



ASK SUNSET

HAVE A QUESTION ABOUT LIFE IN THE WEST? WE HAVE THE ANSWERS.

Q: I want a holiday escape.

I like having an excuse to flee family get-togethers, but I also enjoy a great meal that someone else prepares. Can you suggest a getaway with a good choice of hotels and restaurants that's nice in late November?

—D.K.R., VENTURA, CA

DEAR D.K.R. We love the Southern California desert, a few hours' drive from you and so appealing in late fall. For dining choices, the resort town of La Quinta is hard to beat. At Morgan's in the Desert (morgansinthedesert.com), James Beard award-winning chef Jimmy Schmidt does a prix fixe Thanksgiving dinner with items like gingered squash-apple soup and pumpkin crème brûlée tart. Other options: American comfort food at Arnold Palmer's Restaurant (arnoldpalmersrestaurant.com) or steaks and potent martinis at Hog's Breath Inn (*closed Thanksgiving Day*; hogsbreathlaquinta.com), offshoot of the Carmel, California, landmark. You can overnight in a casita at La Quinta Resort & Club (laquintaresort.com) or at the newly renovated Chateau at Lake La Quinta (chateaulakequinta.com).



Bottle your own wine at three Napa Valley wineries.

Q: For our upcoming wedding anniversary, I'm looking for a vineyard where my wife and I can create our own anniversary blend to take home with us. Suggestions?

—JEFFREY PAUL, LOS ANGELES

DEAR JEFFREY We can think of nothing more conducive to a happy marriage than blending your personal bottle of Chateau Paul to share on a special occasion. Try these Napa Valley programs: Conn Creek Winery's Barrel Blending Experience (conncreek.com) and Raymond Vineyards' Winemaker for a Day (raymondvineyards.com). At Judd's Hill Winery's Bottle Blending Day Camp (juddshill.com), you can make any quantity from three bottles to a full barrel—which should take good care of you and your wife through your 50th anniversary.



Q: Every fall, our Fuyu persimmon tree gives us more fruit than we know what to do with.

Any tips on how to make good use of this bounty? —E.J., LAKE OSWEGO, OR



Dry fresh persimmons to make irresistible snacks.

DEAR E.J. Persimmon trees can pump out a lot of fruit in November, especially when they're mature. Fuyu persimmons are delicious fresh (see page 77 for three easy recipes) and exquisite when dried. We've adapted the Japanese tradition of air-drying the fruit to produce special treats—this works for both Fuyus (the flat, crisp kind) and Hachiyas

(the elongated, astringent kind). First, when the persimmons are ripe—fully colored but not soft—snip them from the tree, leaving about 1/2 inches of stem attached. Next, peel away the tough outer skin. Now wrap string around the stem and use it to hang the fruit in a warm, dry space with (very important) good air circulation. Make sure the persimmons

don't touch one another, and leave them hanging three to five weeks, till they're leathery but still pliable, with a bloom of fine white sugar that has risen to the surface. This is the signal to pull them down and enjoy an intensely sweet, chewy treat—good eaten whole or, if you want, sliced into wedges that you can package as holiday gifts. ☺

Email your questions about Western gardening, travel, food, wine, or home design to asksunset@sunset.com

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