

Monday 14th May 2012

Dear Customer,

Some May so far, It's wet and freezing !

We have switched potatoes to Yorkshire Moors Marfonas - glad we're able to stick English for the moment. We have the season's first Andalucian watermelons in most of the fruit bags.

Watermelons originated in Africa where they grew wild. They were first cultivated in the Nile Valley and watermelon seeds were found in the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun. By the 10th century they were being cultivated in China, now the world's largest producer, and in the 13th century the Moorish invaders introduced them to Europe. It's thought that African slaves introduced the fruit to the United States ! In Japan they now grow cubic watermelons by growing them in glass boxes as well as pyramid-shaped ones. They are an excellent source of vitamin C and beta-carotene and also contain calcium, iron, zinc, magnesium, vitamin B6, riboflavin and lycopene. Some current research is showing anti-hypertensive effects. And they taste nice.

Here are a few recipes you could try with this week, starting with a cake to soak up the misery of all this rain:

Courgette Cake

200g butter

150g courgettes

1 small apple

pinch salt

pinch cinnamon

80g sultanas

200g caster sugar

2 eggs

200g plain flour

½ tsp baking powder

60g pecans

Preheat the oven top 180C/Gas 4. Butter and line the base of a loaf tin measuring 20cm x 12cm x 9cm deep. Cream the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Beat the eggs and mix them in a bit at a time. Coarsely grate the courgettes and apple. Squeeze them with your hands to remove excess moisture, then add to the mixture. Mix the flour, salt, baking powder and cinnamon, and gently fold into the mixture. Stir in the nuts and fruit. Transfer to the lined loaf tin and bake for about an hour, or until golden and firm to the touch. Allow to cool in the tin before turning out.

Pasta with Roasted Courgettes, Garlic and Cherry Tomatoes

2 courgettes, cut into chunks

250g cherry tomatoes

olive oil

3 big cloves garlic, with skin left on

150-200g pasta

Preheat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Toss the courgettes and garlic with 3 tbsp olive oil. Put in a small baking dish, season well and roast for 10 minutes. Add the cherry tomatoes and cook for a further 10-15 minutes until they start to burst and give up their juice. Cook the pasta according to the pack instructions. Take the dish from the oven, discard the garlic skins and mash the garlic into the oil. Toss everything together with the pasta.

Cauliflower and Broccoli Bake

1 cauliflower, broken into florets

50g butter

1 tsp mustard powder

100g strong Cheddar

1 small head broccoli, broken into floret

50g flour

500ml milk

2 tbsp chives, snipped

In a very large saucepan, cook the cauliflower in salted boiling water for 5 minutes. Then add the broccoli and cook for 3 minutes more. Drain well and transfer to a large ovenproof dish.

To make the cheese sauce, melt the butter in a small pan. When foaming, add the flour and mustard powder and cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Take off the heat and add the milk, a little at a time, stirring constantly to get rid of any lumps. Once the milk has been added, return to the heat and add the remaining milk. Keep stirring and bring to the boil, then turn down to a simmer and cook for 2 minutes, until thickened and smooth. Add most of the cheese and some seasoning then take off the heat and add the chives. Pour the sauce over the vegetables and sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Cook in the oven for 35-40 minutes until bubbling.

I did my trip to Sussex last week. Myfa had a lovely time. She managed to find the novelties of a huge rotting fish to roll in on Climping beach and a clod of peacock droppings in the hotel grounds – followed each time by a power-shower with L'Occitane toiletries.

I had been hoping that my car would miraculously recover from it's 'problem', a wrecked engine, en route but it didn't. It took me 8 hours at 40-50mph to get there. The return journey was worse. There was torrential rain on the M1 and I was tucked in between the juggernauts. Each slight incline, I lost all power and couldn't accelerate. It was horrendous. I had wondered if it would be the last and definitive trip in the car and I think it was.

What upsets me most about having to get a new car is that I've only just bought a brand new key for mine and it cost me £130. I'd been using the plastic emergency key since I lost the last one a month ago but it snapped. It is the second new one I've bought in 8 months - they keep dropping out my pockets when I'm out walking. Looking on 'Autotrader' last night I was particularly attracted to a car - not sure of the year or mileage but it had 3 keys with it - remarkable !

I am feeling a bit out of sorts this Sunday morning. If you don't want to go into the 'twilight zone', stop reading now. I had a restless night's sleep, I think I kept stopping breathing. I dreamt of my parents, which I very rarely do. I told them how much I missed them and then my dad told me three numbers. I half woke up at that point and wrote them down wishfully thinking he may have given me the lottery numbers to buy a new Ferrari. This morning I looked at them and wondered - if it was lottery numbers, why just three - what would be the point of that - 5 -7 -19. Then I decided it was more likely to be a date, the 5th July 2019. What date could that be ? The date I would see them again - my death ? I sat terrified - just 7 more years ! It was at least better than 5-7-12, seven years isn't bad. I could do a lot in that time. I have often thought that each year, we all pass unknowingly over the date of our final demise and thank heavens we don't know what that date is. Dreams can be very, very disconcerting.

On that cheery note I hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel