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So I'm keeping my fingers crossed. I think that really and truly spring has sprung! At one point, it even seemed that we might just bypass spring and head straight into summer. The garden is filled with a blooming bounty of daffodils. Most of the tulips were nibbled down to the nub by the deer but a few survived this indignity and are getting ready to burst. Unfortunately, I suspect that the deer decided a little color would be nice with their greens and are waiting for these few tulips to bloom. I can sense them spying from the woods across the road. It won't be long before they saunter over and treat the rest of my spring garden like an all-you-can-eat salad bar.

The best part of these early spring days is the thrilling absence of black flies. It is great to be back in t-shirts and sneakers and revel in the sunshine. Even better is the chance to spend some time in the warm, wonderful sunshine unfettered by black flies. If that little window of opportunity has not yet slammed shut where you live, it will soon. Before you know it, a few early scouts will start to nose around, doing reconnaissance for the hordes to come. A neighbor told me that she has already spotted one or two; I'm hoping she's wrong.

There is a wonderful peace and calm to gardening, at least in my neighborhood. The quiet is only broken by the twitter of birds and the clunk of my shovel. Except for this year, this year the thud of the nail gun and buzz of the chop saw are adding their music to my garden. My porch fell down, not this past winter but the one before, the one with record snowfalls. It has obviously taken a while to get it all sorted and rebuilt. Construction started last fall but it wasn't quite completed before the ice and snow fell. The carpenter promises it will be ready for Mothers' Day.

The porch should be the perfect spot for a Mothers' Day brunch. My snowbird mother will be back from the south. She and my father make their way north every spring, generally arriving a few days before Mothers' Day. They time their arrival to miss the snow but usually manage to get back in time to welcome the black flies.

Like most mothers, my poor mom has had more than her fair share of special breakfasts in bed. For years, she endured Mothers' Day mornings of sticky-sweet Hawaiian fruit punch, burnt toast and soggy rice crispies. We served her breakfasts that only a mother could love and she received them with grace, enthusiasm and good humor.

That is my mother; she is all about enthusiasm and good humor. No matter what she does, she always manages to do it with a sense of fun, ease and grace. Maybe it is her special superpower to make everything look effortless and easy. You often read about people who face life with dignity and grace. While their lives are inspiring, they often seem rather intimidating and awfully serious. My mom is too warm-hearted, too cheerful to be intimidating.

This is not to say she flighty or foolish. When the situation warrants, my mother can be very serious. She worries about family and friends and we can always count on her to be in our court. She's not blind to our faults; she just tends to focus on the good in everyone and every situation. Her positive attitude is infectious, although I must admit it did take me a while to catch on. I think I rather enjoyed being a surly teenager, at least for a couple of years.

I can't help but laugh when I think of breakfasts I served and gifts and cards I gave my mother when I was little. I know the best gift she gave me was a positive outlook. Enjoy the day with your mom, celebrate spring and try not to burn the toast!

Bon appétit!

Susan

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Rhubarb Muffins

My rhubarb plant is starting to flourish. Just in time to make muffins for Mothers' Day.

These sweet treats are a great addition to any spring brunch. Enjoy!

Makes about 16 muffins

1 3/4 cup sifted flour
2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon ginger
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon salt
3/4 cup unsalted butter
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 egg
3/4 cup milk
4-6 ounces fresh rhubarb stalks,
cut into small dice
Crunchy Topping (recipe follows)



1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Grease 16 standard (1/3-cup) muffin cups or use paper liners.
2. Sift together flour, baking powder, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt.
3. Using an electric mixer, cream butter and sugar together. Add the egg and vanilla; beat on high speed until smooth.
4. Reduce speed to low and add flour mixture and milk, alternating in batches, beginning and ending with flour mixture and mixing until just combined.
5. Fill muffin cups about half full. Sprinkle batter with rhubarb. Crumble topping evenly over the rhubarb.
6. Bake in the middle of the oven until tops are golden and a toothpick inserted in center of a muffin comes out clean, 20 to 25 minutes. Cool muffins on a rack for a few minutes. Serve warm.

Can be made the day ahead. Let cool completely and store in a closed container at room temperature. Reheat and serve warm.

Crunchy Topping

1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 cup (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, softened

1. Whisk together flour, brown sugar, cinnamon and salt in a bowl. Add butter and blend with a fork or your fingertips until mixture forms small clumps.