

Monday 24th February 2014

Dear Customer,

Will this rain ever stop raining ? Since my rescued baby Wensleydales arrived in mid-December, there isn't one day I haven't had to empty inches of water from their feed trough before filling it with sheep nuts - so maybe not quite so arid in Yorkshire after all. Still, it's not the Somerset Levels, or Chertsey. And it's so mild, I think only twice this winter, if you can call it that, has there been ice on my fish pond. I even have two orange roses still in flower in the garden. One wonders where the weather will go next. Anyway, as for celeriacfor a winter salad you could grate it with some carrot, chopped nuts and chopped onion and douse with a mustard, olive oil and red wine vinegar vinaigrette. You could make a mash using equal quantities of celeriac and potato, maybe adding some garlic. You could roast in the oven in chunks drizzled with olive oil and seasoned with sea salt and freshly ground pepper. Or you could try one of these delicious recipes:

Jamie Oliver's Smashed Celeriac

| | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 celeriac, peeled | olive oil |
| handful fresh thyme, leaves picked | 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped |
| sea salt and freshly ground black pepper | 3-4 tbsp water or organic stock |

Slice about 1cm off the bottom of the celeriac and roll it onto that flat edge so it's safe to slice. Slice and dice it into approximately 1cm cubes. Put a casserole-type pot on a high heat with 3 lugs of olive oil then add the celeriac, thyme and garlic, with a little seasoning. Stir around to coat and fry quite fast, giving a little colour, for 5 minutes. Then turn the heat down to simmer, add the water or stock, place a lid on top and cook for around 25 minutes, until tender. Season to taste and stir around with a spoon to smash up the celeriac.

Celeriac and Apple Soup

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 2 tbsp olive oil | 500g celeriac |
| 2 medium apples, peeled and sliced | thyme |
| 1 medium onion | 750ml vegetable stock |
| 50g walnuts | 50g diced bread |
| 50g butter or margarine (plus 1 tsp) | salt and pepper |

Peel and dice the celeriac, and slice the onion. Heat the butter or margarine and oil in a pan then add the onion to sweat down. After three minutes, add the celeriac and sweat down for five minutes then pour over enough stock to cover the celeriac and add a sprinkling of thyme. Bring to a simmer then cook for 10-15 minutes, until the celeriac is soft. Add the sliced apple and cook for another two minutes. Finally blend until smooth. To finish, heat a teaspoon of butter or margarine in a frying pan and toss in the walnuts. After a few minutes, add the diced bread and toast them together for a few more minutes. Sprinkle over the soup when served.

Broccoli, Red Pepper and Cheese Frittata

| | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 6 eggs | 2 tbsp milk |
| 1 head broccoli, cut in florets | 1 tsp olive oil |
| 1 red pepper, deseeded and diced | 100g Cheddar cheese, grated |

Cook the broccoli in boiling water for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, in a large bowl whisk together the eggs, adding the milk and half the cheese and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper. In a deep frying pan, fry the pepper in the oil until softened. Drain the broccoli and add to the pan with the pepper. Pour over the egg mixture and cook for 3 minutes so that the bottom layer and sides begin to cook. Then pop the frying pan under the grill to cook the top half of the frittata. This should take another 5 minutes. When it starts to look golden, remove and scatter the remaining half of the cheese on top and return under the grill until it has melted. Allow to cool before cutting into slices.

I guess there has been flooding from year dot. There were terrible floods equal to today's in Swaledale in the 1600's, 1700's and 1800's, the river came up quickly with no weather forecasting and took 'livestock' and destroyed livelihoods. But farming here has changed little between then and now. There isn't intensive farming here, the same pastures are surrounded by the same stone walls, the same river takes the same course and occasionally floods onto the same plains. Urbanisation and farming intensification have not ravaged this corner of Britain. We are in a National Park. Most farmers here are not organic and have developed an annoying nitrate habit to magic up long green grass in an overgrazed field and a herbicide habit to kill off weeds. But what has happened on the Somerset Levels and other regions is horrendous. The departure from traditional small farms to huge corporate-owned, prairie-scale maize growing where hedges and trees are grubbed up, leaving bare and desolate plains with no root structures. This means the topsoil is unset and unprotected, free to blow away as dust or be carried into the waterways as silt in the rains. Top soil and root structures hold water but soil compacted by heavy farm machinery into the layers of clay beneath is like rain falling onto concrete.

When the minutiae of our businesses and daily lives are controlled by regulation, farming has just been a free-for-all. Landowners have become unregulated demi-Gods to do what they want irrespective of the consequences, aided and abetted by the EU and our government. Most farmers don't want to go organic as it is too regulated. Everyone else has to live with onerous regulation. The organic movement stood back and looked at farming 'holistically', in the context of the environment, of healthy sustainable food production, the preservation of the fertility of our soils, the preservation of wildlife habitats and the preservation of root structures. Organic farming is depressingly on the decrease with more acreage going out of organic than coming into it. Our island is very small and getting smaller. Someone somewhere needs to get an overview, get a grip, and take control of how we farm,

what we farm and where we farm it. Our whole island should be treated with the respect of a National Park and be farmed according to organic principles.

Goodness gracious, it's Monday morning and the sun has just this second come out. The sun shines on the righteous !

Very best wishes,

Isobel