

On this chilly Groundhog Day forenoon, home smoked ham is perfuming the air as it simmers on the wood stove, it isn't hard to have one's thoughts center on food. And, too, I am taking time to look back at our January project of visiting 31 countries of the world via the internationally loved subjects of recipes and good eating.

Today, dinner will be pretty much one of our usual meals—homegrown for the most part. In this case, the ham—it turned out very tasty this past fall—will be accompanied by a dish of baked beans flavored with maple syrup and some mustard. And, as almost every day, potatoes will be on the table, too.

There were several recipes that we used this past month that we we will not consign to the wastepaper basket. In fact, I am going to bake a Polish spice cake—Piernik—today. That was a recipe that made a flavorful, nicely textured cake that also stayed fresh for a few days. That, however, isn't usually an issue. Most cakes disappear before they have a chance to become stale.

Githeri, the bean/corn stew from Kenya will also remain in our cooking repertoire. And whenever we have that, I will be sure to bake some of the Kenyan flatbread.

In fact, if the international food project told me anything, it reinforced how much I like to bake and eat flatbreads from around the world. This past month, I made lefse from Norway; naan from India; Venezuelan arepas; flour tortillas from Mexico; and Egyptian hawawshi that used pita bread.

We did make a few desserts or coffee/tea accompaniments in January. I baked maple butter tarts from Canada; mince pies from England; Danish butter cookies; oatcake from the Faroe Islands; Bara Brith, the "speckled bread". from Wales; Nisua from Finland and Eclairs from France; and Austrian raspberry shortbread. And, of course, the Piernik from Poland that will soon go into the oven.

There are also some recipes that we will never make again—oatcake, onion pizza, and Irish boxty. It might have been a failure of our ingredients or technique or our own particular taste buds, but it was a lesson of eating what was on our plates, not always for taste, but with high regard for our copious food supply, something that most of the world does not have.

The other fact that became very noticeable, even though we might have guessed this earlier, is that plain "peasant food," the dishes that have kept people alive and usually thriving for hundreds

of years, differ according to what thrived in a particular area. In northern Europe and Scandinavia, for example, potatoes were held in as high esteem as in Ireland. Almost every country has one or more traditional potato dishes that show up on the lists of the best food of an area. And during the month, we made featured dishes containing potatoes on six occasions. On many other days, potatoes accompanied some other main dish.

We might try this month-long culinary trip again, or, perhaps, at another time of year. It would be interesting to see what we would make during the height of the harvest season, perhaps late August or September. In fact, I think I will make a note of that. Our ingredients available are quite different depending on the time of year. It would be fun to take another culinary trip by way of preparing good food for ourselves.