



Monday 15^h April 2013

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Have we now finally seen the back of winter. We have just switched over from old crop English to new Sicilian Nicola potatoes and the first new season carrots from Andalusia. The carrots are in a bag, in your bags. We have to prepack them so that they retain their moisture and don't get dry and rubbery. It's best to get them straight into the fridge. They are sensitive little things. Produce is scarce, it has to be said, and this year's traditional 'hungry gap' where one would have been consuming the preserved, pickled and salted, is set to be worse than ever after the long winter. But we will work very hard to bring you the best variety and balance we can. This week we have leeks in the bags from Polybell Farm, we have broccoli and sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes are delicious just chunked or sliced and drizzled with olive oil, salt and pepper, then roasted. They cook quickly in a moderate oven. They are also great in stews and curries or baked and eaten like a baked potato. They are extremely nutritious, full of beta-carotene. It's a wonder why we Brits took so long to cotton onto them.

Here are a couple of recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Roasted Broccoli with Lemon Breadcrumb Topping

<i>½ onion, minced</i>	<i>4 tbsp breadcrumbs</i>
<i>1 lemon, zest of, plus juice</i>	<i>salt and pepper to taste</i>
<i>2 tbsp olive oil</i>	<i>1 head broccoli</i>

Heat 1 tbsp of oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and sauté the onion until it begins to brown. Add the breadcrumbs, stirring continuously, and toast until golden. Transfer the mix to a bowl and combine with the lemon zest. Season to taste. Cut the broccoli, including the stems, into large chunks. Toss with remaining oil, season and roast in a baking tin at 220C / 425F/ Gas 7 for 20 minutes. Sprinkle with the lemon juice and then the breadcrumbs and serve.

Sauteed New Potatoes with Cherry Tomatoes

<i>800g potatoes</i>	<i>3 tbsp olive oil</i>
<i>3 tbsp rosemary</i>	<i>3 cloves garlic</i>
<i>salt and pepper</i>	<i>8 cherry tomatoes</i>
<i>8 pitted black olives</i>	

Scrub or peel the potatoes and cut into smallish chunks, about 1/2 " square. Parboil them for 5 minutes, then drain and blot on kitchen roll. Heat a thin layer of oil in a frying pan, add the potatoes, rosemary, garlic, salt and lots of black pepper. Stir the potatoes in the oil so they are well coated and then leave to brown, flipping them over and checking they don't stick or burn. After about 15 minutes when the potatoes are golden and crunchy, add the tomatoes and olives and mix gently. Continue to cook for a few more minutes until the tomatoes go limp and the skins split and char. Serve.

Saturday, joy of joy, the mist and cloud were infused with sun, and temperatures reached 9C. I visited the farm where the sheep will be moving, to see if I could see the grass growing. A few cheeky green tufts were poked up behind the hedge-backs but the rest was yellow and bare. If the sun, rain, sun, rain BBC forecast is right, it shouldn't be long before it renews. Equally, the vegetable farmers will be able to start getting onto their land to prepare it for this year's crops. Ernest is counting down the days until the sheep will be gone and he can retire. Their new home will be 7 miles from Richmond on the edge of a village called Hornby. The fields are gently undulating and surrounded by woodland. They can stay there until the owner, who is in her nineties, dies, at which point it will be sold. I have that long, however long that will be, to save up. I have 80p so far in the piggy bank. Sunday morning and Myfa started emitting her 'I'm going to send you demented' high pitched whine signalling my walk. Always a long one on a Sunday, so we set off for the Moors. As we pulled up and it started raining, torrentially. I told Myfa we would wait until it stopped but she said we had to go immediately because she needed the toilet. We stepped out into the rain and I still don't understand why I don't own a waterproof coat. The first 10 minutes are the worst as the rain works its way through your coat, and coat pocket to the mobile phone, car key and then through your sweater and t shirt. Simultaneously drenching your jeans which cling to you, then start falling down with the weight of the water. Then it's fine and you can tramp through bogs and streams without flinching.

The moors are strewn with dead rabbits which didn't make it through the winter - all in varying states of decomposition. Myfa got in a quick roll on a rabbit leg before I sprinted towards her with my war cry. After that she stopped next to each corpse and looked at me "can I?" she said. She looked so disappointed when I said 'no'. She had to get away from me, run further afield to exercise her free will. She'd criss-cross in front of me from time to time pursuing scents. I then discovered her in a small hollow, rolling in a rotting sheep.

You see, I have to try and write my newsletter on a Sunday as it is needed on a Monday and if I leave it until Monday morning and my brain is an empty vessel, or I am in a poor mood, I've had it. At least on a Sunday there's the margin of another day to have another shot and also delete all the rubbish I'm prone to write. Oh the trials and tribulations! The most important thing is, that winter is finally over and we can now look forward to a blossoming spring and a red hot summer.

We have Cow Nation Soft Blue Cheese available again from now and hopefully by next week, we will finally have our Cow Nation Cheddar. I really kicked myself. I requested an urgent sample be sent to me to measure up to get the labels produced. It was so delicious that I ate it all and forgot to measure it. This delayed it by a week as I waited for a 2nd sample!

Kind wishes,

Isobel

There are 10 toads mating in my pond this morning, I just counted them. My goldfish are really upset by it and darting about all over the place. I don't blame them - a toad orgy !