

Monday 28th October 2013

Dear Customer,

I hope you are still there, didn't get blown away. I don't think St Jude is coming north anymore but heading across East Anglia and veering off to Denmark. I'm a bit disappointed. I love trees, but..... I was hoping it might come and blow down the big sycamores opposite my house which block my view. Providing, of course, that they didn't come through the roof. I remain resigned to their presence and moaning about them any time anyone pops round. The plans I have made for them – infecting them with sycamore-murdering beetles, sawing off their limbs, getting Ernest to skid off the road in his tractor and plough through them.

We have Tadcaster' cavolo nero in the bags this week and leeks and Harlequin squashes from Ormskirk. Our Sicilian tomatoes-on-the-vine and Honeydew melons are currently stuck at Calais, waiting for the ferries to set sail again so will miss the Tuesday bags. We have red Desiree potatoes from the Yorkshire Moors and Black Autumn grapes from Andalucia.

You could halve, deseed and slice your squash, put on a baking tray, drizzle with olive oil, season and roast until tender. You could peel and chop it and add it to soups or stews. Squashes are so nutritious – full of vitamins A, B6, E and C as well as calcium, iron, magnesium, potassium, niacin and folate.

Here are a few recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Harlequin Squash with Puy Lentil Mash

<i>1 Harlequin squash, washed and unpeeled</i>	<i>1 cup Puy lentils, rinsed in cold water</i>
<i>1 tsp vegetable bouillon</i>	<i>2 tbsp olive oil</i>
<i>freshly ground black pepper</i>	

Halve the squash, scoop out the seeds and cut it into 6 segments (like an orange). Place in a pan and cover with boiling water. Boil, covered for about 12 minutes or until soft. Remove the squash but reserve the water. Cover the lentils with 3 cups of the reserved water in a pan, bring to the boil, add a teaspoon of the bouillon and simmer for 35 minutes, adding extra water if it starts to dry out. Meanwhile, scoop the squash flesh from the skin into a bowl, add black pepper, the olive oil and mash. Drain the lentils and mix in with the mash. Serve with a tomato salad and some crusty bread. A good hearty, nutritious autumn meal.

Mediterranean Soup with Cavolo Nero

<i>1 tbsp olive oil</i>	<i>1 onion, chopped</i>
<i>1 red or yellow pepper, diced</i>	<i>1 litre vegetable stock</i>
<i>400g tin chopped tomatoes</i>	<i>400g tin cannellini beans, drained and washed</i>
<i>200g cavolo nero shredded</i>	

Heat the oil in a large saucepan and fry the onion and pepper for 4-5 minutes. Add the remaining ingredients and season. Bring to the boil, simmer covered for 6-8 minutes. Serve with warm crusty bread.

Cavolo Nero Potato Cakes

<i>800g Desiree potatoes</i>	<i>1 tbsp oil</i>
<i>1 onion chopped</i>	<i>50g Parmesan cheese, grated</i>
<i>150g cavolo nero, finely shredded</i>	<i>2 tbsp flour</i>

Boil the potatoes for 10 minutes or until tender, drain return to the pan, mash and season. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a frying pan and fry the onion for 3-4 minutes until golden. Stir into the mashed potato with the Parmesan then allow to cool. Steam the cavolo nero for 4 minutes and then stir into the potato. When just cold enough to handle, stir in the flour and mould into 8 rounds. Shallow fry in 2 batches for 1-2 minutes on each side or until golden and heated through. Serve with a salsa.

I went over to Tosside to see our hens at the weekend. Some of them are going off the rails. One of them, Caroline, has been living with the pigs for the last month. She spends the day in their paddock and at night sleeps with them in the pig arc. Red-eye, after laying her morning egg, is spotted marching off and disappearing onto the moors, there is no sign of her until just before dark, when she arrives back. She does this every day. A small group of six have colonised the greenhouse. They are mayhem.

The sheep are eating so much grass, their huge, round bellies are barely an inch off the ground. I don't think I've seen them not eating for the last 6 months. That is unusual. I would often find them all lying down chewing the cud. Even the occasions I have been there in the dark, I have found them all still eating. As primitive breeds it does make me wonder about them having innate powers of weather prediction. Do they sense a harsh winter coming or does the grass at Hornby just taste so sweet.

As you can see, no real news. Ernest has just brought round a bag of Daily Mails for me to use as guinea pig litter and returned Herman Hesse's, The Glass Bead Game, which he enjoyed. Where do I go from here? James Joyce, Ulysses? For anyone new to Farmaround, Ernest was the shepherd who looked after my 500 sheep until the end of the last winter, when he said he couldn't take it anymore. An ex-dairy farmer in his sixties, he hadn't read a book since school or been further than 15 miles from Richmond in his life, so I embarked on a sort of 'educating Ernest'. I started him on Middlemarch, then Jane Austen and the Brontes, then Hardy and Dickens, and then, the hard-core, the Russians – Dostoevsky, Tolstoy's War and Peace and Anna Karenina. Right, I've just pulled Jean Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness off the shelf – that will do nicely. It makes me shudder just looking at it ☺

Hope this letter finds you well, and better than Ernest will be once he's read this next book from the syllabus.

Kind wishes,

Isobel