

Monday 16th April 2012

Dear Customer,

I do my best to find at least one big green thing to put in the bags each week. It's for your iron. This time, it is Duncan Gielty's pak choi. The flavour is somewhere between spinach and cabbage. It can be eaten raw, finely sliced in salads. You could stir fry it for 2 minutes or steam it, if sliced for 2-3 minutes, if whole, for up to 8 minutes. Here are a few recipes you could try with this week's ingredients – including a curved ball - chutney !

Leek and Courgette Pasta

300g pasta	2 medium leeks, sliced
1 courgette, sliced	200g mushrooms, chopped
240ml sour cream	60ml white wine
1 tsp tarragon leaves	½ tsp salt
olive oil	

Heat oil over a medium heat in a large frying pan. Saute the leeks, mushrooms and courgette for 5 minutes. Stir in the cream and tarragon and season with salt. Bring to the boil and simmer until thickened. Cook the pasta al dente and drain thoroughly. Add pasta to the vegetables, toss well and serve.

Soy and Sesame Pak Choi

400g pak choi, quartered lengthways	25ml sesame oil
25ml light soy sauce	sesame seeds, toasted

Pour 50ml water into a large frying pan and place over a medium heat. Add 1 tsp salt and the pak choi. Cook, tossing occasionally, for about 5 minutes or until all the water has evaporated and the pak choi is just cooked – the leaves should be soft but the base of the stalks still slightly crunchy. Place on a serving dish and drizzle with the sesame oil and soy sauce, then sprinkle over the toasted sesame seeds.

Aubergine and Courgette Recipe

500g courgettes	250g aubergine
250g eating apples	500g sugar
150g dried apricots	150g dried prunes
250g onions	2 tsp French mustard seeds
250ml white malt vinegar	250g cider vinegar
1 tsp salt	

Pour the vinegar, sugar and salt in a pot and bring to a boil until the sugar and salt have dissolved. Using a food processor, chop all the dried fruits and infuse it in the sugar-vinegar mixture. Slice the aubergines and courgettes and put in the processor and whiz until it has a mushy consistency. Pour them in the pot of vinegar mixture and stir. Put the unpeeled apples in the processor with the onion and puree. Pour it in the pot along with the French mustard, stir with a wooden spoon consistently and bring to a boil for 5 minutes. Turn the heat down and let the mixture simmer for about 50 minutes. Continue stirring. If the consistency of the chutney is right, thick and stiff, it is ready. Spoon the chutney into glass jars. Seal the top of the jar with cling film and close the lid. Ideally keep for one month before eating.

I have finally got some summer grazing for the sheep in parkland at Croxdale Hall , south of Durham. Getting it was excruciating ! It was being auctioned off on site in 16 lots. I walked every inch of the 300 acres to decide which fields I wanted – ones with trees, streams and contours. I checked on the plan and saw that my four were numbers 1,2, 3 and 4. That, I felt was a problem, I'd have everyone thinking this newcomer was going to bid on every single lot. Dozens of 4 x 4's started arriving – the hardcore Durham cattlemen - they started congregating in groups. I decided I'd give lot 1 a miss to reassure them I wasn't going to be bidding on everything. It started and Lot 1 was lingering at £85, that was too cheap, I had to go, so waved my particulars in the air and bid my opponent up to £150 then pulled out. I then did exactly the same on lots 2, 3 and 4 – I bid my opponents up from around 75-85 to around £150 then pulled out. My heart was racing, I could feel the eyes on me, feel them thinking 'what the hell's she playing at'. I let lot 5 go, then I panicked. I had no grazing – my 600 sheep at home were already splitting blades of grass 600 ways – a cell each. I came in with a fury and started bidding again on absolutely everything – adding £70 or so, then pulling out. By this time I knew they wanted to shoot me. I slunk against the car – the auctioneer kept looking at me to help him out. I had to fight against my instinct and let 2 lots be sold at just £85. Then I was back in pushing prices as far as

£165. Whatever the last lots went for I would have had to pay as I had to have grass. They could have got their revenge but they didn't and I got 2 big lots at an average of £104 an acre. I got a bargain considering what everyone else had to pay. The owners were there and I expected a bouquet of flowers for my performance or some commission. I can't bear being the centre of attention but always manage to be painfully conspicuous. I'm on ITV The Dales tonight and they'll recognise me and say 'look there she is.. the bitch'. We took the first batch of sheep to Croxdale, tipped them out in the ankle-deep lush grass. They followed each other single-file, 160 of them, around the perimeter, checking it out , then headed to the avenue of ancient lime trees and started stripping the bark off them. The little sods, they'll get us evicted. I've been googling to see if bark grows back. The answer is unclear – some says it kills them. Busy week getting the rest of the brood across. Ernest is clipping their bottoms and treating any lameness so they're ready to go.

Hope you had a lovely Easter,

Kind wishes,

Isobel