



Monday 15th November 2021

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Temperatures have plunged but the sky is blue and the sun is shining. I love my garden's descent into winter with the changing colours as the chlorophyll breaks down. It's a particular joy to see the leaves drop off in front of my house flooding it with light. Views reappear. I don't remember such a pleasant autumn. It's usually hell. A mere month and the days will start lengthening again.

The main thing is we are all still here. A few tasty recipes you can try this week:

Baked Swede and Onion

1 swede, peeled and cut into 2-3cm cubes
1 rosemary sprig, leaves finely chopped
knob buttery margarine
2 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
250ml vegetable stock

2 tbsp olive oil
6 thyme sprigs
3 onions, thinly sliced
2 bay leaves
¼ whole nutmeg, freshly grated

Preheat the oven to 200°C/ Gas 6. Put the swede in a roasting tin with the oil. Add the chopped rosemary and leaves from 2 thyme sprigs, plus salt and plenty of black pepper, then toss together well. Cook in the oven for 45 minutes, stirring a couple of times, until soft and tinged with gold in places. Meanwhile, melt the butter in a large saucepan. Add the onions, garlic, bay, leaves from 2 more thyme sprigs and a generous pinch of salt. Cook over a medium heat, stirring often for 20 minutes, until the onions are soft and golden. Stir the onions into the swede. Add the stock, a good grating of nutmeg, a pinch of salt and a generous grind of black pepper. Scatter the remaining thyme leaves over the top and return to the oven for 30-40 minutes, until the stock has become thick and syrupy. Remove from the oven, taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary.

Swede, Leek and Potato Gratin

1 tbsp olive oil
350g leek, thinly sliced
500g potatoes, peeled and cut into matchsticks
6 bay leaves
150ml organic cream

knob butter or margarine
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 medium swede, peeled and cut into matchsticks
150ml organic milk

Preheat the oven to 190C/ Gas 5. Melt the oil and butter together in a frying pan and add the leek and garlic. Cook gently for 5 minutes until softened but not coloured. Combine the leek mixture, potatoes and swede in a greased 1.5 litre shallow ovenproof dish and season, layering-in the bay leaves as you go. Mix the cream and milk together and pour over the vegetables. Bake for 1 hour until the vegetables are tender and the top golden. Cover with foil if the gratin browns too much. Serve with broccoli perhaps.

I hadn't had any contact with my brother for a while. I'd sent him a card and emailed him to wish him a 'happy birthday' yesterday He'd forgotten mine as he always does. And it was one of those big, hard to come to terms with, ones. At the same time, I emailed him all the things I'd discovered about our great uncle after my hours of meticulous research and drawing down his war records. I recounted it in great detail – wounded in Gallipoli, killed in Flanders. He said he already knew.

I've been very wound up again. All the hedges in this area have been hacked back to their bare wood. Stripped of their leaves and berries - the winter food and shelter for the birds, small mammals, amphibians and insects. They don't have much habitat as it is, a bit of grass verge and a bit of hedge between the tarmac roads and the arable crops. I took a picture of one and put in on the local Facebook group page, calling it an 'abomination of a hedge'. My post was immediately removed by admin. Why ? Too provocative..edgy..metropolitan. Seeking an explanation I was told that it could be any hedge and wasn't necessarily local. So I had to identify exactly which hedge it was. But they're all looking like this. Food and shelter for our wildlife in this, officially one of the most nature depleted countries in the world - you wouldn't think it would be contentious.

Everyone came out to defend the 'abomination'. They said they should but cut every autumn. I argued they should be cut after the winter to leave the food and shelter in place for when it's needed. And then just relaxed trimming every three years at most for maximum benefit to wildlife. 'This is normal practice' they said. So is flushing plastic wet wipes down the toilet; spraying apples 40 times with different chemicals in one growing season; pumping animals full of antibiotics to try and keep disease at bay to enable factory farming. 'Normal practice' has brought us to where we are today. Brought our wildlife and natural world to the brink. As ever I remember the people who care most about the countryside are those who live in cities and rarely the people living in it.

And then to my horror, a newsletter arrived from Kilpin Hall, the place I frequent a lot. An idyllic place with lakes full of native and migratory birds and ancient parkland and woodlands. There was a note from the young, new director, come in to make a difference.

“There are over 250,000 registered drone pilots in the UK making it one of the biggest and fastest growing hobbies out there.....the idea is to test whether this might be a market we could tap into...”

Yet again my fury surged. Birds see drones as predators. Large birds attack them, small birds are terrified. Their feeding, their nesting, their breeding, all disrupted. They would be displaced. Birds who have no doubt been native to Kiplin for hundreds of would no longer feel safe.

And as for the human who go there for ‘mindfulness, peace and tranquillity’ (as per their website), it would be goodbye to them. The last thing they will want is to see and hear those intrusive things buzzing about on the skyline. I sent him quite an upset email explaining why I thought it was a bad idea. Then I got and angrier and angrier so sent him another one telling him the only people who like drones are people who have them, and that it would be a big mistake to turn Kiplin into a boys’ playground.

Very best wishes,

Isobel