

Monday 20th October 2014

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well.....happy.....full of the joys of autumn.

I am just rousing from a 4-day, 'change of season', 'clocks going back', 'Christmas is coming', 'shudder up the spine' migraine. In my blur I switched on the news to hear President Obama responding to last week's newsletter, telling me off for whipping up hysteria about Ebola and saying that a travel ban would NOT be a good idea and indeed would probably make things worse.....
..and that contrary to what I might believe, I am not an expert on how the Ebola virus might mutate and become airborne and I should leave this to the world renowned virologists who are working on it. A year of O-level biology before a mouse was murdered for class dissection didn't qualify me.

I have just seen that my old classmate Rona Fairhead (then Haig) has now replaced Chris Patten as chairwoman of the BBC. Nice one Rona ! She sat at the desk immediately behind me for six years at Yarm Grammar. She had photographic memory. I vividly remember her neat, round handwriting. I remember it because her brilliance and generosity meant I could spend whole lessons staring out the window and flicking blotting paper off my ruler then swizzle round and copy her equations. She was so bright, in another league – double first in law at Cambridge, then Harvard and on... and she was very modest and understated. She was everything I wasn't. I don't think the teachers could comprehend why I wasn't expelled, they would keep sending me to 'see the Headmaster', but all in vain. I spent half my time outside the Headmaster's office. I used to look forward to seeing him. Everyone else got the cane and eventual expulsion, I just got despair presented to me in a very kindly manner. I knew why, it was because my dad knew the Headmaster and he and his wife used to come to dinner at our house - you know - sherry, smoked salmon and 'boeuf Bourignion' – I'd keep well away.

If you really want to go to town with your swede, to jazz it up, try this:

Indian Spiced Swede Cakes

1 swede, peeled and chopped
75g butter or margarine
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground ginger
pinch chilli powder
olive oil or sunflower oil for frying

1 onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves
2 tsp mustard seeds
1 tsp turmeric
200g breadcrumbs

Cook swede in salted water until tender. Meanwhile slow-fry the onion in 2 tbsp of the butter or margarine, until soft and caramelised, which will take about 20 minutes. Towards the end of cooking, add the spices and garlic and cook for a few minutes more. Drain the swede, let it sit and steam a moment, then toss it and the remaining butter or margarine in the pan with the onion and spices. Mash until smooth. Season it with salt and black pepper then form into golf ball-sized nuggets. Add a pinch of salt and pepper to the breadcrumbs and spread into a dish. One by one, roll the balls into the breadcrumbs to coat, gently pressing the balls into flat little cakes. Drizzle enough oil in a frying pan to form a 1cm layer. Heat until quite hot and carefully add each cake. Cook until golden on each side, about 3 minutes. Make sure the sides of the cakes get browned as well. Serve warm with lime or lemon wedges possibly and natural yoghurt with chopped mint.

Creamy Savoy Cabbage and Carrots

1 Savoy cabbage
50g butter or margarine
pinch nutmeg

4 large carrots
4 tbsp double cream

Pull off any tough outer leaves from the cabbage and discard. Cut in half then remove the hard inner core. Rinse the leaves, then shred as finely as you can. Cut the carrots into fine, thin strips or grate in the food processor. Bring a pan of water to the boil and add the cabbage and carrots. Boil for 6 minutes until just tender then drain. Return to the hot pan and add the butter or margarine and cream. Season with salt and pepper, add the nutmeg and stir well to coat. Pile into a serving dish and serve immediately.

Savoy Cabbage with Pears

500g Savoy cabbage
half an onion, finely chopped
1 tbsp creamed horseradish
cayenne pepper, to taste
ground nutmeg, to taste

butter or margarine for cooking
sugar, to taste
100ml single cream (optional)
salt and pepper, to taste
2 ripe pears, peeled and diced

Rinse the cabbage and remove the hard stalk in the middle. Bring a saucepan of salted water to the boil and add the cabbage, blanching very quickly (under 5 minutes). Drain and rinse under cold water to stop it cooking then finely shred the leaves. Melt the butter or margarine in a saucepan and cook the onion until translucent. Add a little sugar then add the cabbage and cook and stir for a few minutes. Add the horseradish and cream (if using) and bring to a simmer. Season with salt, pepper, cayenne and nutmeg to taste. Add the pears and heat through for just a few minutes. Transfer to a serving dish and serve immediately.

Unfortunately there are no eggs this week and I apologise for any inconvenience. Don't worry about the hens, they are all fine. A full flow of Hen Nation eggs will resume in a few weeks and I will explain everything.....the saga.

Kind wishes,

Isobel