



Monday 5th February 2018

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Dull and sleety up here with that damp cold which penetrates into your bones.

We have two of your favourites in the bags this week – celeriac and white cabbage. White cabbage is so nutritious and so delicious.

I read the other day that the UK consumes half of Europe's ready meals, six times more than in Spain for example. Given that a lot of the packaging used in ready meals and bottles contains a chemical called BPA, which is oestrogen mimicking, it could be a reason for the huge surge in prostate cancer and reduction in fertility / sperm counts... as well as and a rise in other cancers. These chemicals change the sex of fish from male to female. Scientists have just found that 80 percent of teenagers in a study had this hormone disrupting chemical in their blood and urine. At the beginning of the last century only one in twenty people got cancer, which rose to one in sixteen in the 1940's, one in ten in the 1970's and today, one in three. I'm sure that diagnosis and longer life expectancies can explain some but lifestyle and environment must surely explain the rest. We are as reckless with our collective health as we are reckless with the health of our planet. And a new thought.....maybe we are damaging our genes and passing on new predispositions to our next generations. Life expectancy is now declining in many parts of Britain. All of which is a very longwinded way of saying 'white cabbages are your friends'. Cabbage is recognised as one of the key foods to reduce heart disease and cancer. Researchers have identified 20 different flavonoids and 15 different phenols in it – all of which are antioxidants – on top of the minerals and vitamins you would expect.

Here are a few recipes you could try this week.

Carrots, White Cabbage and Apple Salad

½ white cabbage

2-3 carrots

1-2 eating apples

chopped dates (optional)

Dressing:

2 parts olive oil

1 part balsamic vinegar

1 tsp mayonnaise

1 tsp wholegrain mustard

Cut the core out of the cabbage and place in a food processor. Cut the carrots into chunks and add to the food processor. Blitz until roughly chopped. Put into a serving dish. Wash, core and quarter the apples and cut into small chunks then add to the cabbage mixture. Add the dates if using. In a separate bowl put all the salad ingredients and whisk thoroughly to mix. Check the taste and adjust if required then pour over the salad and mix well.

Lentil and White Cabbage Gratin in Provencal Sauce

140g brown or green lentils

375g white cabbage, shredded

25g breadcrumbs

25g cheese, grated

drizzle of olive oil

Tomato Sauce:

1 onion, chopped

2 garlic cloves, chopped

1 red pepper, cut in 1.5cm cubes

3 tbsp olive oil

1 tsp ground coriander

2 sprigs thyme

2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes

1 tbsp tomato puree

1 tbsp caster sugar

basil leaves, torn

Preheat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Cook the lentils in boiling unsalted water for about 20-30 minutes until just tender then drain. Fry the onion, garlic and red pepper in the olive oil until soft, about 10 minutes. Add the ground coriander and thyme and stir for 30 seconds or so. Now tip in the tomatoes, tomato puree and sugar and season with salt and black pepper. Leave to simmer to a thick sauce, stirring occasionally for about 15-20 minutes. Check seasoning, take out the thyme and stir in the basil. Meanwhile cook the cabbage in boiling salted water for about 3-4 minutes until just tender then drain thoroughly. Mix the lentils with the tomato sauce and spoon into a shallow ovenproof dish. Mix the breadcrumbs, and cheese if using, and scatter over the mixture in an even layer. Drizzle with a little extra olive oil and bake for 20-30 minutes until sizzling and crunchy on top.

My friend Richard came to stay for the weekend. As a historian (him), I always have to take him to places of cultural and historical interest. I'm having to cast my net further afield having already done everything close by. I made Myfa comfortable on the back seat and we drove the country route to Durham cathedral. I have never been as an adult. I guess it's like living in London and never having visited St Paul's or the Tower of London, one only does as a tourist. I told Richard to go in while I spent a little while with Myfa and got her out the car for a minute. The cathedral is massive and awe-inspiring. I eventually found him reading the story in a panel of stained glass windows. He'd already taken ownership of the place 'come and look at this'. He wanted to show me some dreadful new pews that had been installed which half obscured the intricately carved pulpit. He was furious. He described what the cathedral would have looked like before the reformation - the colours, the resplendence. It's like having one's own personal Andrew Dixon Green. We like to think our brains have evolved since the 11th century but the architectural and mathematical skills involved in designing such a structure and the obvious intelligence, artistry and precision of the thousands of builders and stonemasons in a region and at a time of scant population, makes one reassess that. The choir was rehearsing, I stood against a pillar and listened – so beautiful, so moving, the tears rolled.

The Myfa update is that while weaning her off her steroids, she has been weaned of her strength, her appetite and thirst. Her muscles are wasting away, she is not good. The vet will visit tomorrow. I'm guessing she will have to stay on steroids. We are taking it a day at a time. I watched a programme the other night presented by Chris Packham. He spoke of his dog and said he loved it more than any other creature on earth. I completely understand that. I'm trying to prepare myself for the worst outcome but it feels unimaginable. She's been with me every second of every day for 11 years, my life has revolved around her.

Hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel