



I grew up with four distinct seasons in Wisconsin. Since then I've lived in areas of the country with two anemic seasons and one place with one monotonous season. Here in the Texas Hill Country we have three seasons, sort of. We haven't had much spring the last few years, but summers are generally hot, winters are generally coldish - even a little snow occasionally - and fall, well it's cooler than summer and warmer than winter. As I write this we're approaching winter. Another Thanksgiving is in the books and Christmas looms large.

This is my favorite time of year and for me it starts with Halloween, marches through Thanksgiving and hunkers down with Christmas, New Year and right on into the ominous sounding "dead of winter".

Every season has its own distinct charm and my charmed season begins when leaves fall. I like the look of bare trees. It's like seeing the backbone of the countryside. There's a grittiness, a sense of will power and strength.

Ok, the ubiquitous "pumpkin spice" scent/flavor of fall does have a rather puny ring to it, but except for diehards we're past that now for another year and moving toward the robust scent of pine and the hearty taste of gingerbread.

Our memories and anticipation of the seasons rely heavily on our senses of smell and taste. I can't remember what I got for Christmas when I was eight, but I remember the gingerbread cookies - the same ones I'll bake and decorate this year as I do every year. The part of Wisconsin in which I grew up is heavily German and stollen, the sweet German Christmas bread, is also a staple with its fragrant aroma of cardamom. Sadly, many of those for whom I used to make a Christmas stollen are gone,

but I memorialized the olden treat in a novella simply titled The Christmas Stollen. I framed my grandmother's recipe and just might spend a nostalgic day making it again. I'm betting I can find some takers.

Moving on into January brings the New Year and with it resolutions, anticipation, optimism and champagne! I adore champagne and those who know me well know I like the cheap stuff. The cheaper the better. I've had really good champagne and noted the trill on the tongue the pricey bubbly produces. I even had a Bouvier des Flanders dog named Moet Chandon. The dog was pricier than the champagne. But when it comes to my own taste buds, I love a good Andre or Roget. No debate and that takes care of my love of January.

February means Valentines Day. Chocolate. That is all. Nothing more to say except maybe more champagne.

February 20 - 23rd, in Bandera also brings the biggest weekend of the year to our little tourist town - Cowboy Mardi Gras. The entire town turns purple, green and gold and the town swells with visitors ready to party! Zydeco music, along with plenty of Texas country style tunes, the most colorful parade outside of New Orleans, and of course, the food! Who doesn't like gumbo? How about the spicy aroma of a crawfish boil? Has your sweet tooth recovered from Christmas overload? There's the tradition of King Cake to entice you back to the dark side of a good old rich dessert. Mardi Gras has something for everyone and Bandera's version with western boots and hats, feathers and beads adds a Cowboy Capital flavor to the party.

Yes, I do love this time of year and all it holds and all it promises. From gingerbread to gumbo, chocolate to champagne, from the scent of pine to a crawfish boil, the fragrances and seasonings of the seasons are etched into our sense memories and beckon us forward.

Jump on into the "dead of winter" with both feet and celebrate all it has to offer. And oh yes, don't forget to welcome back our Winter Texans as they escape the nastier aspects of winter we don't have to deal with here.

Wait - were those snow flurries this morning? Laissez les bon temps rouler!



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