

# March lingers on

## GUEST COLUMN

BY NICOLE SPIRIDAKIS

March, lovely March, is one my favorite months—with polite apologies to sweet April and her sun showers, smoky blue June tossing her still-green branches against a summer sky, quiet, still August and white-gold October—and so I must be honest and admit I was ticking off the last rainy days of February a bit eagerly. There is just something about March, you see.

March is the in-between month. It bridges the gap between winter and spring (which arrived, thankfully, mid-month). It is the work-horse, the alarm clock of the calendar, entreating the earth to emerge from its long rest with strong winds and bright sun (and a bit of rain, too), but happily, mind. March calls, Look! The sea is blue again and under its surface there are secret treasures and whales still making their way South. The birds are coming back to town and are already singing their busy summer songs. There is so much to do; let us get started!

At the markets, you'll find lots of root vegetables but there's also tender arugula

and asparagus. You can almost let yourself imagine mid-July and picking blackberries and going for a swim in the river to wash your dusty toes—one of those hot-hot summer weekends when all you want to eat are sliced tomatoes with feta and chunks of good bread. You can almost see sweet September when the apples are back in season and taste better, sharper, than they have in months. You can almost feel the way the sun settles after burning away the long afternoons, slipping down the horizon well past 8 p.m. with no fog in sight. So I guess you could say March is about possibility.

Not to mention there is the time change tucked in there about half-way through the month—I wait impatiently for it every day following the Winter Solstice. Wake up, the March wind whispers to the earth, sweeping away the puddles. And thus the ground rouses itself to put forth daffodils, new grass, a faint greening all over the trees. March blows out the cobwebs and scours the air clean; it tidies away the detritus still lingering from the holidays and pushes us out firmly into the year. It is truly a deep breath.

It has rained on and off for days here in this western state but there have been periods of bright sun. For a recent birthday walk in Sonoma County the fields were that vivid green of late winter, threaded with the beginnings of the mustard grass, and there were even a few blossoms on the trees; tentative though

they may have been, they were there—and blue sky and drifting clouds. Today I woke to hard rain but it eased off. Now a light breeze (a March-like breeze) is rustling the curtains.

Though I'm never really sorry to see winter fade away, this one has been particularly kind to me in terms of learning to love certain vegetables previously unexplored, including turnips, red cabbage, celery root. I'd always *meant* to explore these hidden gems but somehow didn't get around to it until this year.

The first revelation was the turnips. I know I've eaten turnips before, and perhaps have even cooked with them on occasion, but for some reason they never really made much of an impression. Enter 2011, and a mild turnip obsession. I've cooked and mashed them with potatoes, sliced them thinly to pan-fry with bok choy, roasted them within an inch of their lives and gobbled them up in seconds. One afternoon I threw a few turnips into a pan with a bunch of other winter vegetables to roast, and then I made soup.

I'm so happy with this little soup. It's crammed with my favorite things—cauliflower, potatoes, garlic—and though it's nothing fancy it's so satisfying. All you do really is to roast a bunch of vegetables and then cook them in some vegetable broth and puree until creamy. No milk either; this is pure, untouched vegetable, and how glad you are for it. The turnips are what make it and save it from being

too sweet; that sharpness sings through against the cauliflower and onions making it earthy, promising, spring.

Well, I feel like I'm eating spring a bit when I eat this soup. And as April is just around the corner it's just the thing to have for lunch (dish of potato chips recommended but not required). Spring, at last.

## Roasted Turnip & Cauliflower Soup

### Ingredients

*1 cauliflower, broken into florets*  
*2 red russet potatoes, peeled and quartered*  
*1 bunch turnips peeled and quartered*  
*1 small yellow onion, quartered, or three leeks, sliced*  
*A few garlic cloves, peeled*  
*olive oil*  
*3 cups vegetable broth*  
*salt and pepper*

Preheat oven to 375° F. Arrange the vegetables in an oven-proof roasting pan, drizzle with the olive oil, and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast the vegetables until fork-tender, about 45 minutes.

Dump the vegetables into a large pot and add the vegetable broth plus 3 cups of water. Bring to a boil, then simmer until vegetables are very tender. Remove from heat and, using a stick blender or in a food processor, puree until smooth but still textured. Add salt and pepper to taste.