



## Fave are Blooming in Italy

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*Rick Gush*

Saturday, March 7, 2009

Fava beans, ( *Vicia faba* ) also known as horse beans, are a big deal here. In Italian they are called fava, or the plural "fave." Hooray! It's the seventh day of March and my fava beans have finally started to bloom.

It's been a wet and cold winter, so my beans are way behind what they were last year, when we had a very mild January. Last year I actually had some small beans ready to eat in late March.

I'm not Catholic, and actually I'm slightly antagonistic towards some of the church's practices, but nonetheless I get a big kick out of falling in line with my neighbors, so now that I live in Italy, and my neighbors are almost all Catholics, I go to festivals on saint days, and I use several saint days as planting days.

When I lived Hawaii, my neighbors always marked the Makahiki (a local god) festival as the beginning of a new planting year, as did I, so I guess I've got some practice in following local pagan usages.

Fava beans, ( *Vicia faba* ) also known as horse beans, are a big deal here. In Italian they are called fava, or the plural "fave."

It is traditional here in Liguria to plant fave on the second day of November, which is All Souls day.

The little local cemeteries, of which there are many, are staggeringly draped with flowers on the days surrounding this holiday.

My wife and I always plan our vacations in the fall, and I always insist that we return home at the end of October, in order that I can plant my fave on the second of November.

In the south of Italy, where fave have several times in history been an important food source, and where fave usually produce at least a month earlier than in the north where I live, it is still traditional in lots of places to put fave on the altars on St. Joseph's day, which is March 19.

Unfortunately, I don't think our fave will make St. Giuseppe's day this year.

Another tradition, still followed by many in Italy, both north and south, is to have an outdoor picnic on May 1 and eat fave and salami and Roman Pecorino (sheep) cheese.

I'm all for that tradition, and it looks as if we'll be in fine shape with our fave harvest at that point. Good. I like being in synch with my neighbors.