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Homemade sweet potato chips.

My Hero

TCHAIKOVSKY AND TENDERLOIN GO TOGETHER
AT A RAVINIA FESTIVAL PICNIC

RECENTLY WE HAD PLANS to go to Ravinia with three couples we meet each year for a picnic at the park. The fourth couple, the one that usually brought homemade bread and dessert, had another commitment (knee replacement surgery). We'd have to take up the slack. The emails were flying among us to determine our menu.

Carol said she'd bring a caprese salad; sliced tomatoes, mozzarella, a drizzle of balsamic. Okay, I thought. Not exciting, but certainly acceptable. Nancy, the most ambitious cook of the group, the one who makes perfect paella, said she had some Asian noodles in her pantry that she could toss with some sesame oil and maybe some chicken. Wait! Just hold on!

Have you ever met anyone who's said, "What I really have a taste for is some cold noodles sloshing around in an oily sauce?" Seriously, if it's something you would never consider eating in the comfort of your home, why on earth would you want to eat it on a paper plate balanced on your lap? Though happy for anything someone serves me, I had to put my foot down. I would take over the main course. The noodle lady would handle dessert...and since she is a chocolate freak, I knew we'd all be happy.

I had to make something transportable for the

hour ride. It had to be hearty, not heavy. After all, we had to carry this, along with folding chairs, drinks, and a blanket. With the idea that everything good is better on bread, a sandwich seemed the obvious choice.

A sandwich, a great sandwich, is an art form, an architectural wonder. It has to hold together with only two parts; the bread and the filling. And because it has only these parts, they have to be the highest quality you can find.

MAKING THE SANDWICH

I bought a beautiful filet of beef and cut it into very thick rounds. After seasoning it generously with salt, pepper, and some garlic, I grilled it over high heat until it was charred on the outside, but gloriously pink throughout. Medium rare. Cook's choice. When it cooled to room temperature, I sliced it and wrapped it for its ride. One down.

Now for the potatoes: French fries were out of the question. With the tender meat, I'd like some crunch. Potato chips! A crowd pleaser. The market shelves are loaded with chips of every size, shape, and color. But I had two sweet potatoes on my rack. I had a mandolin on my shelf. A marriage. I sliced the potatoes super thin, preheated the oven, and roasted those potato rounds until they were crispy and then

Horseradish Sauce

INGREDIENTS

- 3 tablespoons white horseradish
- 2 teaspoons cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 cup heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Stir together the horseradish, vinegar, and honey in a small bowl. Beat cream until it holds soft peaks. Gently fold the horseradish mixture into the whipped cream. Season with salt and pepper. The sauce may be made a day in advance and kept covered in the refrigerator.

Sweet Potato Chips

INGREDIENTS

- 2 sweet potatoes, sliced 1/8 inch thick
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Flaky sea salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place oven racks in the center and lower third of the oven. Spread the potato slices in a single layer on two baking sheets and drizzle with olive oil. Bake, turning once, until the potatoes are crispy, about 30 minutes. Remove from oven and season with salt while still hot.

removed them to a paper towel-lined pan, sprinkled them with salt while they were hot, and eureka, I had gorgeous red/gold chips. I also bought a bag of thick cut potato chips just in case there was someone in the crowd who turned up his nose at a sweet potato. Oh. I know that person. I married him.

I had the meat and potatoes. I thought soft, rather than crisp buns would be easier to maneuver at a picnic, so I picked up golden brioche rolls, as well as a package of pretzel rolls (because they looked good, and I had never had one).

Now for the architecture. The bun had to be coated with mustard, mayo, butter—something to keep the filling from making the bread soggy. When I think of roast beef, I think of horseradish sauce. Why not?

Summer=tomatoes. Both seasons are short. Take advantage. I cut nice thick slices of juicy beefsteak tomatoes and wrapped up lovely leaves of tender lettuce. Tchaikovsky and tenderloin. It had a certain symmetry.

I unpacked my wares at the park. Mine wasn't the traditional hero sandwich with all kinds of cured meats on a long Italian roll, but I've got to say, I was the hero that night. U