

Monday 30th December 2013

Dear Customer,

I hope you have had a lovely Christmas. And I hope you aren't too fooded out to carry on eating ! I will be glad to see the back of all my chocolates and Betty's Florentines, that's for sure.

Well, here are a couple of delicious recipes you could try with your sweet potatoes to get you back in the groove:

Sweet Potato and Cumin Soup

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| 2 tbsp olive oil | 1 onion, chopped |
| 2 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed | 2 tsp ground cumin |
| 575g potatoes, peeled or scrubbed | 350g sweet potatoes, peeled |
| 1.2 litres hot vegetable stock | 1 tbsp lemon juice |
| 2-4 tbs fresh coriander, chopped | |

Heat the oil in a saucepan, add the onion, garlic and cumin and fry gently for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, dice all the potatoes, add to the pan and fry for a further 5 minutes until lightly browned, stirring to prevent sticking. Add the stock and bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Transfer to a blender and blend briefly until smooth. Return soup to the pan, stir in the coriander and simmer for 3 minutes. Add the lemon juice, season with salt and pepper to taste and serve with a drizzle of olive oil.

African Sweet Potato Stew

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| 1 onion | 4 tbsp vegetable oil |
| 2 cloves garlic, crushed | 2 tsp grated ginger |
| ½ tsp cayenne pepper | 350g sweet potatoes |
| 1 tbsp mild or medium curry paste | 300ml passata or tinned tomatoes |
| 300ml vegetable stock | 225g spinach, trimmed |
| 185g mushrooms | 4 tbsp peanut butter |
| 2 tbsp fresh coriander, chopped | |

Peel and chop the onion. Heat 3 tbsp of the oil in a saucepan, add the ginger, onion and cayenne, and fry gently for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, peel and cube the sweet potatoes. Add the curry paste to the onion mixture and cook for 1 minute. Add the sweet potatoes, stir in and fry for 3-4 minutes. Add the passata and stock. Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 15-20 minutes until the potatoes are almost tender. Meanwhile, shred the spinach leaves. Heat the remaining oil in a frying pan, add the chopped mushrooms and stir-fry for 4-5 minutes until beginning to release their juices. Add the potatoes to the spinach and cook for a further 5 minutes or until all the vegetables are cooked through. Mix a few spoonfuls of the stew juices to the peanut butter to soften it slightly, then stir back into the pan. Add the coriander, season with salt and pepper to taste and heat through. Serve with rice.

I have also been more relaxed this week than I can remember. Thankfully emails reduced to a slow trickle and I was able to concentrate on not thinking about anything – a rare state for me. I took the decision to not have a Christmas tree this year, in fact I think I'm done with them. I can't tell you how liberating it was when I went off to buy a tree and came home with just a small wicker basket of hyacinths and polyanthus. I placed it on the gold platter that the cheese came on and plonked two golden baubles in it. I wiggled a piece of tinsel on top of the piano and another across a shelf and that was it - more than sufficiently festive. I can't stand twinkling lights in the house and I find a tree is an intrusion and I always feel sorry for it. I am finally free - 2 tinsels and 2 baubles.

A friend from Bath was supposed to come for Christmas but she drowned her car in the flood on Christmas eve. It meant I could do exactly what I wanted, so I woke up on Christmas morning and decided I'd just go back to sleep. When I eventually got up, after exchanging lots of 'Happy Christmas' texts, I made a flask of tea, packed a mince pie and headed up to the moors with Myfa – it was wonderful in the wilderness, I didn't see a soul, it was perfect. I came home, had a long bubble bath with scented candles and then headed to friends up the Dale for an evening Christmas dinner. When I arrived at the end of her lane I found it to be completely flooded and I couldn't get to her. I was terrified of at worst, being washed away and at best destroying the car. There is no phone reception so I drove back to the village and knocked a cottage door asking if I could use their phone, they viewed me with suspicion, said but they were just renting it and didn't have one. It was pitch black and I fell over when I tried to get back to the car. I then knocked on the door of the big Georgian house in the middle of the village – a very nice man welcomed me in and took me down to meet his family and their golden Labrador, they made me a cup of tea and gave me a mince pie. In the meantime my friend's phones weren't working so he emailed her for me in the hope she might see it and retrieve me in her land rover. Then the man said he had a 4 x 4 and offered to escort me. When we got to the flood, he drove through to check it out. He said I would be fine driving my car through it, it was only 3" deep. Then my friend arrived in her land rover having seen the email. Anyway, I managed to drive through the puddle, arriving 2 hours late for Christmas dinner.

I rescued 10 baby Wensleydale lambs from slaughter last week. They are in the paddock next to my house. They arrived in that dreadful weather and stood huddled for 2 days and nights in the icy rain and gales, there was nothing I could do to get them into the pig arc shelter which I'd prepared for them, all snug and bedded down with fresh straw. They didn't know me, didn't trust me but I eventually coaxed them in with sheep nuts. Now, they won't come out of it.

Well it's goodbye and good riddance 2013 and hello 2014. All of us at Farmaround wish you a happy, healthy and interesting New Year,

Kind wishes,

Isobel