

Monday 13th February 2012

Dear Customer,

Happy Valentine's Day Week

Well, the red pepper lorry eventually crawled into the warehouse at midnight last Monday. We managed to get them into the London bags but missed the Yorkshire connection. Whenever I write about produce coming from abroad I feel I may be alarming you. I have over the years had many requests for 'British only' produce. That is fine at certain times of the year but at others, like now, I fear 'British only' would kill you. Europe is frozen over and the produce prices astronomical. I did contemplate a 'British only' bag this week and played around with what is available. My best effort for the Standard Vegetable Bag was: **potatoes, carrots, onions, turnips, beetroot, celeriac, red cabbage, white cabbage, green cabbage**. In the Luxury Bag in addition to those items, I thought **swede, celeriac and an assortment of twigs**. And for the Salad Module: **nettles, old dandelion leaves, snowdrops, a dead thistle and a red cabbage**.

The freeze has come as a surprise across Southern Europe. I kept receiving emails last week from Nathalie in Perpignan – diligent French girl not known for chitchat. "Well, I have just got into the office and made myself a cup of hot coffee, I've warmed up a bit and now I'm ready.....". 'Too much information' I thought (yes, I'm a fine one to talk), then realized she is in complete shock. She should come and have a look at our ice rain. I remember asking her once if she ever gets sick of the constant sun and heat. "Jamais" she said. Cinzia in Sicily is pulling her spaghetti out. For two weeks she couldn't get any vegetables onto the mainland because of the transport strikes then the snow fell across Italy and the whole country ground to a halt. The economy is collapsing, Mount Etna has erupted. I tell you what. It's quite refreshing that it's not just us with problems for a change.

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

Parsnip and Ginger Soup

*1 tbsp olive oil
1 large onion, finely chopped
4-5cm piece of ginger, peeled and finely chopped
¼ tsp cayenne pepper
500g parsnips, peeled and cut into 1cm cubes
200ml whole milk*

To Finish

2-3 tbsp flaked almonds or pumpkin seeds

*15g butter
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
¼ tsp ground cardamom
¼ tsp ground cumin
800ml vegetable stock
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper*

1-2 tbsp double cream or plain full fat yoghurt

Heat the olive oil and butter in a saucepan over a medium-low heat and sauté the onion for about 10 minutes, until soft and translucent. Add the garlic, ginger, cumin, cayenne and cardamom and stir for a few minutes. Tip in the parsnips and stir until coated in spices. Pour in the stock, season with salt and pepper and simmer until the parsnips are very soft – about 15 minutes.

Allow the soup to cool slightly then puree with a blender until smooth. Return the soup to the pan, add the milk and adjust the seasoning. Warm through, thinning with a little hot water from the kettle. While soup is warming, toast the almonds or pumpkin seeds in a deep frying pan until just starting to golden. Serve the soup with a trickle of cream or yoghurt and the toasted almonds scattered over the top and a grind of pepper.

Ribollita

*2 x 400g tins cannellini beans
1 onion, finely chopped
1-2 carrots, finely chopped
400g tin chopped tomatoes
pinch rosemary and thyme*

To Finish

*6 slightly stale country-style bread
3-4 tbsp olive oil*

*4 tbsp olive oil
1 stick celery, finely chopped (optional)
1 leek, washed trimmed and finely sliced
800ml vegetable stock
300g Savoy cabbage*

1 garlic clove, halved

Rinse and drain the beans then mash or blend half of them with a little cold water. In a large saucepan, heat the olive oil and saute the onion over a medium-low heat for about 15 minutes, until softened. Add the carrots, leek and celery and sauté for 5 minutes, stirring. Then add the tomatoes in their juice, the pureed beans, the whole beans, stock, rosemary and thyme and simmer gently for about an hour. Shred the Savoy cabbage and add to the soup, cooking for 10 minutes more. Season with salt and pepper. To serve, toast the bread until golden, then rub with garlic and brush with olive oil. Put a slice of bread in the base of each bowl and ladle the soup on top. Trickle some olive oil on top before serving.

London Fashion Week starts this week and we've been busy preparing our next Izzy Lane Autumn/Winter collection. Our clothes are then going off to Milan. I've yet to decide whether I'll go with them. It's a long drive. I have had the fortune of finding a new knitwear manufacturer in Hawick who I've been visiting these last weeks. Whilst many of the old Hawick Victorian mills stand derelict, it's all happening in Keith's garden. He and his wife live in a bungalow dangerously near the edge of the river Teviot. In the garden, a cluster of large sheds housing knitters and hand-frame looms. It's fantastic. It's like a fairytale 'Keith, Jill and the Seven Dwarves' - they've been knocking up samples at an astonishing rate

Diane and I went up to Durham on Tuesday for the last meeting and list of things to do before the new Farmaround website goes live. I will be so relieved. We will actually have photos of our products after all these years and launching new groceries including fantastic artisan bread.

Kind Wishes,

Isobel