

Monday 25th September 2017

Dear Customer,

It may be hard labour but there's nothing better than mashed swede. It is full of everything you love – calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, manganese, potassium and vitamins A and C. Here are some tasty recipes you could try with it and with your cavolo nero.

Baked Swede

1 large swede, about 650g peeled weight
2 medium onions, peeled and thinly sliced
1 sprig of rosemary

40g margarine or butter
a few sage leaves
vegetable stock, to cover

Set the oven at 200C/ Gas 6. Cut the swede into slices about as thick as a pound coin. It is easier and safer to cut a slice from one side to steady the swede as you cut. Grease a baking dish or roasting tin. Lay the slices of swede and onion in the dish, seasoning them with salt and black pepper and strewing with a few sage and rosemary leaves as you go. Ladle over the stock so that it just covers the vegetables, five or so ladlefuls, then dot with margarine or butter. Bake in a preheated oven for an hour or so, turning the swede in the stock from time to time until the vegetables are very tender. Serve with juices spooned over.

Cavolo Nero and Potato Bake with Gruyere

800g potatoes, peeled and finely sliced

1 onion, finely chopped
½ tsp chilli flakes

Gruyere Sauce:

120g Gruyere, grated
50g plain flour
pinch nutmeg

1 tbsp olive oil
3 garlic cloves, chopped
1 bag cavolo nero, chopped

50g butter or margarine
500ml milk

Preheat the oven to 220C/ Gas 7. Simmer the potatoes in water for 5 minutes until just tender. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Saute the onion for 8 minutes until softened, then add the garlic and chilli and fry for another minute until fragrant. Stir in the cavolo nero, cover and cook for 6-8 minutes until wilted. Season and set aside. Meanwhile make the sauce. Put the cheese in a bowl. Melt the butter in a saucepan over a low heat then add the flour and cook, stirring constantly, for 3-4 minutes until pale golden. Gradually whisk in the milk until you have a silky sauce. Heat, stirring, almost to a simmer, then take off the heat and stir in the nutmeg and two thirds of the cheese. Lay half the potatoes in a 1.8-litre baking dish and cover with the cavolo nero mixture. Top with the remaining potatoes and pour over the sauce. Finish with the remaining cheese and bake for 25 minutes until golden and bubbling. Serve immediately.

Leek, Cavolo and Potato Soup

1 tbsp olive oil
2 garlic cloves, crushed
500g potatoes, cubed
100g cavolo nero, chopped in small pieces

1 onion, chopped
450g leeks, sliced
1.2 litres hot vegetable stock
handful thyme leaves

Heat the oil in a large lidded pan. Add the onion, garlic and leeks and cook for 5 minutes until just softened. Add the potatoes and pour in the stock. Bring to the boil, reduce the heat and cover. Simmer for 15-20 minutes until the potatoes are cooked through. Remove the soup from the heat and stir in the thyme. Using a blender thoroughly process until smooth. Return the soup to the pan and stir in the chopped cavolo nero. Bring back to the boil then simmer for a further 5-10 minutes and season to taste.

Once upon a time in the West we lived so modestly. Before mass food processing if we wanted a biscuit we had to make it - get the basin out and a bag of flour – there were no packs of crisps or crisp permutations, buns and bun permutations, chocolate digestives or tins of spaghetti hoops in the cupboard. If we had to cook everything from raw ingredients now, we would eliminate billions of kilos from our waistlines overnight and solve the obesity problem, improve our health, the NHS coffers and help our planet. I think we should do it – just ban it all and return to a grocer's shop on the corner selling raw ingredients, and even return to rationing. I would be delighted to not be able to buy biscuits anymore – or have them rationed at least – a voucher allowing me only 1 packet per month.

Watching a clip of a David Attenborough interview he said that there are three times more people on the planet now than when he first started broadcasting. That is absolutely terrifying and it's growing exponentially – 7.6 billion today growing to 11.2 billion by 2100 when current new-borns turn 83. That's our danger - the Kim Jong Un/Trump spat pales into irrelevance as we continue our determined march to self-destruction. The planet just can't support this weight of people and level of consumption. We need some strict almighty being to come down and take control, rein in our greed and hedonism (be it a mental health issue or not!). I had hoped that might be the Paris Climate Accord and that they might go beyond the climate remit and tackle waste, factory farming, the pollution of the oceans, the destruction of the natural world, sustainability. They could do so much. The US will be back in once Trump goes - except for Oregon, California, New York and a few other states who said they're staying in anyway.

I'm teetotal, not because I'm an alcoholic, but because I can't stand the effect of alcohol, the lack of control or even the hint of the lack of control. I stopped in my early twenties – a long time ago. When my French friend came to stay she was drinking lager and I had to try a sip. I loved it. Then when a friend came round for a meal the other day with a bottle of prosecco, the end of the bottle ended up in my fridge. So that night I took a swig, then another swig. I felt the urge to keep going back to the fridge.

Ernest came round last Sunday being conciliatory about the sheep, so all more or less ok for now but a warning taste of things to come as winter descends and his mood with it.

Hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel