

Monday 22nd October 2012

Dear Customer,

I can't believe it's Pumpkin Week already. Clocks back on Saturday and temperatures set to drop into winter gear. We have Royal Oak's Cylindria beetroot in the bags too – delicious roasted, and Rosemary Wass' Yorkshire Moors parsnips and we have Breton cauliflowers but sadly not in blue and white stripy t shirts. What's great about pumpkins is that you can carve them into lanterns and still eat the flesh. If you're not planning a Halloween exhibit and fancy the skin – you could cut it into sections, scoop out the seeds and lay the slices in an oiled roasting tin. Drizzle with oil and grind some sea-salt and black pepper over them. Cover with foil and roast at 200C/Gas 6 until soft and tender – anything from 25-60 minutes. Take the foil off halfway through and baste with a little of the oil.

Otherwise, here are a couple of other things you could try once you have mined out flesh:

Pumpkin Soup with Cinnamon - Sugar Croutons

50g margarine, softened	1 tbsp dark brown soft sugar
2 x ¼ tsp ground cinnamon (¼ for croutons and ¼ for soup)	
4 slices wholemeal bread	160g onion, chopped
2 tbsp melted butter	825ml stock
425g pumpkin puree (as in bread recipe below)	
1 tsp salt	eighth of tsp ground ginger
eighth of tsp ground black pepper	250ml whipping cream

Preheat the oven to 200C/Gas 6. Combine the butter, sugar and cinnamon. Spread evenly over one side of each bread slice. Place bread buttered side up on a baking tray. Bake for 8-10 minutes or until bread is crisp and top bubbly. Cut each slice of bread into 8 small triangles. Saute the onion until tender in butter in a medium saucepan. Add half the stock, stir well, bring to the boil, reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Blend in food processor until smooth. Return mixture to the saucepan. Add the remaining stock, pumpkin, salt, cinnamon, ginger and pepper. Stir well, bring to the boil, cover, reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the whipping cream and heat through but do not boil. Ladle into bowls and top with the cinnamon croutons.

Pumpkin and Walnut Bread

500g pumpkin, unprepared weight	50g butter, melted plus some for greasing
60g caster sugar	½ tsp grated nutmeg
3 eggs, lightly beaten	350g strong plain white flour
2 tsp baking powder	½ tsp salt
100g walnuts, roughly chopped	

Peel the pumpkin and discard the seeds. Cut the flesh into small chunks and place in a medium saucepan. Cover with water and bring to the boil, Put the lid on, lower heat and simmer for 20-25 minutes. Drain well and blitz in a food processor to a smooth puree. Leave to cool. Grease a 22cm x 11cm loaf tin (1.3litre) with butter. Line the base and sides with greaseproof paper. Preheat the oven to 180C fan/ 200C/Gas 4. Weigh 280g of the pumpkin puree and place in a large bowl. Add the butter, sugar, nutmeg and eggs and mix all the ingredients together. Sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a second large bowl and make a well in the centre. Pour the pumpkin mixture into the well and stir until smooth. Then fold in the walnuts. Pour the mixture into the prepared loaf tin and bake in the middle of the oven for 1 hour. After resting for 3 minutes, turn onto a wire rack. Delicious alternative to crackers with any cheese.

Now to the important stuff. Who are your favourites on X Factor ? I like Jahmain, Ella and James. I do worry how we are becoming little more than morons, taking our highs from elimination contests. OK, I am. Isn't The Apprentice back soon and Masterchef. Did you watch the Great British Bake Off ? I guess there are worse things to take pleasure in on long, dark nights.

I've been busy this weekend with an autumn spring clean. I've been de-cluttering and creating order. It gets worse before it gets better. I emptied every drawer in the house into a pile on the floor. That was the easy bit. I sat until 2am this morning picking through it and creating new themed smaller piles and then finding them a drawer. I'm a bit short on drawers so there had to be some doubling up. There's now one for light bulbs, telephone stuff, candles and techy stuff like leads and discs. I put 2 dog whistles in there too. In my right-hand desk drawer is now my entire collection of biros – about 200 of them. All paperclips and curtain hooks are in little containers. Euro coins have been separated from other change and placed in a small bag. I'm still sitting amongst the crumbs – the difficult things - packets of flower seeds, nephew's old keys, hotel sewing kit.....and so on. I have a skip's worth of stuff to chuck out in the back garden. I sent Ernest away with the family set of 24 volumes of the Encyclopaedia Britannica – each weighing half a ton. I asked him how on earth he coped when he wanted to know something and had no means of finding out. It sold them to him. He doesn't have the internet and I managed to get him to take the bookcase too. I told him he needed some new curtains and gave him the ones that were in my parents' dining room. I still have the entire

contents of their house compacted into my loft. I don't mind throwing my own stuff but theirs is nearly impossible. I tentatively put out one of their old broken chairs with the rubbish. It hurt but I managed it. I guess it takes a lifetime. Anyway back to sifting and sorting now.

I hope you're having a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel