



Monday 13th February 2017

Dear Customer,

It's dark, cold and sleety up here. I've been putting tons of food out for the birds - they are ravenous at the moment. Each morning when I come downstairs the blackbirds are sitting on the garden chairs staring into the kitchen waiting for me, first in the pecking order for breakfast.

Here are some tasty recipes you could try with this week's vegetables:

Parsnip and Leek Tart

1 tbsp olive oil	1 tbsp margarine
300g parsnips, peeled and thickly sliced	1 large leek, thickly sliced
2 tbsp clear honey	2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
1 tbsp thyme leaves, chopped	250g puff pastry, defrosted

Preheat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Heat the oil and butter in a 23cm heavy-based flameproof gratin dish or ovenproof frying pan. Add the parsnips and leeks cut-side down in a single layer. Pour the honey and vinegar over and sprinkle the thyme. Season. Cook over a low heat for 15-18 minutes until just tender and golden brown on the base. Remove from the heat. Roll out the pastry thinly and cut a circle about 3cm bigger than the pan. Lift the pastry circle over the vegetables and push firmly down onto them tucking the pastry in around the edge of the pan. Bake for 25-30 minutes until the pastry is golden and cooked through. Leave the tart to stand for 5 minutes then loosen around the edge with a palette knife. Place a large flat plate on top and turn out. Serve warm.

Leek, Onion and Potato Soup

500g leeks	1 medium onion, chopped small
2 medium potatoes, peeled and diced	50g butter or margarine
850ml vegetable stock	275ml milk or 275ml additional stock

Cut the leeks lengthways, wash thoroughly then slice and drain well. Melt the butter or margarine in a large, thick-based saucepan then add the leeks, onions and potatoes, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon. Season with salt and pepper then cover and let the vegetables sweat over a very low heat for about 15 minutes. Add the stock and milk, or just stock, cover and simmer for a further 20 minutes or until the vegetables are tender. Leave to cool a little then blend to a puree. Return the soup to the pan, season and serve with chopped chives or parsley sprinkled over.

Swiss Chard Tagliatelle

bunch of swiss chard	50ml olive oil
1 clove garlic, crushed	pinch salt
370g dried tagliatelle	150g Gruyere cheese

Take the chard, separate the green leaves from the stalks and cut the stalk into strips. Put the oil into a large pan on a medium heat, add the stalks and garlic, and saute until cooked. Leave to one side. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil, add the pasta and cook according to the packet instructions. Just before the pasta is cooked, shred and add the chard leaves to the boiling water and cook for half a minute. Drain immediately and add the pasta and leaves to the pan of cooked stalks. Toss everything together with the cheese so it starts to melt and season generously. You could add a squeeze of lemon juice and some grated lemon rind at the end.

I had to go to Grimsby last Tuesday to see our new knitwear manufacturer. I'd never been there before. The journey would have been quick – probably two hours – except that I didn't want to go on any motorways in the fog with a slow puncture, two bald tyres, a bald windscreen wiper and cracked suspension, so I took the country route. It took me over 4 hours through a part of the country that barely anyone realises exists, above Hull, the East Riding of Yorkshire, of flat arable land and sparse population. It was all very interesting. I looked forward to seeing the Humber Bridge - similar to the Severn Bridge in structure. I drove across slowly taking in the dramatic views with the sea mist rolling up the estuary.

So I was about two hours late for the meeting, which must have been a record – I did keep updating them en route. Bryan was standing in the street in the drizzle waiting for me. I had no idea that it was normally their day off – just thought they would be busily knitting away on their looms. Anyway I got that sorted and we have some great new knitwear pieces underway.

There has still not been any response to my adverts seeking sheep grazing and I have spent many days and nights searching online. Time ticks away - the farm will be sold and I will have nowhere to take them. I did come across a lovely mini farm up for lease by tender. It's small, exactly the right size, with 75 acres of parkland. It's not a typical farm, it is smart and neat and lies opposite Hare Hill in Over Alderley, Cheshire. My sheep would be very happy there. And it has a lovely cottagey house with it, a writer's house, but it is all 2 hours from here and what price. Tendering is horrible. I spoke to the agent, viewing is next Wednesday with tender closing date on the 27th Feb. I asked who owned it. The owners name was suspiciously the same as my cousin's mother in law in Ireland who I did once meet. I couldn't work out why if it was her, she would have a farm there. We can find out anything on the internet now though.

I discovered that the owner of Hare Hall, a Charlie Brocklehurst, died with no heirs and left a fortune to my cousin's mother in law's late mother with whom he was madly in love from afar. I wish someone from afar would leave me a fortune. But anyway it seems it is hers after all. I will not be flagging up the connection and risk embarrassing my cousin who I am close to by failing the credit check ☺ – that lingering post Northern Rock blight.

I hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel