

**Monday 30th January 2012**

Dear Customer,

We have Ormskirkian golden beetroot in the bags again as they were so popular last time. I'm not surprised, they are a super-super-super-food. They have B vitamins, iron and zinc as well as vitamins A and C, calcium, magnesium, potassium and protein. On top of all that they contain soluble fibre for a healthy heart. To roast them, place in a tin with half an inch of water in the bottom. Cover with foil and roast for 30 minutes so they are tender when pierced with a knife. When they are cool, you can then de-skin them. Excellent in a salad with some chopped apple, blood oranges and a balsamic vinegar dressing.

**Tagliatelle with Spinach, Mascarpone and Parmesan**

450g tagliatelle or spaghetti

2 tbsp butter

½ a nutmeg, freshly grated

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

150g mascarpone

olive oil

2 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced

1 bag spinach, finely sliced

120ml double cream

2 handfuls of freshly grated Parmesan

*Cook the pasta according to packet instructions. Meanwhile, put a bit of olive oil in a frying pan with the butter, garlic and nutmeg. When the butter has melted, add the spinach. After 5 minutes it will be wilted and dark with most of the liquid cooked away. Season with salt and pepper then add the cream, mascarpone and a small ladle of the pasta water. Let this simmer then season again. Drain the pasta, reserving some of the cooking water, then stir in the spinach sauce. Add the Parmesan and toss everything together. Use some of the reserved cooking water if needed so it isn't too sticky. Season and serve.*

**Caramelised Golden Beetroot and Red Onions**

500g golden beetroot

40g butter or margarine

200ml hot vegetable stock

dash balsamic vinegar

1 large red onion, cut into wedges

40g muscovado sugar

2 tbsp thyme leaves

*Preheat oven to 220C/Gas 7. Peel the golden beetroot, cut into chunky wedges and put in a roasting tin with the red onion wedges. Dot with butter or margarine, sprinkle over the sugar and pour over the hot stock. Scatter with the thyme leaves and season with salt and pepper. Cook in the oven for about 35 minutes, turning halfway, until the beetroot is just tender. Drizzle with balsamic vinegar and cook for a further 10 minutes.*

**Moist Golden Beetroot and Chocolate Cake !**

250g beetroot

4 tbsp hot espresso

135g plain flour

3 tbsp cocoa powder

190g caster sugar

200g fine dark chocolate (70% cocoa solids)

200g butter

heaped tsp baking powder

5 eggs

crème fraiche and poppy seeds, to serve

*Lightly butter a 20cm loose-bottomed cake tin and line the base with a disc of baking parchment. Set the oven at 180C/Gas 4. Cook the beetroot whole and unpeeled in boiling water – 30 or 40 minutes depending on size. When tender, drain, cool under running water and peel. Slice out the stem and root and blitz to a rough puree. Melt the chocolate in small bowl over a pot of simmering water but don't stir. When melted, pour over the hot coffee and stir once. Cut the butter into small pieces and add to the melted chocolate. Push butter under the surface and leave to soften. Sift together the flour, baking powder and cocoa. Separate the eggs – put the whites in a mixing bowl. Stir the yolks together. Then, working quickly, remove bowl of chocolate from the heat and stir until the butter has melted into it. Leave for a few minutes then stir in the egg yolks. Do this quickly and firmly. Fold in the beetroot. Whisk the egg whites until stiff, then fold in the sugar. Then fold the egg whites and sugar into the chocolate mixture. Then fold in the flour and cocoa. Transfer quickly to the cake tin and put in the oven, turning the heat down immediately to 160C/Gas 3. Bake for 40 minutes. The rim should be spongy and the inner bit should wobble a bit when shaken. Leave to cool. Don't remove from tin until it is completely cold. Serve in thick slices with crème fraiche and poppy seeds.*

Before the herons came I had 7 goldfish and now there are just 4. The remaining ones float, huddled together in a little group under the netting – they are inconsolable. They don't want to eat, they don't want to swim. It's absolutely terrible.

I know I keep going on about my 2 guinea pigs. They live in the utility room in a cage on the floor but I cut a large opening in the cage that they can come in and out and the utility room door is open leading into my living area but

they rarely venture into it. There is a newspaper carpet in front of the cage – their lounge/terrace/dining area where they tend to hang out during the day. Once a fortnight and with an air of great purpose, Badgie comes trotting out of the utility room and trots round the living room for a few minutes then goes back. I caught it last time on my phone video camera. I want to work out how to upload it to show it to you. Recently however, he has taken to trotting out squeaking when I come home with shopping and he hears the rustle of bags. He runs round my feet like a puppy to see what I've got for them.

I received an email over the weekend from a lady who is buying our milk and eggs from Selfridges. She was lamenting the fact there are no equivalent words to humanity / humanitarian which also encompass animals. It struck a nerve with me as I have searched my brain and it's limited vocabulary for such a word for many years. The word 'humanity' suddenly seems sinister and selfish. The search is on. Does such a word exist ? If not, there needs to be one and what should it be ? Any classicists out there ? Any help greatly appreciated

The snows been here today, it made us shudder then went again. The ghost of recent winters hangs eerily in the air. We are told it will be back. I have to travel to Dorset and Somerset for urgent matters this week so I hope not.

I met up with Ernest to go for a walk yesterday – it turned into an epic, we must have walked 100 miles. Many gates we arrived at had warning signs – 'Cows with Calves', 'Danger Bull'. There weren't at this time of year, it 's what farmers use to try and keep walkers away. I said I wished I had something to write with so I could add 'Danger Bull *shit there's no bull*'. To which Ernest replied he'd bring a 'crayon'. He hasn't caught on to the world of marker pens. Then we got to a stile which Myfa couldn't get over and Ernest suggested that maybe she could 'stagger under the fence', I asked if he meant 'squeeze', which he did. After walking in silence a while he suddenly proclaimed " Crime and Punishment and The Killing Fields are two of the best books I have ever written". I do feel very privileged to know Ernest – he's absolutely hilarious. He should hire himself out to walkers, he would certainly brighten their day. He obviously came through Crime and Punishment unscathed and has now said that he is going to go to Waterstones to buy himself some books because he enjoys reading so much. Now if that isn't a result !

Kind wishes,

Isobel