

Monday 23rd April 2012

Dear Customer,

It's been tipping it down here. After ice rain and a wet drought, I'm expecting the coldest heatwave since records began.

The 'big green' in the bags this week is/are spring greens from Duncan Gielty in Ormskirk along with his Estima potatoes and onions. We have cauliflowers from Brittany and plum tomatoes and courgettes from Andalucia – quite cosmopolitan. Not a lot is growing here at the moment – we are between seasons, entering the traditional 'hungry gap'. Here are a few easy recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Courgette and Tomato Gratin

500g courgettes, sliced

1½ tbsp olive oil

100g Mozzarella or Cheddar, sliced

1 tbsp basil

400g tomatoes, sliced

1 clove garlic, crushed

3 level tbsp grated Parmesan

salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to Gas 5/375F/190C. Heat the oil in a large frying pan and add the courgettes in a single layer, add the garlic and sauté the courgettes so golden on each side. Then arrange layers of courgettes, cheese slices and sliced tomatoes in a heatproof gratin dish so they overlap each other slightly like roof slates. Finally sprinkle on the grated Parmesan, basil, salt and freshly ground black pepper. Bake on a high shelf in the oven for 30 mins. Serve with crusty bread and a green salad with a lemony dressing. You could also add slices of cooked potato to the gratin.

Garlic Roasted Cauliflower

1 whole head garlic, cloves separated but not peeled

4 tbsp olive oil

fresh minced parsley

2 tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 cauliflower, trimmed and cut into large florets

salt and freshly ground black pepper

3 tbsp pine nuts, toasted

Bring a small pan of water to the boil, add the garlic cloves. Boil for 20 seconds. Drain, peel and cut off any brown parts. Cut the largest cloves in half lengthways. Toss the cauliflower with the garlic, 3 tbsp olive oil, 2 tsp salt and 1 tsp pepper. Spread the mixture out in a single layer on a baking tray and roast in a medium – hot oven for 20-25 minutes, tossing twice, until the cauliflower is tender and the garlic lightly browned. Scrape the cauliflower into a large bowl with the garlic and pan juices and add the remaining tsp of olive oil, the parsley, pine nuts and lemon juice. Sprinkle with more salt, toss well and serve hot or warm.

Spring Greens and Lemon Soup

4 handfuls of spring greens

1 celery stick

2 bay leaves

1 litre vegetable stock

1 medium carrot

2 leeks

1 lemon

30g butter or margarine

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 but 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 but the colour still bright. Shred the greens into ribbons. Finely grate the lemon zest and add to the soup with the greens. Taste as you add when you feel it is sour enough. Simmer for 2 to 3 minutes until the greens are just tender. Check the seasoning, squeeze over the lemon juice and serve.

Spring Greens with Lemon and Garlic

spring greens, shredded

1 tbsp olive oil

juice of half a lemon

salt and pepper

1 clove garlic, crushed

Blanch the spring greens in a pan of boiling water for 2 minutes until tender. Drain well. Heat the oil in a pan, then fry the garlic for 1 minute. Add the spring greens to the pan. Season with salt and pepper and stir in the lemon juice before serving.

It's been a week mainly preoccupied with sheep. Most of them have now gone off to Croxdale to their summer parkland. I've been going up to check on them. My sheep are very strange. Driving in through the big wrought iron gates, it's like driving into some mythical land. It's not a herd, it's a colony. They hang about in groups, usually centred

around a tree, some snuggled up asleep between the big protruding roots, others standing on their hind legs stretched upright against the tree trunk, nibbling the bark. I wouldn't be surprised one day to arrive to pandemonium - the fire brigade and sheep perched in the branches. A passer-by said they look like a load of orphans – which they are. No two look the same, they range from the size of a small dog to the size of a water buffalo, with the horns to match. I must video them to show you.

Ernest has just this second called – he is absolutely furious – it's Monday morning and he's just been to see them and found 30 of the Shetlands in the far field (which is beautiful with lush grass, trees and a stream) had managed to get over the cattle grid into one of the Durham cattlemen's lots. It took him 2 hours to get them back in and then they just lay down in the middle of the road and wouldn't even move for the postman. They've only been there 4 days. Ernest couldn't work out how they did it – one big flying leap or did they step carefully over it.

If you haven't already, please can you email Diane with your email address so she can set up your online account. We are hoping to launch on week commencing 30th April. If the website is down at all during that week, you will know why. We are hoping for no glitches !

Kind wishes,

Isobel

PS We have just received a consignment of a fantastic artisan BioSanare Premium extra virgin olive oil from Catalonia in Spain, olive land. It is available to order now in 5 litres tins for £29.50 or 75cl bottles for £5.95.