfulness, but there's nothing mellow about September in Southern France, the weather is frequently hotter than August. This year, it seems, will be no exception as August was the chilliest since records began, according to our disgusted neighbours!

There's change in the air. *Rentrée* has hit the children, work has hit the adults and the myriad visitors are packing away the Ambre Solaire and heading back to London, Paris and Lille. Out of date fête posters flap lazily from the many billboards and trees they decorated throughout the summer as the gallant men from the commune sweep up the last of the plastic cups. You can almost hear the land heave a huge, poignant sigh, the party's over. Meanwhile the skies clear, the sun comes out, the temperatures rise and life returns to normal.



Out in the fields and *potagers* the colours of the landscape are brighter and brasher than ever. Red and yellow peppers clash with vast orange pumpkins on tangled vines. In the old convent garden, *coeur de boeuf* tomatoes, the size of a baby's head, dangle precariously over ancient iron gates. Immaculately tended rows of drying beans, haricot, borlotti, and numerous others are waiting to be harvested. You can already find them in the markets. Sacks of coco beans in the pod, perfect for that most distinctive of southwestern feasts, an autumn cassoulet. Of course the problem, or the delight, with a cassoulet is that you need half a dozen friends - at least - to share it with and it's really best served on a freezing cold night, when the wind slaps into the north side of the house like wet cloth on a river stone. It's a winter dish; hard to contemplate when the temperatures are hitting thirty-five in the shade and you're typing with one foot in a bowl of iced water in an effort to keep your blood just below the boil.



As usual heat dictated the menu. I decided to put the beans on hold for a few more weeks, and turn my attention to the most expensive of our early autumn treats; *cèpes*. Of course you can track down your own if you know where to look - and more importantly, what to avoid - it's great fun too. But with every countryman in the Quercy out there, after even the tiniest sprinkle of rain, armed to the teeth with long stick and basket - they never use a plastic bag because the debris from the mushrooms must be allowed to fall and generate next years crop - chances of a good haul are deceptively slim.

I adopted my usual ploy and trundled along to the old lady in the market, just behind the butchers van. She sells prunes, garlic, delectable *pastis quercynoise* and a few dozen eggs. She also sells anything she can gather from the wild and in September it's usually *cèpes*. Sure enough she had a small offering laid out on a red and white checked cloth, fifteen euros a kilo. That may sound a lot but in fact it's about as cheap as you'll find in these parts and you don't need very many for a good, fat, juicy omelette. I bought three good sized specimens weighing in at just under 200g - three euros, hardly a fortune - then I selected half a dozen fresh eggs and belatedly realised I'd forgotten my egg boxes. The stallholder clucked over me like a mother hen, I'm forever doing things like this and a sore trial I must be to her. She took a firm grip on my basket, moved the *frisée* lettuces to one side, plucked off her head cloth and, completely ignoring my frantic protests, used it to make a nest between the *cèpes* and the damp leaves. I was firmly adjured not to put anything heavy on top of the eggs and to bring the head cloth back

the following week. She brought this fine performance to a close by stuffing a handful of parsley down beside the cèpes and dismissing me with a nod and a smile.

That night we sat on the terrace, our backs to the warm stone, and listened to the clunk of boules from the slow game on the far side of the *place*. We ate buttery, fluffy, slightly runny omelettes, stuffed with wonderfully aromatic, earthy cèpes, garlic and parsley. Accompanied by a crisp green salad, a warm baguette and a jug of local wine. It was absolute bliss.

And in case you were wondering, I washed the head cloth and put it back in the marketing basket where even I would be unlikely to forget it!

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### Autumn - Mushroom Season in the Lot

As the long hot summers draw to a close, and the mists in the valleys rise bringing rain and the coolness of autumn, the towns empty and the children return to school, the locals prepare themselves for the mushroom season. Although the season is relatively short, lasting about a month, it is an important part of the calendar..

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### Dog of the Month - Introducing Louisa

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### Les Amis des Chats Charity Association

The Tarn-et-Garonne based cat charity association *Les Amis des Chats* has launched a brand new web site in both English and French. [www.les-amis-des-chats.com](http://www.les-amis-des-chats.com) offers a wide range of cat health and welfare information ...

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### Pork Loin with Wild Ceps

Autumn is the perfect time for this delicious recipe, cèpes abound in the countryside and there are always plenty of enterprising locals in the markets who've taken the back break out of the endeavour for you! Autumn is also the time for inexpensive pork... [Read more...](#)



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[Discussion Forum.](#)



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