

Monday 3rd November 2014

Dear Customer,

I hope you are well and enjoying this spectacularly mild weather. Though I don't think anyone of us are in any doubt there will be a price to pay. We have sweet potatoes in lots of the bags this week – full of beta-carotene, vitamins A and C and antioxidants. They can be grilled, baked, roasted, sautéed or boiled and mashed.

Quick Sweet Potato Hash

2 small sweet potatoes, cubed
2 tbsp olive oil
salt and pepper
8 cherry tomatoes, halved
2 free range eggs
1 small onion
½ tsp cayenne pepper
1 red pepper, chopped
1 tbsp coriander, chopped

In a small pan over a medium heat, cook the potatoes and onions with the olive oil, cayenne pepper and salt and pepper, covered for about 5 minutes, until softened. Remove the lid and cook for another 2-3 minutes until browned. Add the remaining ingredients except for the eggs and cook for another 2-3 minutes, tossing everything together. Make an impression with a spoon in the middle of the hash mixture and crack the egg into the hole. Cover and cook for 3 more minutes until the whites are set. Remove the lid and serve immediately.

Roasted Aubergine with Fried Onion and Chopped Lemon

aubergine, halved lengthways with stem on
salt and black pepper
¾ tsp ground cumin
1 small green chilli, deseeded and chopped
½ medium lemon
75ml olive oil
2 onions, peeled and thinly sliced
½ tsp sumac
25g feta, broken in large chunks
1 garlic clove, peeled and crushed

Heat the oven to 200C/ 400F / Gas 6. Score a crisscross over the cut sides of the aubergines, brush with 50ml of the olive oil and sprinkle liberally with salt and pepper. Place cut side up on a baking tray and roast for 45 minutes, until golden brown. Meanwhile, pour the remaining oil into a frying pan over a high heat, add the onions and a good pinch of salt and cook for about 7 or 8 minutes, stirring until parts of the onion go dark and crisp. Add the cumin, sumac and some of the chilli, cook for two minutes, then add the feta, cook for a minute, then turn off the heat. Cut the skin and pith off the half lemon. Chop the flesh and put in a bowl with any juices, the rest of the chilli and the garlic. The moment the aubergines are done, spoon the lemony sauce over the flesh side. Warm up the onions and spoon on top. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Autumn Cabbage and Bean Soup

1 tbsp olive oil
200g cabbage, shredded
1 glass dry white wine (about 150ml)
400g can peeled plum tomatoes
400g tin cannellini beans or butter beans, drained
50g Comte or mature Cheddar, grated (optional)
1 small onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, thinly sliced
2 tbsp fresh thyme leaves
600ml vegetable stock
4 thick baguette slices

Heat the oil in a saucepan, add the onion and cook over a medium heat for three to five minutes until softened. Add the cabbage and garlic and stir-fry for two minutes. Add the wine and thyme and simmer for one minute. Add the tomatoes and stock and bring to the boil. Simmer for 15 minutes, then stir in the beans. Season and simmer for two minutes. Set aside. Toast the baguette slices. If you are using cheese, arrange the baguette slices on a baking tray and toast on one side under a hot grill. Turn them over and top the untoasted side with the cheese. Return to the grill for two to three minutes, until the cheese is golden and bubbling. Ladle the soup into bowls and serve with the toasts.

I had a visit from some of our French produce suppliers this week, it was 30C when they left Perpignan. We didn't mention vegetables once, which is just as well as it's not my favourite subject. I don't think it's theirs either. We discussed the British and French economies, the terror of our next General Elections, Francois Hollande and how his tax policies on lower and middle earners and pensioners, is leaving people destitute... and what an idiot he is.

I asked them if they had had a look round the town before they came to me. They hadn't, but Madjid said he had seen it the last time he came to visit me. Mmmm..... interesting because I have never seen him here before. I have only ever seen him in Perpignan. He told me that we went to lunch in a restaurant in the Market Place. So that gave me something to stew over when they left.

Modrey, our Jordie knitter had a go at knitting some ladies socks for us and I met her in the usual spot - Sainsburys cafe in Darlington - for the handover. When I got home I realised they were massive, a large men's size. I texted her to tell her. That was a few weeks ago and yesterday I got a text from her:

"Girls with big feet n fat legs r looking for your socks on website from Newcastle Northumbrian n Darlington colleges I was showing one of the parents them n her daughter took a photo of them n has been showing them around .."
She is so cool !

I met my friend Liz for lunch today in a village pub in the Dales. Thank God she's living up here too now – meeting up with her is like being in London, you know, the café culture conversation. Everyone in London is screwed up. (except a lot of Farmaround customers) – all my friends are. London attracts all the most screwed up people from across the world. In long distance texting with friends you can only get and give a snapshot . You have to be one-to-one on an outside table with hoardes of strangers passing by, then you can really get started” I can't take any more...”. Three hours later when your friend goes off to the loo, all you can hear is people telling each other how screwed up they are, it's like being in a Woody Allen film..... and then you feel blissfully normal.

Back in the pub, a man came up to me and asked me if I'd lived in Forest Hill. Well, 20 years ago I did. I didn't recognise him. It turns out he was the original partner of Keith Abel of Abel and Cole who predated Cole. He said he was the one who took Abel and Cole into organic, in other words, he was the one that copied my box scheme model - they ditched their door-to-door battery egg and conventional potato round for it – they saw I was onto something. I fondly remember how I turned down an offer worth £4 million pounds plus shares from venture capitalists to put Farmaround and Abel and Cole together - this was in the mid- 90's. Well I'd have spent it by now anyway. I had thought Keith Abel walked away with £20 million recently-ish but this guy corrected me, it was £40 million. Je ne regrette rien.

I was very impressed with my translation work of Liz's ' Brigitte Bardot interview which appeared in the Mail today I hasten to add !
I'm off to walk the moors under a vast sky where I will not see another soul and I am just a tiny, mortal speck. That's why I came here.

A lot of my London friends get creeped out in the countryside. When they visit I have to have lots of diverting activities arranged - walks round Richmond town, boat trips, little churches etc. because for them to look across that bleak moor under that vast sky, it's for them like staring at their own death.....'look, there it is'.

Kind wishes,

Isobel