

Monday 1st April 2013

Dear Customer,

I hope you are having a nice Easter break, despite it being the coldest since the Ice Age. I was hoping to cheer you up with some little baby globe artichokes but it is Monday morning and the Spanish lorry has failed to turn up. The driver has maybe frozen to death somewhere on the M25.

If they do happen to appear and happen to appear in your bag, you may or may not have cooked them before. If not, here is how to do it:

Cooking and Eating Globe Artichokes

Cut the stem close to the base of the artichoke, leaving about an inch of it. You can eat these stems if you leek off the outside layers, which is more fibrous and butter. Chop them off and cook them with the artichokes. In a large pot, put a couple of inches of water and if you have them, a clove of garlic, a bay leaf and a slice of lemon. Add the artichokes (and stems), bring to the boil, reduce heat and simmer for 25-40 minutes or until the outer leaves can easily be pulled off. The artichokes can be eaten hot or cold. They can be served with malted butter or mayonnaise or a mayonnaise with a little balsamic vinegar mixed in.

To eat: *Pull off the outer petals, one at a time. Dip the white, fleshy end in the sauce or melted butter. Tightly grip the other end of the petal. Place in mouth dip-side down and pull through the teeth to remove the soft, pulp, delicious portion of the petal. Discard the remaining part of the petal. Continue until all of the petals are removed. You will then arrive at an alarming, hairy bit which is covering the artichoke heart. Scrape with away with a knife or spoon, don't try and eat it. You will be left with the hear which you can cut into pieces, dip into the sauce and eat.*

Provençal Potatoes

1 onion, peeled and chopped
1 garlic clove, crushed
350g potatoes
50g olives
Parmesan shavings, optional

1 tbs olive oil
440g tin chopped tomatoes
2 sun-dried tomatoes in oil, drained
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Fry the onion in the oil for 5 minutes, then add the garlic and the tinned tomatoes. Bring to the boil and simmer for 10-15 minutes until very thick. Meanwhile, bring 5cm of water to the boil for the potatoes. Peel the potatoes and cut into 1/4" thick sliced. Add to the pan, cover and simmer for 7-10 minutes until tender but not breaking up, then drain. Chop the sun-dried tomatoes and add to the sauce along with half the olives. Season, then mix together the sauce and the potatoes, top with the remaining olives and serve immediately. Or top with the Parmesan cheese, brown under the grill, then garnish with the remaining olives and serve.

Cheese and Spinach Souffle

220g spinach, washed and drained with large stalks removed
25g butter
1 pinch cayenne pepper
grated nutmeg to taste
2 large eggs
2 extra egg whites

150ml milk
60g strong cheddar, grated

Preheat the oven to 200C/Gas 6. Grease a one-litre soufflé dish with plenty of butter. Fill a roasting tin large enough to hold the soufflé dish, one third the way up with water and put in the oven to pre-heat. Steam the spinach in boiling water for 2 minutes and drain through a fine sieve, removing every drop of water. Chop the spinach roughly. Put the milk in a pan to warm. Melt the butter in a saucepan and stir in the flour to make a roux. When it's smooth, gradually add the warm milk, whisking hard until you get a silky sauce. Over a low heat, mix in the cheese (reserving a little to sprinkle on top, just before the dish goes in the oven). Combine the cheese sauce and chopped spinach in a mixing bowl. Add the cayenne pepper, salt and pepper to taste and grate in about a quarter of a nutmeg. Separate the eggs. Add the 2 yolks to the spinach and cheese mixture and mix thoroughly. Put the four egg whites in a large mixing bowl and whisk until they form nice stiff peaks. Using a metal spoon, carefully fold the egg whites into the spinach and cheese mixture one spoon at a time, taking care not to lose the air you've whisked into them. Spoon the mixture into the prepared soufflé dish, then sprinkle the remaining cheese over the top. Place in the preheated roasting tin and cook for 30-35 minutes. The soufflé should be nicely risen, soft and moist on the inside and just starting to crack on the surface. Serve immediately. That's how you do it, very best of luck with it.

Still not one daffodil or a blade of grass, no bird song, not a sign of life. Everything is wilted, frozen and shrivelled. A friend from Bath came to stay for Easter bearing a Simnel cake and a chocolate rabbit. I was expecting to hear tales of spring but she said it wasn't much better there.

Blimey, that is two, short, humourless, wretched newsletters in a row. Any new customers will think I am a really miserable old bag ! I will try and get myself cheered up by next week ! I've been thinking about going on a sun-bed.

Hope this finds you well,

Kind wishes,

Isobel