

Monday 17th March 2014

Dear Customer,

It's Monday morning and it's quite nippy up here and very grey. We watched in horror as those of you in the south were battered by the winter winds and submerged by the rains. Now we watch in envy as you wander round in t shirts and sit out in deck chairs. So all back to normal.

I 'am loving' the psb (purple sprouting broccoli) from Royal Oak Farm. No delicate removal of the stems, just hack down the whole plant and pop it in the bag. That's better, that's what we want, leaves an' all.

We have Yellowstone carrots in the bags this week. Yellow, white and purple carrots pre-date orange carrots in carrot evolution. The first evidence of carrots is fossil pollen from the Eocene period, 34-55 million years ago. There is evidence of their first cultivation 5000 years ago on the Iranian Plateau which covered the areas which are now Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. They were descendants of wild carrots which still grow today in parts of Asia. Carrots arrived in Spain in the 1100's via the Middle East and North Africa. By the 16th century, when orange carrots were first documented, they were being widely grown all over Europe. Over the ensuing centuries, orange carrots began to dominate and the other colours were only grown in remote regions. Orange carrots have therefore had centuries of hybridising but the yellow carrots in your bags this week are probably the same as you might have stewed up in your former life when you were in the Guti tribe and started an allotment on the banks of the Indus. I know you remember it well. Interestingly this area is said to be the only area which escaped the Ice Age. It would therefore make sense that so many of our vegetables originate from there.

Here are some delicious recipes you could try this week:

Courgette Pasta Bake

225g uncooked pasta
500g courgettes, diced
2 garlic clove, crushed
1 tbsp chopped fresh basil
600g tomato passata
salt and black pepper

1 vegetable stock cube
1 large red onion, finely sliced
1 chilli, sliced
2 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
3 tbsp fromage frais (optional)

Preheat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5. Cook the pasta in a pan of boiling water containing the stock cube, then drain. Preheat a large non-stick frying pan and dry-fry the courgettes, onion and garlic in the pan for 3 - 4 minutes. Add the chilli, basil and tomato passata. Bring the sauce to a gentle simmer, then stir in the cooked pasta and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to an oven-proof dish and bake in the oven for 30 minutes. Just before serving, dot with fromage frais, if using, and sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley. Serve with fresh purple sprouting broccoli or a fresh green salad.

Butternut Squash Sauteed with Lemon, Walnuts and Parsley

2 tbsp olive oil
butternut squash (1 medium or 2 small), peeled and cut into ½ inch cubes
salt and freshly ground black pepper
1½oz toasted walnuts

2 tbsp butter or margarine
fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped
1½ tsp freshly grated lemon zest

Heat the oil and, butter or margarine, in a frying pan. When hot, add the squash and season with salt and pepper. Cook the squash, stirring occasionally, until it is lightly browned and tender, 8-10 minutes. Transfer to a serving bowl and mix in the parsley, walnuts and lemon zest. Serve

Butternut Squash and Orange Cake

225g self-raising flour
1 tbsp mixed spice
175g caster sugar
200ml sunflower oil
1 orange (juice and zest)

1½ tsp baking powder
1 tsp ground ginger
3 large eggs, beaten
225g butternut squash puree

To make the puree, peel and cut the squash into 2cm square chinks and steam for 8-10 minutes, then mash into a puree. Preheat the oven to 180C/160C Fan/Gas 4. Grease and line the base of a shallow tin 6½" x 10½". Mix together the flour, baking powder and spices into a large bowl and stir in the sugar. Make a well in the centre and add the eggs, oil and zest and juice of the orange, then stir until smooth. Add the butternut squash puree and mix well. Spoon the batter into the cake tin and bake in the centre of the oven for 45-55 minutes until a skewer comes out clean from the centre of the cake. Allow to cool for 10 minutes before turning it onto a wire rack. Icing is optional but goes well with lemon or cream cheese icing or just a dusting of sugar.

As I said, it's Monday morning, and Crimea has just voted overwhelmingly to be part of Russia again. It's very nice to see William Hague playing such a prominent role in condemning the Russians and gives plenty of food for thought as to what it would be like to be the recipient of a nuclear bomb. It isn't a vote winner for the next election, honestly it isn't. Please just let the Russians take back Crimea and even Eastern Ukraine and let us enjoy the spring crocuses and plan our summer holidays ! Let's put World War III on hold for the moment, because otherwise you render our whole lives meaningless. It's ok to back off and stand down. It won't make you look like a wimp. Just to reiterate, it really isn't what will give you a steal on the two Eds.

On a brighter note, there are twelve big toads mating in my small pond. I went out to dredge it of autumn leaves to find them there. I, of course, couldn't bring myself to disturb their fervour and the procreation of their next generation.

Kind wishes,

Isobel ☺