

**Monday 23<sup>th</sup> March 2015**

Dear Customer,

I am pleased to report that I saw a half-open daffodil this afternoon. I don't think it quite had the confidence to open right up - probably felt a chill down its stem from the north wind. It's a start though. And here are lots of recipes to keep you out of mischief:

**Golden Beetroot TarteTatin**

75g golden sugar	40g butter
splash sherry vinegar	1 tbsp honey
7 thyme sprigs	4 fresh beetroot, cooked
250g puff pastry	salt and black pepper

*Preheat the oven to 180C /350F /Gas 4. Place a small, heavy, oven-safe frying pan over a medium heat. Add the sugar to the pan and stir until it dissolves, then add a big pinch of salt, the butter and a splash of sherry vinegar. Keep stirring until it has turned mahogany brown but don't let it burn. Add 1 tsp honey to the pan. Pick the thyme from the stalks and add them too. Remove from the heat and stir. Cut the cooked beetroot into nice fat slices and carefully arrange the slices on top of the caramel, working from the edge to the centre in a spiral pattern and season with salt and pepper. Roll out the pastry so it's big enough to cover the beetroot, then place it on top, tucking the edges down into the pan. Put in the oven for about 30 minutes or until the pastry is golden. When ready place an upturned plate over the frying pan and flip it over. Leave for 30 seconds to let the caramel mostly fall from the pan onto the plate then slowly lift the pan. Serve while still warm, possibly with creme fraiche or goats cheese.*

**Potato, Aubergine and Parmesan Gratin**

1 aubergine, cut in cubes	500g potatoes, peeled and diced
2 onions, sliced	2 cloves garlic, peeled and finely chopped
knob of butter	2 tbsp oil
400g tin chopped tomatoes	225ml vegetable stock
2 tsp dried mixed herbs	4 tbsp breadcrumbs
2 tbsp grated Parmesan	black pepper

*Cook the potatoes in a pan of boiling water for about 5 minutes then drain and reserve. Heat the oil and butter and add the onion. Fry gently until soft then add the garlic and aubergine and fry until tender. Add the potatoes and season with salt and pepper. Add the tomatoes and stock and simmer for 10 minutes. Place the mixture in a gratin or baking dish and sprinkle over the breadcrumbs and Parmesan and bake in the oven for 15 minutes until the topping is golden.*

**Spiced Potatoes with Aubergine and Coconut**

700g potatoes	1 aubergine
2 tsp black mustard seeds	2 red chillis, finely chopped ( to taste)
4 tsp turmeric	400ml tin coconut milk
fresh coriander	

*Cut the potatoes into 2cm cubes and the aubergine into 1cm cubes. Heat 2 tbsp oil in frying pan and fry the mustard seeds for a minute until they start popping. Add the chilli and stir in the potatoes and aubergine and fry for 1 minute. Stir in the turmeric and 400ml water. Cover and cook for 8 minutes. Stir in the coconut milk, season well and bring to the boil. Cook uncovered for 7-8 minutes until tender. Serve garnished with chopped coriander.*

**Sticky Orange Potato Cake**

350g potatoes, peeled and quartered	200g butter, softened
155g caster sugar	1 tsp vanilla extract
4 free range eggs	175g ground almonds
2 tbsp baking powder	finely grated zest and juice of 2 oranges
finely grated zest of 1 lemon	3 tbsp granulated sugar

*Steam and mash the potatoes and set aside to cool. Preheat the oven to 180C/Gas 4 and butter and line a 20cm deep round tin. Beat together the butter, caster sugar and vanilla extract until light and creamy. Gradually beat in the eggs then mix in the ground almonds, baking powder, cooled mashed potatoes, orange and lemon zest. Spoon into the cake tin smoothing over the surface and baking in the oven for 45-50 minutes. While the cake is cooking put the orange juice in a small saucepan and bring to the boil, reducing by half. Cool then stir in the granulated sugar. When cake is just firm and a skewer comes out clean, remove from the oven and leave in the tin for 15 minutes then turn onto a wire rack to cool. Spoon the orange juice mixture over the cake and allow to cool completely before slicing. Yum !*

I am still playing the waiting game on the Garden Centre, still brooding over catering equipment on ebay, brooding over apprentices, over floor options, colour charts, bakers, candlestick makers... I do expect to sign the lease this week though then it will be all systems go.

And Wow ! Great sights in Leicester as all those thousands of people, tearful with joy and sadness, lined the streets throwing white roses onto the coffin of Egbert the cobbler – born a pauper and buried a King - a real Cinderella story ( you would have a curvature of the spine crumpled up in a little hole for 600 years ). If over 17 generations each generation had on average 2 surviving children who each had 2 surviving children, that's over 8 million descendants. I know that my line, if you wiggle back and take up the male line from my great, great grandfather, it goes back to Owain Tudor, father of Henry VII who killed Richard III, there are presumably 8

million of us. Anyway, not to be outdone and realising the benefits to the local economy I noted on the news that they have suddenly just found the bones of 'Don Quixote author, Cervantes' in a tomb in Madrid ! Just think, in 500 years' time, someone might dig you up and rebury you as Lady Gaga or Frank Sinatra – they would find one of her 8 million descendants, take a swab of DNA and prove it was her and not you. With every passing decade science outdoes previous science. DNA is a work in progress.

Kind wishes,

Isobel