

**Monday 21<sup>st</sup> April 2014**

Dear Customer,

I hope you have had a lovely Easter break. Easter generally marks the start of the traditional 'hungry gap', when sourcing becomes difficult, that awkward period when the winter crops have ended and before the new English season begins. It is the time when we are most reliant on importing from the Mediterranean where they are already basking in sun and harvesting their first summer crops. We have already switched to Andalucian carrots and will start on their new Nicola potatoes soon, though these are in the luxury vegetable bags this week.

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

**New Season Carrot Cake**

250g golden caster sugar	2 free-range eggs
120ml sunflower oil	150g self-raising flour
1 tsp mixed spice	1 tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp baking powder	125g new carrot, finely chopped or grated
55g sultanas	110g walnuts
1-2 tbsp milk	1 pinch salt

Preheat the oven to 180C/Gas 4. Grease a 23cm cake tin and line with baking parchment. In a large mixing bowl whisk together the sugar and eggs until pale and fluffy, then gradually add the oil. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour, spices and baking powder. Fold into the wet ingredients then add the carrots, sultanas, walnuts, milk and salt. Transfer to the prepared cake tin and smooth the top gently. Bake in the centre of the preheated oven for 70-90 minutes until a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. Remove from the oven and cool before slicing and serving.

**Courgette Frittata**

1 onion, finely diced	3 tbsp olive oil
500g courgettes, finely sliced	5 free-range eggs

Using a 18-20cm frying pan, sweat the onion in the olive oil for 5-6 minutes until soft but not coloured. Add the courgettes to the pan, season and cook for a further 8-10 minutes over a low-medium heat until the courgettes have softened and lightly caramelised. Quickly beat the eggs together, season with salt and black pepper and pour into the pan. Use a spatula to distribute the egg evenly through the courgettes. Leave to cook until the egg begins to firm up near the base of the pan. Preheat the grill to a medium heat. Place the pan of frittata under the grill (keep handle away from heat or protected with foil) and cook for 4-5 minutes until the eggs are golden and set on top. Slide the frittata onto a serving plate and cut into wedges.

**Courgette and Bean Fusilli**

400g fusilli pasta	250g green beans, sliced
large bunch basil	100ml olive oil
2 large courgettes, diced	4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
50g butter or margarine	50g freshly grated Parmesan
2 lemons, juice	

Cook the pasta according to packet instructions until just tender. Add the beans to the pan for the last 2-3 minutes. Drain everything – reserving a ladleful of cooking liquid. While the pasta is cooking, pound the basil and a teaspoon of salt into a paste using a mortar and pestle and leave on one side. Heat the olive oil in a deep frying pan and cook the diced courgettes for 2-3 minutes over a medium heat. Stir in the garlic and fry for another minute. Add the hot pasta and beans to the pan with a ladleful of cooking water. Fold in the basil paste and butter or margarine and stir to combine. Add the grated cheese if using, and the lemon juice. Scatter over peeled and sliced lemon slices and drizzle with olive oil before serving.

I didn't get one single Easter egg! On the meadow opposite my house there is an Easter egg event every Easter Sunday. In the morning, the organisers go round hiding Easter eggs in tree trunks and down rabbit burrows. In the afternoon the gates are opened and the children of Richmond flood in, maps in hand, hunting down the eggs. I knew exactly where the eggs were as I saw them being hidden and could easily have gone out with a sack before the gates were opened.

I really impressed myself last autumn when I decided for the first time ever, to bring my pots of geraniums indoors to stop them being killed in the frosts. It was a mature and responsible act and one which I interpreted as having finally reached adulthood. One sunny day last week, I was equally impressed when I carried them back outside, arranged them round the pond, pulled off the dead leaves and watering-canned them. All back in place and they would grow bigger and better this year. Next night, there was a surprise visitor. It was the frost. Now their leaves are drooping and translucent and I'm wondering if I should be carrying them all back in. Now that would be one step too far, the pots are heavy, they will just have to try and survive as best they can.

I am a bit worried about all my friends. We're all getting on a bit and no one seems able to make that transition to adulthood. I spoke to one of them last night who told me about the dating site she'd just signed up to. She told me what she'd written in the 'what I am looking for' section. I must say, I was quite surprised. Surprised but not shocked as I don't get shocked easily. "yeah, nice one, go for it, I told her". She'd received 50 emails in the first hour. We are at a funny age and to avoid staring into the abyss, panic has set in. It doesn't matter what you do, just do it, live now and stuff what anyone thinks. That seems to be the motto!

It's Easter Monday, a huge hornet has just flown into my office, Myfa is whining with boredom as she always does when I have spent too long on the computer and too little time attending to her. Right, I will go and get dressed !

Kind wishes,

Isobel