



Monday 20th March 2017

Dear Customer,

Spring is slowly breaking up here in the Dales. Joy of joy, I saw the first daffodils in bloom this week on the grass verge which runs along the front of Norman Brown the estate agent's garden. He must have a microclimate on his verge – always the first out. It's not feeling balmy but it doesn't feel wintry either, and just 2 more weeks before the clocks go forward.

Green bin collections start again this week so I took a deep breath, put on my wellies, gathered up a few implements and headed into the matted mess of my own garden. I raked some of the dead leaves off the flower beds and used my bread knife to saw away the rotting down leaves of the irises. It was all going well until I sawed straight through my little finger. Freaked out and pouring blood I rushed inside for treatment. Every time I try and do any gardening it always ends badly. My neighbour has a different relationship with her garden – she's always in it and wanders round with a mug of tea doing a little bit of this and a bit of that. I rush out and attack it – get cut, stung and lacerated - now sawn. I'm too ferocious. I'm going to try slow gardening now with a cup of tea and something to kneel on - will try to get to the bottom of why people enjoy gardening and find it relaxing.

We have delicious Lancashire cabbages in the bags this week from Royal Oak, a family farm, farmed by Peter Lydiate, his partner Cheryl and his brother. They grow potatoes, squashes, broccoli, kales and cabbages to name but a few. They have really good peaty soil which is so dark in places that it makes the unwashed potatoes look black but at the same time gives them their fantastic flavour and high mineral content.

Here are a few tasty recipes you could try and a great way to cook your cabbage:

Roast Cabbage Wedges

1 green cabbage, cut into 8 wedges, core trimmed
1 tsp caraway or cumin seeds
salt and freshly ground black pepper

5 tbsp olive oil
1 large lemon, cut into 4 wedges

Set the oven to 220C/ 425F/ Gas 7. Brush the cabbage wedges all over with olive oil. Put them on the baking tray and sprinkle with the seeds then season well. Add the lemon wedges. Roast for about 25-30 minutes turning them over halfway through cooking. Squeeze lemon juice over before serving.

Carrot and Courgette Soup

250g courgettes, sliced
125g potatoes, chopped
25g butter or margarine
900ml vegetable stock

425g carrots, chopped
1 onion, chopped
black pepper

Melt the butter or margarine in a large saucepan, add the onion and fry. Add the courgettes, carrots, potatoes, stock and black pepper. Cook until the vegetables are tender then whizz in the blender.

Spaghetti with Courgette and Chilli

200g spaghetti
2 tbsp olive oil
½ red chilli, sliced

2 medium courgettes
1 clove garlic, crushed
olive oil

Cook the pasta to al dente according to packet instructions in a large saucepan of salted boiling water. Meanwhile slice the courgettes lengthways using a vegetable peeler. Heat the olive oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Add the courgettes, garlic and chilli. Stir over the heat for about 3 minutes until soft. Season well with salt and black pepper. When the pasta is cooked, drain and return it to the pan. Add the courgette, taste and adjust the seasoning. Serve with a drizzle of olive oil.

Courgette, Pistachio and Golden Raisin Cake

200g courgettes, unpeeled and grated
60g pistachios
1 tsp ground ginger
200g light brown soft sugar
185ml olive oil

zest of 1 lemon
175g self-raising flour
½ tsp ground star anise
50g caster sugar
2 Hen Nation eggs

Preheat the oven to 190C/ Gas 5. Grease a 1k loaf tin and line the base and sides with baking parchment allowing to overhang at the sides. Once the oven is hot, roast the pistachios for 8 minutes. Leave them whole then leave to cool. Mix the flour, a pinch of salt, the ginger and star anise together and add the pistachios. Place the sugars and oil in a large mixing bowl and whisk together until combined. Whisk the eggs in one at a time and keep whisking until you have an emulsified texture, a little like mayonnaise. Then add the rest of the ingredients and using a large spoon fold and combine into an even mixture. Transfer the cake batter into the lined loaf tin and bake for 35 minutes. Turn the tin round so that it bakes evenly and leave for a further 15-20 minutes. It should have a springy feel. Allow to cool in the tin before removing.

I had a very intense year last year and my hair was not high priority. In fact all my highlights had completely grown out and for the first time since childhood I had a full head of my natural hair colour. The hairdresser came on Saturday morning. After updating me on her love life she told me I had no natural warmth at all in the colour of my hair. That was interesting to know. So she chopped my hair off and put the highlights back in.

I have just had an email from the organic farmer in Camarthenshire. He had obviously been on the internet and found out that Shetland sheep like eating trees. They prefer trees to grass actually – they are like locusts. He told me has 14 fields and copses full of ancient beeches and oaks and he doesn't think it is going to be possible to get them all protected. He needs a couple of days to think about it but I know he has already decided that they can't go there so I am back to the drawing board. I now have two months to find them somewhere.

Kind wishes,

Isobel