



Monday 2nd August 2021

Dear Customer,

Wow, August already. The summer seems to be flying by. The week has been largely grey and rainy with the occasional sunny interlude but dramatically cooler. But it hasn't been a bad summer overall so far.

We have delicious celery from the Cambridge fens in the bags this week. Here are a few tasty recipes you could try with it:

Cream of Celery Soup

2 tbsp butter or margarine, plus extra to serve	1 onion, roughly chopped
1 head celery, sliced	1 large potato, scrubbed and cubed
1 apple, peeled, cored and cubed	1 litre hot vegetable stock
2 slices ciabatta, torn into small pieces	170ml single Cream
fresh parsley, finely chopped	

Melt 1 tbsp of butter/ margarine in a pan and cook the onion and celery for 5 minutes. Add the potato, apple and stock. Boil then simmer gently for 25 minutes until the vegetables are tender. Melt the remaining butter/ margarine in a frying pan and cook the torn ciabatta for 5 minutes or so until golden brown and crunchy. Using a hand-held blender, whizz the soup until smooth. Remove from the heat, stir in the cream and parsley and ladle into bowls. Sprinkle with crunchy ciabatta croutons and serve.

Slow Roasted Celery

40g hazelnuts, chopped	head of celery, halved lengthwise, leaves coarsely chopped
2 cloves garlic, crushed	1½ tbs apple cider
2 tbsp olive oil	fresh parsley, coarsely chopped
100ml vegetable stock, acidified with the 1 tbsp apple cider	75g crumbled blue cheese, or alternative

Preheat the oven to 200°C. Bring a pan of salted water to a boil. Blanch the celery for 3 minutes then scoop out with a slotted spoon and let drain. Place the celery on a baking sheet, cut sides down. Whisk the garlic with the cider and oil and season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle the celery with half of the dressing and half of the parsley and slide the baking sheet into the oven. Pour the stock over them and cook for 45 to 60 minutes, until it's al dente and the tips are colouring. To serve: drizzle with the rest of the dressing; sprinkle with the rest of the parsley, celery leaves, cheese, and hazelnuts.

It's still amphibian hell here. I may be responsible for a froglet genocide and am reeling from it. The two men came last week to 'point' the paving. Before they started I gathered up any froglets I could see, took them to safety behind the aluminium bin and asked them to leave that area. They started hammering out the old mortar. I went out a few times and new froglets had appeared, maybe from underneath, maybe they could get out after all. I picked them up and peered into the cracks. The men started rescuing any they saw and threw them on the lawn. I told them it was going to be mown.

When they started to mix sand and cement to pour in, I had to leave the house. I felt sick but thought if I don't do it now, then all the tadpoles yet to leave the pond and future generations of froglets will all fall down into that underworld to a probable death.

I wanted to believe that there were none underneath when they filled it in, but when I got back, they'd finished, and one of them looked as if he'd just walked away from someone's death bed. I felt sick again. We didn't speak.

I then set about creating a sanctuary for them away from cracks and builders and lawnmowers. At the back of the decking, a platform which looms over my sloping garden, is a big beech tree and beneath it a damp, dark and sheltered corner with a little stone wall, and heaps of leaves and debris. I added a few more rocks and lay an old watering can on its side. I took a bucket and started collecting the froglets from around the storage bin. I looked into the bucket and they were all coming straight back out, climbing up the side. I had no idea they could climb. I got them moved and have just been catching the odd stragglers.

This morning there was a purple bird dropping, from eating berries no doubt, next to the aluminium bin. I didn't think much of it. Then I went to check on the froglets and there was the same signature purple bird dropping on one of the stones I'd laid there.

So some clever thrush or other knew exactly where the frogs were and then found where they'd been moved to. All nicely collected into one place for him to pick off. I've been providing his live bait. I don't know how any of them ever survive, the odds are so stacked against them.

I've failed miserably trying to protect them. On top of that, the other day I found a fledgling wood pigeon flapping about on the paving, unable to fly, injured and with blood on his legs, I caught him, put him in a box to take him to the wildlife sanctuary and within seconds he was dead. The parents have been grieving. Every single morning they are normally waiting by the kitchen door for their breakfast. They come back about four times a day and I dutifully feed them and have for years. Since the fledgling's death there has been no sign of them.

Apart from killing all the wildlife in my garden I've been to a music festival. I went to see my cousin's band, a girl trio from East London called Deep Tan. As you can imagine, I was pretty freaked out to get the message from her that morning saying she was playing near Thirsk and inviting me. A music festival with thousands of people after a lockdown of near solitude. How was I going to do that ! Well, I wasn't. I told her I knew she'd be really preoccupied and that I would text her when I got there if I made it. There was no way I could go. ' For God's sake, bloody well go' I told myself. 'No, I can't face it.' I really did want to see her and see her new band. I hadn't committed myself so thought I could just drive over and take a look, then decide whether to 'enter' the site. I put on my vegan biker boots. The rain was torrential. I couldn't find my waterproof jacket. I went back and fore to the car, round the bedrooms, the cloakroom, searched for twenty minutes - nothing. I was now really late. Then I had a eureka moment. Was it in the airing cupboard ? Yes, there it was, drying out from the last drenching. I went out to the car and could clearly see the front tyre was flat. I would try and make it to the garage. Got to the garage, rain was still torrential. I did the near side, went to the far side but it was raining so hard I couldn't see through the window what the reading was. I was waiting for a beep, it didn't beep. It looked like the tyre was deflating. I was so late. I got out the town and ahead of me it said the road was closed due to flooding. 'I'll turn back', 'no, you keep going'. I knew they would be on stage by now. I made up another route, and ahead of me was a convoy of travellers crawling along, Ford transits pulling huge caravans. After 10 minutes they turned off. The band would probably have finished by now. Maybe they were running late. By chance I found the festival site. There were so many Gates, I went to the nearest and they sent me to the furthest, told them there was a pass for me. They pointed me to a place to park in some mud. I ran across asking if they'd played yet. 'Is that the main stage ?' I asked. It was, there were just roadies on it. They took me to a marquee where I could find my cousin having just finished. Pleased I went though, caught up with the band, had some festival food, had a taste of normal.

Kind wishes and hope you have a good week, Isob