

Monday 24th March 2014

Dear Customer,

After a sharp frost, it's a beautiful sunny, crisp morning. I'm glad to see we're all still here and haven't been nuked for being so pompous and righteous. Just as well else we would have missed having this week's Yorkshire Moor swedes. I know they are laborious to prepare but they are very worth it. There's nothing much better than swede mashed with butter and seasoning, or as in the West Country, mashed with clotted cream. You could try the variation below:

Mashed Swede

1kg swede, peeled and chopped
25g butter
sea salt and black pepper

75g crème fraiche
1 tsp Dijon mustard
finely chopped chives

Boil the swede for about 20 minutes, or until tender. Drain completely and put in the liquidiser with the crème fraiche, most of the butter and the mustard. Liquidise into a puree and season to taste. Once very smooth, transfer to a serving bowl, make a well in the centre and drop in a knob of butter. Scatter over some chopped chives and serve.

Cream Roasted Swede Soup

1 medium swede, peeled and cut into cubes
salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 carrots, finely sliced
6 stalks thyme, leaves picked
142ml single cream

3 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
1 clove garlic, crushed
1¼ litres vegetable stock

Preheat oven to 200C/400F/Gas 6. Place the cubes of swede in a roasting tray. Drizzle over two tablespoons of the olive oil and season. Roast in the oven for 25-30 minutes until golden brown and tender, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile, heat the remaining teaspoon of oil in a large heavy-based saucepan and stir in the onion, carrots, garlic and thyme leaves and fry for 5 minutes until softened but not browned. Add the roasted swede to the pan and pour over the stock. Bring gently to the boil, cover and simmer for 25-30 minutes, stirring occasionally. Puree the soup in a food processor or liquidiser until completely smooth. Transfer back to a clean saucepan. Stir in most of the cream, reserving some for garnishing. Gently heat through and adjust the seasoning if necessary. Serve in warm bowls and garnish with some fresh thyme leaves, a swirl of cream and some grinds of black pepper.

Courgette and Lemon Spaghetti

200g spaghetti
2 courgettes, thinly sliced lengthways
1½ tsp fresh chopped sage
zest of ½ lemon
50g feta cheese, crumbled (optional)

3 tbsp olive oil, plus some for drizzling
3 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1½ tsp fresh chopped rosemary
2 tbsp Parmesan (optional)

Cook the spaghetti al dente according to packet instructions. Drain and drizzle with a little olive oil to coat the pasta to prevent sticking. Set aside. You can use the same saucepan to make the sauce. Pour in 3 tablespoons of olive oil and bring to a medium heat, then add the courgettes and sauté for 4-5 minutes. Then add the garlic and herbs and mix well. Saute for a couple more minutes to allow the flavours to come together and the courgettes to cook through. Return the cooked spaghetti back into the pan and heat through, mixing in the lemon zest, a good grind of black pepper and the cheese if you are using it. Serve

I've been worried for a few months, maybe 5 or 6, that the tyres on my car were quite flat, it was becoming un-drivable. Last week I finally decided I'd have a go at putting some air in, so after filling up with diesel I pulled up alongside the air pump. I've had a car for the last 30 years and don't know how I've managed to never put air in my tyres. I have a vague recollection of doing it maybe once or twice in the distant past. It was quite a palaver trying to find out what the air pressure should be. I eventually found the numbers hiding inside the petrol cap flap and then had to find my glasses to read them. I never carry many passengers but I often carry sheep nuts so I had to work out the calculations, kilos of sheep nuts, kilos of human. I had my air pressure numbers and kept repeating them in my head lest I forget during the two steps to the pump. I put in the number, put the nozzle on, it hissed and instead of the tyre getting harder and the car higher, the tyre was deflating and the car was sinking. Luckily there was a man vacuuming his car in the next booth and I asked him to show me how to do it. He only did exactly what I had just done but the tyre miraculously started inflating. I thanked him and went to the next tyre. I couldn't unscrew the little cap so I had to call he man back again and ask him if he could manage to unscrew it. I then asked him if he wouldn't mind just doing the pressure on all the 4 tyres. Great, sorted. Over the next few days, the tyres still looked flat to me so I went to a tyre garage and ask them to check the pressure. They were more or less fine. I'm just going to go to them in future.

Banalities of tyre pressures aside, I had a phone call from the police at 9.20pm the other night. I panicked but he told me it was fine, nothing to be alarmed about but that a sheep, thought to be one of mine had been hit and killed and gave me the number of the father of the girl who hit it. It had died instantly, he said, but the daughter's car needed a new wing and bonnet. It was all very mysterious because the sheep had been taken away by disposal people the father said, but when I rang the disposal people they said they knew nothing about it. They have had a quote of £1500 for the car repairs but I have no evidence of it being my sheep though I don't disbelieve them. It was a brown one apparently and I later found a hole in the fence which it had probably squeezed through with a little piece of brown fleece hanging off it. Poor sheep, I feel very upset and it was my fault. People do drive at a hell of a speed though on these country roads and at this time of year there are escaped lambs, mating pheasants and baby rabbits everywhere. They should take a leaf out of my book and take half the air out their tyres, that would slow them up a bit.

I hope all is well with you,

Kind wishes,

Isobel