

Monday 12th March 2012

Dear Customer,

I hope all is well with you and that you are enjoying this wonderful Spring weather. We have broccoli in the bags this week for a change. I guess we have come to regard it as a staple as it is so easy to prepare and cook and it is so good for one ! It is high in beta carotene, vitamin C, folic acid and iron as well as having moderate levels of calcium. It is also called 'calabrese', having originated in Calabria. It was introduced to France from Italy by Catherine d Medici in 1560 and spread from there to the rest of Europe. It was introduced to the US by early Italian settlers and is extensively grown around New York and Boston. Fascinating isn't it ! The potatoes this week are Cara variety from Royal Oak Farm in Ormskirk. Here are a few light, spring recipes you could try with your ingredients:

Light Leek Soup

500g leeks
1½ pints water
salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 tbsp olive oil
3 tbsp cream
grated nutmeg

Trim the roots and inedible parts off the leeks, slit them open and rinse them clean. Cut them in half downwards, down again and then across thinly to get very small pieces. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan and put in the leeks, stir, then cover and let them cook very gently for 10 minutes, stirring a couple of times. Add the water and let the soup simmer for about 20 minutes, or until the leeks are very tender. Liquidise about two-thirds of the soup – leave the rest as it is to add texture. Stir in the cream and season the soup well with salt, black pepper and freshly grated nutmeg. You can serve hot but this is also delicious served chilled.

Cauliflower Tomato Cheese

1 tbsp olive oil
1 garlic clove, crushed
1 cauliflower
125g Cheddar or Gruyere cheese

1 onion, peeled and chopped
1 x 400g tin tomatoes
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Make the tomato sauce: heat the olive oil in a medium pan then fry the onion in it for 5 minutes, until beginning to soften. Add the garlic and tomatoes, breaking the tomatoes up roughly with a wooden spoon. Bring to the boil and let the mixture simmer away for 10-15 minutes, until it is very thick and any excess liquid has evaporated. Meanwhile, wash and trim the cauliflower, breaking it into florets. Cook it in 2" of boiling water for about 5 minutes, until tender, then drain. Heat the grill. Mix the cauliflower florets with the tomato sauce and season well with salt and pepper. Spoon it into a shallow gratin dish, sprinkle with the grated cheese and grill until the cheese is golden brown.

Buttered Apples

450g eating apples
2 tsp sugar

15g butter
50g sultanas

Peel and quarter the apples, remove the cores then cut each quarter into thin slices. Melt the butter in a saucepan and add the apples, sugar and sultanas. Stir, then cook, uncovered over a gentle heat for about 3-4 minutes, stirring gently from time to time, until the apples have heated through and softened. Serve hot with a thick natural yoghurt and a shortbread biscuit !

Bananas with Cream and Sesame Crisp

2 tbsp sesame seeds
150ml whipping cream
4 large bananas

6 tbsp caster sugar
150ml Greek yoghurt

First make the sesame crisp: have ready a square of non-stick paper. Put the sesame seeds with the sugar into a small, heavy-based saucepan and place over the heat. After a minute or so the sugar will melt and within a few seconds will go golden. At this moment, remove it from the stove and pour it in a thin layer over the non-stick paper. Set aside to harden. Whip the cream and fold it into the Greek yoghurt. Peel and slice the bananas and put into one large, or small individual bowls. Spoon the yogurt cream on top. Peel the paper off the sesame crisp then crush it into pieces by banging with a rolling pin and scatter the pieces on top of the bananas and cream.

I'm in a funny mood you will notice ! I think it's the seasonal adjustment having spent the winter, tense, with gritted teeth – the sun and warmth, starting to relax, is a bit of a shock. I came down with a migraine on Wednesday night and at 4am, in agony and vomiting, I really wanted to text a photographer who was coming up from London that morning and ask him to delay but I knew he was on a tight deadline to take photos for an Australian magazine. He wanted shots of the Dales too so we had to drive into Swaledale. I look neither attractive or interesting at the best of times, so with my migraine he was really up against it. He was with me for about 6 hours trying to get a decent shot. I didn't have time to recover as another photographer came the next day from a Newcastle magazine – same excruciating pain and bloodshot eyes ! After a long sleep and strange dreams I got out into the garden to try and weed the pain away. It was glorious weather but I went into post-migraine existential angst - 'what was the point of weeding, they'd all grow straight back, why did I want a nice garden, and what was the point of anything come to that'. I snapped out of it a bit when I took Myfa onto the moors and instead of following a footpath, I followed a crystal clear stream and wended my way up to it's source with Myfa zigzagging across the moor ahead of me – jumping the stream one way, disappearing for 5 minutes, then bounding back the other way.

After a 4-page piece and the cover of the Yorkshire Post Magazine on Saturday, in which I was gratefully puffed up out of all recognition, into magnificence even (a lot to live up to !), I was spotted and have been invited by Lord Digby Jones' office and the UKTI to a session in London, as one of 15 Yorkshire fashion and textile companies, on how to find international markets with advice from Anya Hindmarsh, Orla Kierly and many more. I know I have expressed my frustration here in this letter at not being able to access any information or support on this in the past so it should be interesting. I'll let you know how I get on !

Today, this Monday morning, the weather is simply heavenly again,

Kind wishes,

Isobel