

Monday 2nd February 2015

Dear Customer,

It's very cold now, the snow isn't really thawing up here – it's hot soup weather. I bought myself a new Kenwood whizzer - so much easier than tipping it all in batches into the blender. We have lots of great soup material in the bags this week – leeks, squashes, parsnips, lovely Spanish onions.... I throw apples and pears into my soups too. There's nothing better than a hearty, vegetable (and fruit) soup with olive oil-fried wholemeal croutons to boost your immune system. Here are some recipes you could try this week:

Oven-Roasted Hokkaido Squash

1 medium or 2 small squash
3 tbsp sunflower or olive oil
4 tsp toasted sesame seeds
3 garlic cloves
salt and pepper

Wash and cut the squash in half, then cut again into u-shaped pieces. Remove the seeds (the peel of this squash is edible). Place them on a paper-lined baking tray. Peel the garlic, press it into a small bowl and mix with the oil. Season with salt and pepper. Brush the squash with the garlic marinade and sprinkle with the sesame seeds. Bake at 200C in the preheated oven for 20-25 minutes until tender.

Alert: Don't throw your squash seeds away – clean them of any attached flesh, rinse and dry them, then put on a baking tray coated with a bit of oil and salt for 15 minutes until they start popping - a lovely healthy snack.

Roasted Savoy Cabbage

1 savoy cabbage
salt and freshly ground black pepper
olive oil
lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 20C/400F and grease a rimmed baking tray. Cut the cabbage into quarters and carve out the core. Cut each quarter into two lengthwise, and slice crosswise thinly. Place the cabbage on the prepared baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and toss to coat. Place in the oven and bake for 15 minutes, stirring halfway through, until cooked through and golden brown in places. Sprinkle with black pepper and dress with lemon juice. Serve

Nigella's Savoy Cabbage with Garlic and Cream

1 savoy cabbage, finely shredded
5 tbs cream
6 big cloves garlic, grated
salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a large-based pan with a lid, cover the bottom of the pan with a cm of water and turn the heat up to high. Add the shredded cabbage and stir as the water heats up. When the water starts to boil, reduce the heat, stirring all the time. Once the cabbage has started to wilt but is still crisp, season it and add the garlic. Stir well and taste. Keep stirring and stir in the cream. Serve

Carrot Hummus

1 tsp cumin seeds
6 tbsp olive oil
500g carrots, peeled
juice of ½ lemon
3 tbsp tahini (or smooth peanut butter)
1 tsp coriander seeds
1 tsp clear honey
3 large cloves garlic, bashed
juice of 1 orange
sea salt and black pepper

Preheat the oven to 200 C/ Gas 6. In a dry frying pan, toast the cumin and coriander seeds for about a minute until just fragrant. Grind to a fine-ish powder using a pestle and mortar. In a large bowl whisk 4 tablespoons of the oil with the honey and toasted spices. Cut the carrots in 4-5cm chunks and add to the dressing with the garlic. Toss to coat and season with salt and pepper. Tip into a small roasting tin and roast, turning once, until the carrots are tender and just starting to char slightly around the edges, about 35 minutes. Allow to cool slightly then scrape everything into a food processor, slipping the garlic cloves out of the skins as you do. Add the lemon and orange juices, tahini (or peanut butter) and remaining oil and pulse to a puree. Adjust the seasoning if necessary and serve with pitta or garlic bread.

Failing seeming to be able to bring about any other change in my life, I've started moving my furniture round. My Colin and Hayes sofas must weigh a ton a piece. I've been pushing everything round trying to configure things better and have moved a table and chairs to the front of the house to maximise the views and the sun streaming in but this has displaced one sofa in particular which now has nowhere to go. I can't even push it out the house as my kitchen was built after it came and now it's blocked in. It won't fit through any door or window. I would have to carve it up to get it out.

I am therefore writing this with rugs rolled back and the perplexing sofa in the middle of the room. Apart from that my coffee table is now the wrong colour and shape to be residing so close to the dining table. It is rectangular and dark but it should now be round, either in light wood or glass. Now that the dining table is in front of some alcove shelves, the shelves now look too cluttered with ornaments – they need thinning out – and the curtains look wrong. I have a huge empty space where the dining table was and now that I intend to use it for the purpose it was intended instead of as a desk, I have piles of paperwork all over the floor. I've just messed everything up, it's a complete mess everywhere and I haven't got the physical energy to push it all back to where it was originally, where it all looked fine.

Ernest has been uncharacteristically cheerful this winter. Normally, from the end of october until the daffodils bloom, I don't see him – he goes to ground. I sometimes would notice him pass in his land rover, staring very intensely straight ahead.

Not this year for some reason but I saw him the other day and he had returned to his winter form. He was looking awful and anxious. He's been worried about the person who rents his land not paying him. Despite him seeing this man regularly he can't bring himself to ask him for it and the man never mentions it. Five hundred pounds had been due on 1st November. The other day, the man had come to his house with a box of eggs and instead of 6 eggs, there were 5 small eggs in it. Ernest has read this as his rent payment – one egg per £100. Kafka, where are you ?

Kind wishes,

Isobel