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Start an End-of-Summer Tradition

SEPTEMBER 2008

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Every year for the past decade, Jennifer Trainer-Thompson and her family — all four generations — have converged at a lakeside lodge in New Hampshire for several days of eating, swimming and socializing. It's an annual tradition that takes place on the weekend after Labor Day, when hot summer days give way to cool autumn nights, and they look forward to it all year long.

"All we do is eat, swim and enjoy each other," says Thompson, Williamstown, Mass.-based author of The Joy of Family Traditions. "It's really the last hurrah of the season in New England. The week after Labor Day can be as hot during the day as it is in August, but the nights are typically cooler. It's the perfect time of year for a family reunion."

It's also the perfect time of year to get wet. "Water is very important to our family," Thompson continues. "When we get together, water is always the focal point."

Indeed, water is the perfect conduit for family fun, even on the cusp of autumn, when many families are reluctantly getting ready to trade in their sandals for snow boots.

However, the end of summer doesn't have to be a somber occasion. Instead, it's the perfect time to celebrate the season with a series of poolside rituals. Executed every year, yours, like the Thompsons', can become time-honored traditions with which to bid the summer season adieu.

Memories that Matter

In an increasingly busy world, traditions are extremely important. "Family traditions really help ground us," Thompson says. "We're all connected in our 24/7 world, but we're often disconnected from what's immediately around us. Traditions are a way to reconnect, to build histories and create memories."

Traditions don't have to be momentous occasions, either. "People tend to think of traditions as monumental events, like Thanksgiving, Christmas or Hanukkah," Thompson points out. "But it's often the littlest, quirkiest traditions that are the most meaningful."

For that reason, pool owners are especially lucky. After all, swimming pools are full of opportunities to create great memories.

"When our parents were growing up, very few people had pools," Thompson says. "But boy, water is such a fundamental element in our lives, and you can center a lot of events around it."

Seasonal Traditions You Can Start

If your family doesn't yet have an end-of-summer ritual, now is the perfect time to start one. No matter where you live, even in warm climates that lend themselves to year-round swimming, your summer deserves a proper and memorable send-off.

Need some inspiration? Here are five traditions that you can start this year. Held poolside, they're an ideal way to say goodbye to summer and hello to fall.

1. **Host a back-to-school soirée.** For your kids, the biggest bummer about summer's end isn't the shorter or colder days. It's school. In order to ease the transition, Thompson suggests hosting an annual back-to-school party for your children and their friends. "On the eve of school starting, invite the neighbors and their kids over for a 'last splash' and a cookout," she says. Like your annual trip for school supplies and clothes, a "last splash" will give your kids something to look forward to every year before they hit the books.

2. **Have a family swim meet.** Of course, you don't need to host a party in order to have a tradition. If you want to privately and quietly commemorate back-to-school season with your children, Thompson suggests a family swim, followed by a poolside dinner and an annual family meeting. At the meeting, discuss your family's goals for the coming year. Maybe you want your kids to get better grades. Maybe you want to take a family vacation somewhere. Maybe you want to finish your basement. Whatever it is, having a set time every year for planning and reflection will help your family bond.

3. **Take a midnight swim.** Traditions aren't just for kids. They're for adults, too. Consider taking advantage of fall's cooler nights by scheduling a midnight swim with your partner. Consider it an annual date night. The water, along with some candles and stars, are all you'll need to keep the romance going strong well into autumn.

4. **Organize a seasonal feast.** Because the calendar was originally designed by farmers who plant in the spring and harvest in the fall, summer's end is the perfect time to pay homage to society's agrarian roots. "Have a seasonal dinner by the pool to celebrate the September harvest," Thompson suggests. "Tell people, 'Only bring food that you've grown, or that's come from a nearby farm.'" Tie your tradition in with community events by scheduling it to follow a local farmers' market.

5. **Tailgate in your trunks.** The only thing that says fall more than autumnal produce is football. To start the season off right every year, consider moving the bratwursts and the beer from the parking lot to the backyard. With waterproof speakers and an outdoor television, watching the game with buddies is as easy in the pool as it is in the stands. (For more poolside tailgating ideas, including a fun fall recipe that's perfect for sports fans, read Tailgate in Your Trunks.)

No matter your end-of-summer traditions — family reunions, block parties, barbecues — what's important is not what you do, but rather where you do it and with whom.

"It's so important that families spend time together," Thompson says. "A pool is so conducive to that because it's such a convivial place."