

**Monday 9th April 2012**

Dear Customer,

Hoorah we have had some rain since the last letter – and a foot of snow in our case. We have Jonnie Watson's delicious purple sprouting broccoli in the bags again this week and also sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes are delicious baked like a potato or roasted drizzled in olive oil and with freshly ground black pepper, but you could also try them in a muffin or pancake. Little hands might enjoy making these this Easter holiday. And big hands for that matter.

### **Sweet Potato Muffins**

<i>225g sweet potato, mashed</i>	<i>2 eggs beaten</i>
<i>200g caster sugar</i>	<i>120 ml sunflower or olive oil</i>
<i>80ml water</i>	<i>200g plain flour</i>
<i>1 tsp ground cinnamon</i>	<i>1 tsp bicarbonate of soda</i>
<i>½ tsp baking powder</i>	<i>½ tsp salt</i>
<i>75g chopped pecans ( alternatively some ground almonds with grated apple)</i>	

*Preheat the oven to 180C/ Gas 4. Grease a muffin tin or line with paper muffin cases. In a large bowl, mix eggs, sugar, sweet potato, oil and water. Combine flour, cinnamon, bicarbonate of soda, baking powder and salt. Add the dry ingredients to the wet ingredients along with the nuts. Fold gently until just moistened. Fill the cups ¾ full. Bake in the preheated oven for 20-25 minutes or until muffins test done. Cool on a wire rack.*

### **Sweet Potato Pancakes**

<i>350g sweet potatoes</i>	<i>200g plain flour</i>
<i>3½ tsp baking powder</i>	<i>1 tsp salt</i>
<i>2 eggs beaten</i>	<i>350ml milk</i>
<i>50g butter, melted</i>	

*Put sweet potatoes in a medium saucepan of boiling water and cook until tender but firm, about 15 minutes. Drain and immediately immerse in cold water to loosen skins. Drain, remove skins, chop and mash. In a medium bowl, sift together, baking flour, salt and nutmeg. Mix mashed potatoes, eggs, milk and butter in a separate medium bowl. Blend the sweet potato mixture into the flour to form a batter. Preheat a heavy frying pan over a medium-high heat. Drop batter mixture into the heated pan by heaping tablespoonfuls and cook until golden brown, turning once with a spatula when the surface begins to bubble. Delicious with maple syrup or cranberry sauce.*

### **Courgette Pasta Bake**

<i>225g uncooked pasta</i>	<i>1 vegetable stock cube</i>
<i>4 courgettes, diced</i>	<i>2 onion, finely sliced</i>
<i>2 cloves garlic, crushed</i>	<i>1 red chilli, sliced</i>
<i>1 tbsp chopped basil</i>	<i>600g tomato passata</i>
<i>3 tbsp fromage frais</i>	<i>2 tbsp chopped parsley</i>
<i>salt and black pepper</i>	

*Preheat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5. Cook the pasta in a pan of boiling water containing the stock cube, then drain. Preheat a large non-stick pan. Dry-fry the courgettes, onion and garlic in the pan for 3-4 minutes. Add the chilli, basil and tomato passata. Bring the sauce to a gentle simmer, then stir in the cooked passata and season with salt and black pepper. Transfer to an ovenproof dish and bake in the oven for 30 minutes. Just before serving, dot with fromage frais and sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley.*

I've been busy with my other job – volunteer Dales Wildlife Warden. I've been thinking about getting myself a uniform with a cap. This is the busiest time of year for me with all the baby animals dazed and confused. I was going to look at some summer grazing for the sheep with Ernest and spotted a duck with ten tiny chicks running down the side of the road. The cars were whizzing past them with just inches to spare. They assume of course 2 day old chicks know the highway code, that or they simply didn't care if they squash them. I abandoned the car in the middle of the road and brought the traffic to a standstill so the royal procession could make their way to the river. They clambered onto the grass verge and one chick got left behind so Ernest picked it up and tried to catch up with the troupe. By the time we got to the river, they had vanished. I thought they would have gone in the direction of the river flow "run Ernest, run..." as he sprinted along the river bank. They'd gone. I climbed through some barbed wire to try the other direction and found them huddled by the river and Ernest managed to get the chick reunited. They then set off at speed down the river but another one climbed out onto the opposite bank and dropped through some rocks - the others left

without him. Ernest can't swim so I waded in picked him out of the hole and set off with water up to my thighs to try and catch the others up. Thankfully they had hauled up by a jutting tree root and put the chick with his mum. I then had to drive to Scotland – bare feet in cold wet wellingtons and cold wet jeans. How these tiny things survive at all is just beyond me. I guess most of them don't.

In my search for grazing I am forced with squinted eyes to look at the farm auction ads in the local paper – the disgusting terminology - the cull ewes, slaughter cows, two day old calves, the horses and pony sale in Kirby Stephen where they will all be bought by the knacker man. It is horrendous and this week I read something that turned my blood cold – lambs are now being required by abbatoirs to be belly-shaved. It doesn't take much to work out why. I then thought I couldn't bear it if I ever came across a group of lambs penned up having their bellies shaved in readiness. The other day I drove past a lamb which had got out its field so I stopped to try and get it back to its mum and in the corner of the field I saw for the first time, belly clippings. My heart sank. As beautiful as it is, it is also extremely harrowing living in the countryside.

On that sad note.....

Kind wishes,

Isobel