

**Monday 8<sup>h</sup> April 2013**

Dear Customer,

I hope you are well and managed to have a nice Easter holiday. I don't want to break with tradition by not starting with the weather. Well.... on Saturday, we saw the sun, it was magnificent. I had a lovely walk by the river in Reeth – the rabbits were playing on the banks, birds were singing. There was excited anticipation, a sense that spring was finally here. I went along to visit a friend, who moved up to Swaledale in the autumn, for a long-awaited cup of tea at the bottom of her garden, over-looking the river. She wasn't there, out with the dogs.... so I dead-headed her hydrangeas because I knew she never would. She didn't get back – probably captivated by seeing the moorland landscapes sunlit for the first time. By Sunday the sun had gone again, the sky was grey and an iced east wind was blowing. The trees opposite my house are still hanging with autumn leaves, the trees look dead. The landscape is yellow – the grass looks completely dead. There is not one bud on one tree and not one daffodil has bloomed. Everything in my garden is browning and shrivelled, I don't know if my plants are dead or alive. Everything is in suspense. It's not hard to transpose this scene into a farm context. Today, Monday, it is grey and freezing, there have been hailstones. I've just checked the forecast and the symbol for Richmond every day is grey, no sign of any sun or warmth. My sheep are on £80 worth of hay a day, unheard of for this time of year.

We have spinach in the bags this week. Jamie Oliver suggests the simplest way to cook spinach is to braise it. Chop it and put in a pan with a little butter or margarine, a grating of nutmeg and a squeeze of lemon juice. Put a lid on and let it steam until tender. Drain away any excess liquid, let it sit for a minute then serve.

Here are a few recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

### **Spiced Sweet Potatoes**

400g sweet potatoes, peeled  
1 tbsp thyme

2 tbsp olive oil  
½ tbsp paprika

*Preheat the oven to 200C/400F/Gas 6. In a small ovenproof dish, thinly slice the sweet potato. Sprinkle with olive oil, chopped thyme and paprika. Place in the oven for 15 minutes or until tender. Serve.*

### **Spinach and Lentil Curry**

200g red lentils  
200g pot natural yoghurt or coconut milk  
½ tsp turmeric  
½ tsp ground cumin  
1 onion, chopped  
2 cloves garlic, chopped  
2 tomatoes, chopped  
400g tin mixed beans, rinsed and drained

4 tbsp tomato puree  
1 tsp garam masala  
½ tsp chilli powder  
2 tbsp vegetable oil  
150g spinach, coarsely chopped  
1" piece root ginger, grated  
fresh coriander, chopped

*Rinse lentils and place in a saucepan with enough water to cover. Bring to the boil, reduce to low heat, cover and simmer for 20 minutes, then drain. In a bowl, stir together the tomato puree, yoghurt or coconut milk, the garam masala, turmeric, cumin and chilli powder and stir until creamy. Heat the oil in a frying pan over a medium heat and stir in the onion, garlic and ginger, and cook until onion begins to brown. Then stir in the spinach and cook until dark green and wilted. Gradually stir in the yoghurt or coconut mixture. Then mix in the tomatoes and coriander. Stir the lentils and mixed beans into the mixture until well-combined. Heat through for about 5 minutes.*

Back in the early eighties I was singing and playing saxophone in an 'all-girl' band, being very mouthy and feminist. It was great to have our first woman Prime Minister, but still, it really wasn't very cool to like Margaret Thatcher. At the time I was living in a shared house in East Dulwich and one of my housemates was my old friend Richard Weight who, probably to embarrass the rest of us, had a huge effigy of Thatcher in his bedroom window facing over the street. A French artist called Gerard also lived there and he used to pull his coat over his head to hide his face whenever he arrived at, or left the house. One polling day Gerard came back to the house red-faced and furious. He'd been to vote and found Richard outside the hall with a blue rosette on, ushering people in. Richard was freshly out of Cambridge. He'd got there from a Peckham comprehensive where he used to get beaten up for wearing a cloak to school. He spent several years living in Salisbury, ghost writing Ted Heath's memoirs, in the smug knowledge that his mother who had famously thrown a tin of red paint over him in Downing Street. Richard's new book 'Mod: A very British Style' has just been published. It's had great reviews and is a study of British mod youth culture with reflections on fashion, music and film. He's a very witty and insightful writer.

With things coming in threes, apparently.... I'd been really worried all week, about writing another miserable newsletter. When a migraine struck on Saturday night, 'for heaven's sake' I thought...'the letter is doomed again.....I knew I should have written it on Friday'. Fingers crossed for next week !

Kind wishes,

Isobel