

Monday 2nd March 2015

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. It's Monday morning and we are white again here in the Dales after overnight blizzards. Ernest has just fed my sheep in the paddock next to my house but I can hear them blaring piteously at every walker who goes past. Here are some tasty recipes you could try. I think the pancakes may be of particular interest to hide your January King cabbage in.....but it is so, so good for you.

Cabbage, Carrot and Potato Saute

120ml olive oil	1 medium onion, thinly sliced
a few good pinches sea salt	½ tsp ground black pepper
½ tsp ground cumin	¼ tsp ground turmeric
½ head cabbage, finely chopped	600g potatoes, peeled and cut into 2.5cm cubes

Heat the olive oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Cook the carrots and onion in the hot oil for about 5 minutes. Stir in the salt, pepper, cumin, turmeric and cabbage and cook for another 15 to 20 minutes. Add the potatoes, cover and reduce to a medium-low heat and cook until the potatoes are soft, 20 to 20 minutes.

Cabbage Pancakes (are really nice)

1 tbsp olive oil	½ small head cabbage, cored and thinly sliced
1 medium onion, thinly sliced	black pepper to taste
325ml natural yoghurt	150ml milk
4 tbsp vegetable oil	2 free range eggs
250g plain or spelt flour	4 tsp baking powder
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda	1 tsp butter

Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Stir in the cabbage and onion, cook and stir until the vegetables are soft and fragrant, about 10 minutes. Season with pepper and set the pan aside to cool. Whisk together the yoghurt, milk, vegetable oil and eggs in a bowl until evenly blended and set aside. Stir together the flour, baking powder and bicarbonate of soda in a large bowl. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients. Pour the wet mixture into the well then stir until well combined. Fold the cooled cabbage and onions into the batter. Heat a large frying pan over a medium heat and butter or oil. Pour 60 ml of batter onto the frying pan and cook until bubbles appear on the surface. Flip and cook until browned on the other side.

Apple, Pear and Walnut Crumble

450g apples, peeled, cored and cut into large chunks	450g pears, peeled, cored and cut into large chunks
finely grated zest of 1 lemon	juice of ½ lemon
sprig rosemary (optional)	2 tbsp light muscovado sugar
Crumble Topping:	
100g walnuts	175g granary or wholemeal flour (or plain white)
85g butter or margarine, diced	85g caster or light muscovado sugar

Heat the oven to 190C / Fan 170C / Gas 5. Put the chopped apples, lemon zest, rosemary, if using, and sugar in a saucepan. Add the lemon juice and cook for 3-4 minutes. Tip in the pears and cook 2-3 minutes more, until the fruits are just beginning to soften. Spoon the fruit and juices into a 1.7 litre pudding dish and flatten slightly. For the crumble, finely chop half the walnuts in a food processor until reduced to the consistency of ground almonds. Add the flour, butter or margarine, and sugar and continue to blitz to a coarse or fine crumble mix, whichever you prefer. Roughly break the remaining walnuts with your fingers and stir into the crumble. Scatter the crumble mix on top of the fruits and bake for 20-25 minutes until golden brown. Serve with custard, cream or natural yoghurt.

I am just off to the Garden Centre to sign the lease. I've been busy on ebay. I've bought 12 nice garden tables for £132 from Bagshot and a Victorian blackboard for £19.99 from Didsbury. So that's it. My entire budget for turning Swale Lodge into a centre of magnificence is now spent. I had contacted the cookery college in Darlington to see if they had any amazing emerging chefs. They were very keen to come and see me to tell me about apprenticeships. I must admit, I liked the sound of it. I could have up to five apprentices for 18 months for just £2.17 per hour working for 30-40 hours a week, providing they were released on a Tuesday to go to college and for each one I took on, I would receive £1500 from the government after 13 weeks. £7,500 to put new flooring down, decorate, and spend on ebay would come in very handy. I could even replace Diane, Eve and Lorraine with them – that would be a big saving.

A local lady had heard through the grapevine that we were looking for a cook and emailed me – inviting me to be 'tempted by her Northern baking'. She was a qualified cook and had run her own cafes. I shuddered at the thought of 'northern baking' and thought I'd better forewarn her. I emailed her back that I thought 'northern baking' was generally stodge (apart from the baking done by you, our dear farmaround customers who live in the North – I know you are the exceptions) and that we use the best organic ingredients, that we wanted to do fantastic vegetarian meals and snacks. She told me her daughter and sister were vegetarians and that she got my vision. I felt more optimistic. So on Friday, I didn't have any breakfast and went round for the tasting session to see what savoury delights she had prepared. Laid before me was a lemon drizzle cake, biscuits, scones, tea breads, muffins, butterfly cakes, ginger cake and a ricotta pie with beetroot chutney. She'd worked so hard on preparing this but the puff pastry on the ricotta pie was thick and soggy and the beetroot chutney just tasted of cloves and cinnamon and beetroot had the texture of plastic and I had to take it out of my mouth to put it on the side of the plate. The biscuits were like rock, I worried I'd break a tooth and the cakes were so sweet they were sickly. The ginger cake just tasted of black treacle. I tried to say that it was very nice but I guess the truth was written across my face. Towards the end of the session I asked her what 'fat' she had used. She said Stork margarine. I started feeling sick, as far as I knew, Stork had animal fat in it. I asked to take some of the samples away. I wondered if I was being particularly harsh but my discerning friends confirmed my palette was not misleading me. Anyway the birds seemed to enjoy her baking. Stork is vegetarian now apparently but I will never make my peace with it.

In fairness, her scones weren't bad, albeit too big, and one of the muffins – she'd followed a dieting recipe - was not too sweet and had carrot and seeds in and that was quite nice. She so desperately wanted the job and I feel very bad about it but having the right cook is going to be key. I'm concerned about how many cooks I'm going to be disappointed by before finding the brilliance I need.

Kind wishes,
Isobel