



Monday 19th September 2016

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Yet another weekend of wall to wall sunshine here in the Dales, and the last bit of summer I suspect, so I did my best to spend it outdoors – last chance to boost vitamin D levels.

I haven't had any time to do my garden this year, it hasn't been my top priority and it's gone a bit out of control - a return to wilderness - matted vegetation, shrubs entwined with brambles, 5ft nettles, random new trees. I took Ernest's gardening advice to just snip across the top at eye level with a pair of shears and ignore the rest. It made a big difference and makes it look like someone's living in the house. I managed to get something into the green bin for tomorrow's collection for a change. There's nothing more disheartening on a Sunday night than seeing every single green bin on the street out except for mine - glaringly absent from the line-up.

It's just as well I'm not an organic grower – your bags would be as empty each week as my green bin.

Your Cos lettuces this week are from Pam Bowers in the fens in Lincolnshire. Pam was one of our very first growers when we started over 20 years ago. She was one of the originals. With no horticultural training it started out as a dream for her and her partner Rick to become self-sufficient. In 1975 armed with guru John Seymour's 'A Complete Book of Self-Sufficiency', they left their housing estate in Hertfordshire, bought their fenland property Strawberry Fields and embarked on the 'good life'. The family quickly became self-sufficient growing their own vegetables and with hens, a goat and sheep to make their own clothes from. They only bought in salt and coffee. Even then she remembers making a coffee substitute concocted from dandelion roots. But there were still inevitable bills to pay so they started selling surplus vegetables to the local markets. Through the 1980's they expanded their acreage and started taking growing commercially seriously. It was all a steep learning curve. Many organic growers packed in during the recessionary early 90's but through conviction Pam and Rick stuck it out. Pam split up with Rick in 1995 and found solace by doubling her acreage and planting new hedgerows and organising crop rotations. All her four children, now grown up, work in the business in some capacity, with Clyde and Dicken being her business partners.

Here are some quick and tasty recipes you could try this week:

Courgette and Carrot Gratin

<i>3 courgettes, in 1/4" slices</i>	<i>2 carrots, in 1/8" slices</i>
<i>2 medium onions, thinly sliced</i>	<i>2 heaped tbs butter</i>
<i>2 heaped tbs flour</i>	<i>250ml of vegetable stock</i>
<i>250ml of milk</i>	<i>salt and black pepper to taste</i>
<i>60g breadcrumbs</i>	<i>60g Gruyere cheese, grated</i>

Heat the butter over medium high heat until foaming. Add the onions. Turn the heat down to low and cook, without colouring, for about 10 minutes until very soft. Tip in the carrots and courgettes. Cook and stir until the courgettes are softening. Sprinkle the flour over the vegetables and stir. Mix the milk and stock together and then slowly pour this over the top, stirring gently and cooking until it thickens. Season it to taste with salt and pepper.

Preheat the oven to 200C/400F/Gas mark 6. Grease a shallow gratin dish. Pour the courgette mixture into the gratin dish. Mix together the breadcrumbs and the Gruyere cheese. Sprinkle this mixture evenly over top of the vegetables. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes until bubbling and lightly browned on top. Allow to sit for about 10 minutes before spooning out to serve.

Red Pepper, Fennel and Tomato Paella

<i>900ml vegetable stock</i>	<i>2 tbsp olive oil</i>
<i>1 large onion, finely chopped</i>	<i>2 red peppers, deseeded and sliced</i>
<i>300g tinned chopped tomatoes</i>	<i>1 1/2 tsp paprika</i>
<i>250g paella rice</i>	<i>1 small bulb fennel</i>

Bring the veg stock to the boil. Heat the olive oil in a wide frying pan over a medium-high heat. Finely chop the onion, deseed and dice the peppers and fry for 5 minutes. Add the crushed garlic cloves, chopped tomatoes and paprika and fry for 2 minutes. Stir in the paella rice. Shave the fennel, reserving the leaves, and add to the pan then season. Pour over the stock and bring to the boil. Reduce to a simmer and leave the rice to cook uncovered without stirring, for 10 minutes. Shake the pan and cook for a further 10 minutes. Turn off the heat, cover with foil and let rest for 5 minutes. Serve with the reserved fennel leaves, a squeeze of lemon and lemon wedges.

Roasted Fennel, Onion and Potato

<i>large bulb fennel</i>	<i>650g potatoes, peeled</i>
<i>2 onions, each cut in 6 wedges</i>	<i>40g butter or margarine</i>
<i>2 cloves garlic, crushed</i>	<i>50g cheese, grated (optional)</i>

Preheat the oven to 200C/180C Fan/ Gas 6. Grease a shallow 2.5 litre ovenproof dish, about 9" x 12". Trim the top from the fennel and cut the bulb into 6 wedges. Cut the potatoes to about the same size. Bring a large pan of salted water to the boil then cook the fennel and onion for about 5 minutes. Add the potatoes and boil for a further 5 minutes until all the vegetables are just tender. Drain well. Put the butter and garlic in the empty vegetable pan and set over a low heat until just melted. Add the vegetables to the butter or margarine, toss until coated then tip into the prepared dish. Sprinkle with the cheese, if using, then bake for 30-40 minutes until piping hot.

When I brought the sheep up the lane a week or so ago, I videoed it with my phone and put it on facebook. In the field which runs alongside the road, the lambs belonging to the neighbouring farm were so excited and ran alongside us on the other side of the fence. They were so sweet and I captured them on video too. On Saturday I noticed that field was empty, they'd gone. I can't bear September, the September sales, all the lambs being 'sent away'. Because I watched the video back many times their sweet faces are etched in my mind.

I hope you have a good week,

Kind regards,

Isobel