



Monday 28th September 2015

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Our subject today is cauliflowers.....when you're ready. Apart from containing folate, heaps of vitamin C, B6, phytochemicals, carotenoids and protein.... they squeak. If you venture into a cauliflower field early in the morning you will hear an eerie, mysterious sound. It is utterly terrifying, especially if you're on your own. It's called the 'cauliflower creak'. The florets rub together during growth spurts, as the sun rises and warms the moisture on the leaves and curds. The curd can grow up to 3cms in a day. The squeaking indicates it is growing quickly and it also makes the curd become sweeter. It is not unique in the vegetable kingdom as cabbages also squeak.

Researchers in Bonn, Germany claimed that some plants such as cabbages, give off a gas when they are under attack. Super-sensitive microphones picked up bubbling sounds from a healthy plant but this rose to a 'piercing screech' when it was under threat. Even a tiny insect bite could have this effect. The more a plant is subjected to stress, the louder the signal. And in case you were wondering, the world's largest recorded cauliflower weighed only 14 kilos - a bit disappointing, I thought there would have been a bigger one than that.

It is delicious roasted. You could cut into florets and toss with olive oil, pepper and soy sauce and put on a baking tray in a single layer and bake for 20 minutes or until golden around the edges.

Cauliflower Gratin with Oat and Sunflower Seed Crust

3 medium onions	a clove of garlic
2 bushy sprigs rosemary	2 tbsp olive oil
800g cauliflower	handful of green leaves eg cabbage
200ml cream	100ml vegetable stock
80g strong cheese	60g rolled oats
100g fresh white breadcrumbs	40g sunflower seeds

Set the oven at 180C/ Gas 4. Peel the onions, halve and slice them thickly. Peel the garlic and slice it thinly. Pull the needles from the rosemary and chop them. Warm the oil in a large, deep pan, add the onions, garlic and rosemary and let them cook over a moderate heat for a good 15-20 minutes until the onions are pale gold and soft. Break the cauliflower into large florets, then slice each floret into two or three so you have lots of flat pieces. Boil them in salted water with the chopped greens for 6-7 minutes or until almost tender then drain. Butter a baking dish and tip in the cauliflower and greens. Season the cream and vegetable stock with salt and pepper and pour over. Grate the cheese and scatter it reserving a handful. To make the topping, mix the oats, breadcrumbs and sunflower seeds and pile onto the vegetables. Add the reserved cheese and bake in the oven for 45 minutes or until the crust is golden.

Cauliflower and Cumin Fritters with Lime Yoghurt

320g cauliflower	120g plain flour
1 tbsp flat-leaf parsley	1 clove garlic, crushed
small onion, finely chopped	4 free-range eggs
1½ tsp ground cumin	1 tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp ground turmeric	1½ tsp salt
1 tsp black pepper	500ml sunflower oil for frying

Lime Yoghurt

300g Greek yoghurt	2 tbsp finely chopped coriander
grated zest of 1 lime	2 tbsp lime juice
2 tbsp olive oil	salt and pepper

To make the lime sauce put all the ingredients in a bowl and whisk well. Taste – the flavours should be vibrant and citrusy – adjust seasoning as necessary. Chill or leave at room temperature. Put the cauliflower florets in a saucepan of salted boiling water. Simmer until very soft, around 15 minutes and drain. Meanwhile, put the flour, chopped parsley, onion, garlic, eggs, cumin, cinnamon, turmeric, salt and pepper in a bowl and whisk to make a smooth batter. Add the warm cauliflower and mix in smashing the cauliflower with the back of a wooden spoon. Heat some oil in a large frying pan over a high heat. Working in batches, spoon in the cauliflower mixture allowing 3 tablespoons per fritter. Separate the fritters with a spatula. Fry in small batches, adjusting the heat so the fritters cook but don't burn – around 3-4 minutes on each side. Drain on kitchen paper. Serve hot garnished with parsley leaves and the lime yoghurt.

I had some old friends visit last week from Portland in the US who I hadn't seen for a very long time – 15 years. I dropped them back off at Northallerton Station and there was a commotion. Darka, Mirosław's American wife and a singer, was stressed as the train was due imminently and the ticket machine wouldn't work. The quiet but full waiting room echoed with "Come on you mother***** of a machine".

Mirosław gave her a gentle shove trying to get her to keep her voice down and Darka turned on him "Don't you dare push me... you say you're sorry..." she shouted. I shrugged apologetically at all the polite faces.

On reflection, all my friends seem to be good at making a scene – they are very dramatic. They make me look restrained and normal.

Mirosław was the guitarist in my old band, now turned successful photographer in the US. He was brought up in Wolverhampton with Ukrainian parents who sent him, aged just 11 yrs old, to Rome to become a priest. It must have been pretty bewildering but firmed him up as an atheist. He had a funny, sweet mum who just thought she was doing her best for him. I remember her washing Miri's favourite black suede jacket in the washing machine. She'd always bake me a giant Ukrainian cake to take home whenever I visited. Since I last saw Miri, we have both lost our parents. 'We are both orphans now' he said. Sadly it is what many of us are slowly becoming with the inevitable march of time.

The photographer and journalist from Another Escape magazine came up to take photos. They were lovely but it was a trial for them. It took all day because I hadn't got enough sheep nuts to keep the sheep interested so we spent hours trekking round the fields after them to get them in the shots. My own increasing dislike of having my photo taken was, I know, etched across my face, and it's such a beautiful magazine, I'll just ruin it.

Kind wishesand good luck with squeaky,

Isobel