

Monday 6th February 2012

Dear Customer,

We got a thick dump of snow on Saturday but it is thankfully going as quickly as it came. As write this our red peppers have come to a standstill somewhere on the autoroute du soleil on a broken-down lorry. I hope they make it in time for the bags. I don't like flying so usually drive to the Mediterranean for my holidays. When I feel a million miles from home and a Dentressangle lorry passes – I muse that it might have our produce on and will be in London that night, then Europe feels much smaller. As you can see, my world is a small one. You will never bump into me with my backpack in Delhi or up the Andes. If you did, it wouldn't be a pretty sight – a woman, a gibbering skeleton who hadn't eaten since the aeroplane convinced she had malaria, leptospirosis and dengue fever at least and whose cherished values had been whipped like a rug from beneath her feet. I'm very envious of those who can travel the world, just take it in their stride. My friend Helen is currently trekking in Patagonia – it sounds fantastic. She found a little puppy asleep on a glacier and carried it 20 miles back to civilisation where she managed to reunite it with it's family. It was called General. I texted her to remind her we aren't popular in Argentina right now and to keep her country of origin quiet. Anyway why travel when we can have the home comforts of Rosemary Wass' swedes in our bags. Freshly harvested from under the snow on our North Yorkshire Moors where there's nothing more sinister than an odd fat slug.

Swede and Potato Pasties

*pack of puff or shortcrust pastry
125g swede
small onion, grated
few sprigs of thyme, chopped
½ tsp sea salt
50g strong Cheddar (optional)*

*225g potato
75g carrot
handful of parsley, finely chopped
1 tsp vegetable bouillon
30g butter or margarine, melted*

Defrost the pastry. Preheat the oven to 190C/ Gas 5. For the filling, peel the potato, swede and carrot and cut into 3-4mm dice. Mix together with the other ingredients in a bowl, adding the butter or margarine last to bind. Roll out the pastry to approximately 3mm thick. Using a 19cm plate as a template, cut out 4 circles. Spoon the vegetable mixture on to one half of each circle. Brush the pastry edges with a little water, fold the pastry over to a half-moon and crimp the edges well to seal. Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment. Brush with egg or milk to glaze if desired. Bake for 35-40 minutes until the pastry is golden brown. Delicious hot or cold.

Cauliflower and Chick Pea Curry

*1 cauliflower, trimmed
3 onions, chopped
1 tsp freshly grated ginger
2 tsp ground cumin
2 star anise
400g tin chickpeas, rinsed
handful chopped coriander*

*2 tbsp sunflower oil
4 garlic cloves, chopped
2 tsp ground coriander
pinch dried chilli flakes
400g tin chopped tomatoes
2 tsp garam masala
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper*

Cut the cauliflower into medium florets. Put in a large pan, cover with cold water, add salt and bring to a rolling boil. This will part cook the cauliflower. Take straight off the heat, drain and keep warm. Heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium heat. Add the onion, garlic and ginger and sauté for about 10 minutes, stirring often. Add the ground coriander, cumin, chilli flakes, star anise and some salt and pepper and cook for a further 5 minutes. Add the tomatoes with their juice and the chickpeas. Stir well then add the cooked cauliflower. Pour in enough water to not quite cover and bring to a simmer. Simmer for 5-10 minutes, stirring once or twice until the cauliflower is tender. Stir in the garam masala and half the chopped coriander, then check the seasoning. Serve scattered with the remaining coriander accompanied by rice and naans.

Peter Lydiate and his brother took over the tenancy of Royal Oak Farm, 300 acres of Lord Derby's estate in South West Lancashire, in 1977, when their father tragically died in a car accident. His grandfather initially took over the tenancy in the 1930's. It is 8 miles from the coast and 8 miles from Liverpool. They don't so much have soil there but a fertile black sand. We have been enjoying their delicious leeks, root crops, kale and cabbages. Peter's girlfriend also works on the farm – they work 80-hour weeks in the summer and 70-hour weeks in the winter. Many farmers have a quiet time in the early spring but because the Lydiates have tunnels and grow their own plant modules, there is no

quiet time. With the drop off in organic sales over the last few years, particularly the supermarkets, they have had to grow a greater variety of crops to appeal to more customers which in turn means more work. Peter says he hasn't had a holiday since the 1970's and that because their work is so complex, noone else can do it so they simply can't go away. After a really hard week, the weekend is worse, harvesting and preparing all the orders. They converted the farm to organic in 2000. Cheryl said that conventional farming is hard but organic is in another league. I shall eat my vegetable hotpot tonight with the due respect of the work that has gone into growing it. I really wish they could get themselves a holiday.

Peter said that it was like farming in the Arctic this weekend – searching for the vegetables in the bitter winds beneath the deep snow.

I hope you are keeping warm in this icy blast. Roll on spring.

Kind wishes,

Isobel