



Monday 26th March 2018

Dear Customer,

I hope you are well. Today it feels like spring. There is a perfect blue sky and the sun is streaming in. I just hope the Easter 'Beast' changes course and swerves us.

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

Fennel and Aubergine Bake

*350g fennel, thickly sliced
3 tbs balsamic vinegar
2 x 400g tinned tomatoes
2 tsp Italian herbs
grated cheese, optional*

*2 tbsp olive oil
1 aubergine, cut into bite-sized chunks
1 garlic clove
4 tbsp breadcrumbs*

Preheat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Line a baking tray with foil. Lay the fennel and aubergine on the tray and brush with olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Meanwhile blend the tinned tomatoes, herbs and garlic. When the vegetables are tender, remove from the oven and turn oven up to 230C/ Gas 8. Put the vegetables in an ovenproof dish and cover with the tomato mixture. Scatter with the breadcrumbs and cheese, if using. Bake for 20 minutes.

Fennel Pasta

*1 large bulb fennel
50g capers, rinsed and chopped
4 garlic cloves
1 tsp brown sugar
pinch hot chilli flakes
1 tbsp parsley*

*3 tbsp olive oil
10 olives, pitted and halved
400g tin tomatoes
5 tsp balsamic vinegar
200g pasta
2 tbs pine nuts, toasted*

Cook the pasta according to packet instructions. Meanwhile, heat a heavy-bottomed pan on a medium heat. Trim the fennel and cut into 8 wedges lengthwise. Brush the wedges of fennel, unpeeled garlic cloves with some olive oil. Place on a hot pan and let them caramelize for a few minutes. Turn the garlic to the other side to let it brown too. Once the fennel is soft, take it out of the pan, season with some salt and pepper and set aside. Peel the roasted garlic cloves and chop them up. Heat up 2 tbsp olive oil in the same pan, add the garlic and tinned tomatoes and let them simmer on a low heat until they soften and thicken into a sauce. Mix in some balsamic vinegar and sugar. Season with salt, pepper and chilli to taste. Add the chopped capers and olives. Mix the pasta in with the sauce and serve it topped with the caramelised fennel, toasted pine nuts and fresh chopped parsley.

On Saturday I moved the sheep from Ernest's land to a farm in the village of Kirkby Fleetham, near Northallerton. We ferried them there in several trailers. Again, the sun was shining when they descended the ramp and onto their new, sheltered fields where the grass seemed to be growing already. The farmer said he hoped it would be long term so he could justify all the investment he was making in the fencing and I said I hoped so too. I hope this will be their last move. They look like such a motley crew, a bit embarrassing – all shapes and sizes and ages and breeds – and all looking a bit scraggy after their tough winter. They will pick up quickly now with the sugars from the new grass. Ernest is yet again glad to see the back of them and isn't talking to me because the weather was so bad these last few months. In the autumn when I had tried to have a discussion about what we would do if bad snow came, he wouldn't entertain it, just kept saying 'it won't snow'. It was impossible to argue with him 'how did he think he could possibly know that', but no, it wasn't going to snow so he wasn't going to talk about it.

On Thursday I drove to Hawes to receive delivery from Cumbria of a puppy. I know it is soon, but every cell in my body was telling me to do it. So the last few days have been very strange. She's lying next to me fast asleep with her mouth open and little teeth showing with her head resting on Fluffles, a white soft toy poodle that Diane gave her. She follows me everywhere, if I leave the room she howls. I had bought a playpen to leave her in when I go to feed the few sheep I have left here in the paddock. As I walk up the road and when I am walking back all I can hear is her screaming and howling. I think the people who had her used to shut her in a cage and leave her all day when they were at work. Somehow I have to undo that. She's 10 weeks old. I've been having all sorts of mixed emotions. It feels a bit like having post-natal depression and not being able to bond with one's own baby at first, or at least that's what I imagine it must be like. So very perplexed and depressed yesterday I took her for a little walk down a mossy track with her at my ankle in her new red harness springing like a lamb with a leaf in her mouth – beating myself up.

Then I decided I must not expect myself to love her like I loved Myfa, not yet, and that I should just treat her like a little mate who has come to live with me. It felt a bit easier once I'd taken that pressure off myself. The feelings will come of course.....well I bloody hope so as I'm all she's got. Needless to say she is peeing and poeing everywhere so I am being kept very busy and can't take my eyes off her for a second.

I hope you have a lovely Easter whatever you are doing. I know what I'll be doing.

Kind wishes,

Isobel