

Monday 13th April 2015

Dear Customer,

We have purple sprouting broccoli in the bags this week. It is delicious steamed for 6-8 minutes, sprinkled with lemon juice and then dipped in butter – you could go all the way and eat it with Hollandaise sauce but this has the same taste. You could also steam and then fry it with garlic and toasted sesame seeds. You could roast it in a baking tray with some olive oil for 10 – 15 minutes until tender and then mix it with crème fraiche and cooked pasta. You could also add some cooked leeks into the pasta and finish with a sprinkle of parmesan. Whatever you do I am sure it will be delicious.

Spring Green and Lemon Soup

3 medium leeks	30g butter or margarine
1 medium carrot	1 stick celery
1 litre vegetable stock	2 bay leaves
4 handfuls spring greens	1 small lemon

Trim and wash the leeks and slice into thin rings. Melt the butter or margarine in a large saucepan and add the leeks, leaving them covered, to soften over a low heat. They should not colour. Finely chop the carrot and celery and add to the pan. Pour in the vegetable stock, add the bay leaves, salt and pepper and leave to simmer for 20 minutes until the vegetables are soft. Rinse the greens and shred into thin ribbons. Finely grate the lemon zest and add to the soup with the greens. Taste as you add and stop when you feel it is sour enough. Simmer for 3-4 minutes, or until the greens are just tender. Check the seasoning and serve.

Butternut Squash and Leek Lasagne

1 medium squash	olive oil
2 cloves garlic	1 bunch fresh basil
2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes	3 leeks
150g baby spinach	350g ricotta cheese
200g dry lasagne sheets	100g mozzarella
75g parmesan cheese	

Preheat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5. Carefully halve the squash, scoop out the seeds (and roast for a snack) then chop the squash into 3cm chunks, leaving the peel on but removing any thick skin. Place the squash in a roasting tray, sprinkle with a pinch of salt and pepper and drizzle well with olive oil and toss together. Cook in the oven for 1 hour, or until soft and cooked through. Then make the tomato sauce. Peel and finely chop the garlic cloves. Pick the basil leaves and discard the stalks then put a saucepan on medium heat and add a lug of olive oil, the chopped garlic and the basil leaves. Cook for a couple of minutes, stirring often, until the garlic turns golden. Add the tinned tomatoes, season with salt and pepper and leave to simmer for 10 minutes. Trim and finely slice the leeks and wash the spinach. Heat a large saucepan on a low heat and add a splash of olive oil. Add the leeks and sweat slowly for about 10 minutes or until soft. Add the spinach and cook for another minute or two until wilted. Remove from the heat and leave to cool for a few minutes then carefully drain off any excess liquid. Mix the ricotta into the pan and season well with salt and pepper. Spoon a quarter of the tomato sauce into the bottom of an earthenware ovenproof dish, approximately 30cm x 20cm and follow with a layer of lasagne sheets and poke in half of the chunks of squash, then top with a remaining third of the tomato sauce. Cover with another layer of lasagne sheets, then cover with the remaining creamy leeks and pieces of squash. Top with remaining tomato sauce and a final layer of lasagne sheet. Spoon the rest of the tomato sauce on too in an even layer. Tear the mozzarella into small pieces and dot over the lasagne. Finely grate the Parmesan over the top, cover with tin foil and cook in the hot oven for 20 minutes. After that, remove the foil and cook for another 20 minutes, or until the lasagne is golden and bubbling. Serve with a fresh salad.

I was sitting at the computer in my dressing gown and had a call from my brother. He was on his way to Alston for a rare viewing on his house and said he was going to drop in to see the Garden Centre, and that he was in a hurry. As ever, giving no notice, leaving his options open until the last second. He had just come off the A1 and wanted directions but I couldn't work out where he was and which exit he'd taken and he wasn't pleased. I ran upstairs to put some clothes on – you can't keep him waiting. I arrived just after him and he opened his boot and pulled out a flat screen television for me. He likes tv's in every room so having just vacated his London house, he now has a surplus. I cheerfully showed him round as he grimaced – I think it was agonising for him. In my mind I can see how it's going to look but all he could see was rubble. That, and a nasty conflict between serving takeaway pizza and chips to the local workers on the trading estates, and serving heritage beetroot salads to a more sophisticated, farmaround customer-type crowd who likes French cinema and artisan bread. His parting words, knowing I don't have it, were "you could spend £50,000 on it" and "You need to identify who your target market is..", then he was gone – he whizzed off as quickly as he'd whizzed in. I am on a very tight budget and am all too aware that I have to prioritise. In a rare dispassionate moment, I decided to cancel the retro Danish swivel egg chairs in favour of something more practical.....an oven. I do regret it though.

We had some glorious weather last week, it had been hideous seeing the tiny, spindly newborn lambs across the Dales, backs arched in misery, being battered by the freezing winds and wintry showers, and hideous seeing the heavily pregnant ewes about to give birth in it. Alas, the bad weather is back again today.

I've just ordered a wild flower meadow to put on the Garden Centre roof !

Hope this finds you well,

Kind wishes,

Isobel