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Kane County Magazine

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OUT OF THE ORDINARY

You'll find attention to detail and a stunning riverfront location at The Graceful Ordinary

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FALL FOR AUTUMN FLAVORS

The season isn't just for pumpkin: Indulge in these out-of-the-box options

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TALENTED TEEN

She started her photography company at a young age — and business is growing

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food & SPIRITS

The Kane County dining scene is booming — where to eat, where to drink and what's new | Section starts on page 7



COMFORT FOOD

HONORING THE HEALING POWER OF EATING, SEASON BY SEASON

By Katie McCall, local food columnist

Every year, I look forward to September more than any other month. Not because it happens to be my birthday month, but rather, it's always marked the natural transition to my favorite season: autumn.

Most often, we trade out the sandals for socks; sticky, humid weather turns cool and crisp; and the crunch of golden leaves on the sidewalk or a bonfire popping and crackling in the backyard are music to my ears. Let's not forget it's pumpkin spice *everything* and I can officially drape a blanket over my shoulders and call it fashion.

But perhaps, more than anything, it welcomes a transitional time for food — both the way we prepare and eat it. All too often we rush through the act of cooking a meal, and some go as far as guiltily themselves for indulging in foods that are comforting, dismissing their healing powers and ignoring how seasonal eating is therapeutic.

In springtime, I relish in doing anything outdoors after a long winter: seeking signs of green during a rainy walk, stumbling upon budding violets, foraging for mushroom in the woods, picking asparagus in the fields and planting a garden. The food I consume tends to be restorative,

fresh, bursting with herbs and bright flavors.

Summer then lends itself naturally to the bounty of the season. We're blessed with juicy heirloom tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, peppers, green beans, beets, sweet corn, melon, peaches — you name it. The grill and porch instantly become our kitchen, as my family and I prepare and eat more meals outside than in.

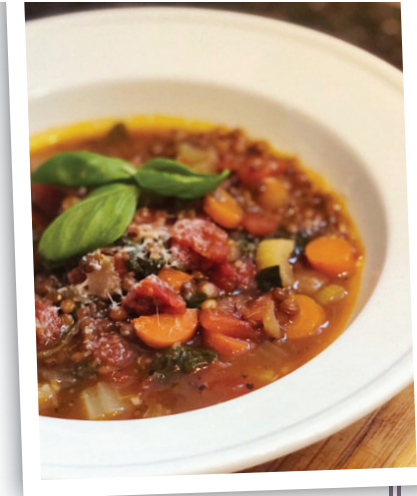
By fall (in my mind, September, regardless how hot it may be) and winter, I'm ready for comfort food. Soups, casseroles, pasta, roasted vegetables, homemade bread, hot tea, baked goods ... anything that feels like a warm hug. I'm fortunate that my birthday falls at the end of the month when the weather leans toward chilly and many of these dishes find their way to the table.

In all honesty, I'm not a big birthday person; it's simply an excuse to get my immediate family together to share a special meal. Weather permitting, we dine alfresco on the screened-in porch or down in the garden. The home-cooked, seasonally inspired meal typically consists of an enormous salad studded with late summer veggies from the garden, velvety squash soup, roasted herb potatoes, grilled chicken for the meat eaters, some kind of delicious homemade bread and dessert — always dessert.



We gather around a long table that's set with vintage tablecloths, mismatched china and vases filled with just-picked wildflowers from the garden, which over the course of the meal begin doing soft backbends above our glasses of wine and lemon-mint water. Birds chatter in nearby trees, crickets chirp, frogs croak and we do our best to ward off mosquitoes with citronella candles. It sounds like a styled photo shoot in a glossy home and garden magazine, but the truth is that it's one hundred percent authentic.

For me, it's far beyond a meal. It's the experience of passing a bowl to the person sitting next you, sharing stories, reconnecting, catching up while slowing



down, celebrating multiple generations together and honoring those who used to sit around the table. Season by season, this is the greatest gift I could ever ask for.

■ Katie McCall, former owner of Two Wild Seeds Baking Co., is a bona fide Midwestern girl. Raised on four acres of rural property in Yorkville, she was always taught to respect nature and all of its bounty. From foraging morel mushrooms in the woods to picking wild black raspberries for homemade jam, Katie feels most at home when in nature and preparing food for others. When she's not creating new dishes in the kitchen (and writing about them) she can be found nose-deep in cookbooks, exploring the outdoors with her family — and eating ... always eating.



LENTIL VEGETABLE SOUP

This soup is hearty, healthy and the perfect dinner for a cool, fall evening. Have fun interchanging seasonal vegetables to make it all your own!

SERVES 4-6

- 1 medium onion, diced
- 3 cloves fresh garlic, minced
- 3-4 carrots, chopped
- 4 ribs celery, chopped
- 2 cans diced tomatoes (with liquid) — or fresh tomatoes if in season
- 1 1/4 cups green lentils, rinsed and sorted
- 4 1/2 cups vegetable stock
- 2 cups packed, fresh spinach or kale
- Olive oil, salt, pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried oregano
- 2 capfuls of apple cider vinegar
- Fresh Parmesan cheese, to garnish
- Fresh basil, to garnish
- Fried onions, to garnish (optional)

Prepare by dicing and chopping all veggies; set aside.

Drain and sort lentils, removing any that are misshapen, matured, chipped or imperfect. Set aside.

Set a large stockpot over medium-high heat and coat the bottom with olive oil. Add the onion and saute until translucent. Add garlic. Saute another minute or two, careful not to burn the garlic.

Add the carrots and celery. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Saute until veggies become cooked through and slightly browned. Add tomatoes, which will help deglaze the bottom of the pan and pull up those yummy browned bits. (Brown bits = flavor!)

Add vegetable stock, lentils, dried herbs, vinegar and salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil, then reduce to low heat, cover with a lid and simmer about 35 minutes.

Add the spinach (or kale) and any other quick-cooking vegetable on hand; zucchini are perfect. Meat eaters could also add precooked sliced sausage at this point.

Allow to cook another 10 minutes. Taste once more to adjust seasoning as needed. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese, fried onions (optional) and fresh basil. Enjoy!