



**Monday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018**

Dear Customer,

It's a rainy and foggy Sunday, and Armistice Day. I can't put the TV on as I don't want to spend the day crying. It also happens to be the anniversary of my dad's exit, making it all the more poignant – too poignant. My plan had been to plant tulip bulbs. In the spring I had terrible tulip envy. I saw gardens gloriously full of them. I decided back then that I would create my own tulip paradise. So online at Gardens4Us I got carried away. I bought hundreds and hundreds in every shape and colour. There were some good deals. And to satiate my spring crocus envy when nothing follows my snowdrops, I bought hundreds of them too. All I have to do now is plant them. With B Day looming on the 29<sup>th</sup> March and our triple back somersault off the cliff, I will at least have a beautiful garden.

Talking of bulbs, if ever a vegetable could feel taken for granted it must be an onion. Rolling about in the shadows at the bottom of the sack, chopped into little pieces and fried in hot oil before disappearing anonymously into a curry, a stew or a soup, it is always an extra, never the star. Without the flamboyance of a curly-leaved cabbage or the sultriness of a purple aubergine, yet where what would we be without them. They are an excellent source of B vitamins, vitamin C, calcium, potassium, copper, manganese and zinc. They have anti-viral and anti-inflammatory properties and will help boost the immune system to fight any prevailing bugs.

Here are a few recipes you could try this week. Make your onions happy:

#### **French Onion Soup**

700g onions, thinly sliced

50g butter, or margarine

½ tsp sugar

275ml dry white wine

2 tbsp olive oil

2 cloves garlic, crushed

1.2 litres good stock

2 tbsp Cognac, optional

#### **For the Croutons:**

french bread, baguette, cut into 2.5cm slices

1-2 cloves garlic, crushed

1 tbsp olive oil

Gruyere, grated, optional

*Preheat the oven to 180C/ 350F/ Gas 5. First make the croutons – drizzle the olive oil on to a large baking-sheet, add the crushed garlic then spread the oil and garlic all over the baking sheet. Place the bread slices on top of the oil, then turn over each one so that both sides have been lightly coated with the oil. Bake them in the oven for 20-25 minutes till crispy and crunchy. Next place a large saucepan on a high heat, melt the oil and butter/ margarine together. When very hot, add the onions, garlic and sugar, and keep turning them from time to time until the edges of the onions have turned dark, about 6 minutes. Reduce the heat to very low and leave the onions to carry on cooking very slowly for about 30 minutes, by which time the base of the pan will be covered with a rich, nut brown, caramelised film. Pour in the stock and white wine, season, then stir, scraping the base of the pan well. When at simmering point, turn down the heat to its lowest setting, then leave it to cook very gently, without a lid, for about 1 hour. Check seasoning and add the Cognac if using. Now sprinkle the grated Gruyère thickly over the croutons, if using and place under the grill until the cheese is golden brown and bubbling. Serve the soup topped with the croutons.*

#### **Onion Fritters**

3 small onions (225g), peeled, cut into semi-circles

1 tsp finely grated fresh ginger

1 fresh hot green chilli, cut into rounds (optional)

good pinch of ground turmeric

pinch of salt

¼ tsp red chilli powder

3 tbsp chopped fresh coriander

½ tsp ground cumin

4 tbsp chickpea flour ( gram flour)

olive or vegetable oil

*Mix the onions, chilli powder, ginger, coriander, green chilli (if using), cumin and turmeric in a bowl. Dust with chickpea flour, but do not mix it in just yet. Add a pinch of salt then hand-mix the onions into the dry ingredients, mashing it all for about 5 minutes, or until the slices clump together. Put 1cm of oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Meanwhile, make 12 rough patties from the onion mixture, placing them in a single layer on a board or plate as you make them. Onion pieces will stick out, but that is how it should be. When the oil is hot, turn the heat to medium-low and add half the patties in one layer. Fry for 1 minute, flip, and fry for another minute. Flip again. Fry for another 30 seconds or so on each side until reddish-gold and crisp. Serve with chutney.*

#### **Onion and Potato Tortilla**

2 onions, cut into 12 wedges

200g potatoes, cooked and sliced

2 tbsp parsley

3 tbsp olive oil

5 Hen Nation eggs

salt and pepper

*Heat the oil in a 20cm frying pan and add the onions. Cook the onions for 6-7 minutes or until soft and lightly brown. Add the potatoes and toss with the onions. Cook for a further 5-7 minutes, shaking the pan occasionally to make sure nothing sticks to the bottom. Break the eggs into a small bowl and beat lightly with a fork. Add the parsley and season. Gently pour the eggs over the onion and potato mixture, shaking the pan so the egg mixture runs into all the gaps. Return to a low heat and cook gently for about 20 minutes or until the eggs are just set. Place the tortilla under a preheated grill and cook for a few minutes further or until the eggs are completely set and the top is lightly brown. You could also add some peas, or cheese or tomatoes.*

I don't mind planting my bulbs in the rain, the problem is that I won't be alone. 'She' would have to come out and help and it would end up a muddy mess as she dug alongside me. She can't tolerate me being in the garden without her. In fact she can't tolerate me being anywhere without her, and whatever I do, she has to be involved. If I'm peeling a potato she has to stand up on her hind legs on the kitchen bar watching and sniffing each ribbon of potato skin coming off. 'Right, now we're going to chop up the cabbage'. She remains there the whole time – watching, learning. At the Post Office counter and in shops she stands up against the counter to see who is serving and watch the scanning process, watch stamps going on envelopes. She has no dog etiquette and I am loathed to stop her and crush her joy and her desire to partake, observe and acquire knowledge. Oh dear, these terrible, terrifying bonds we have with our animals. Lainey is 10 months old now and is weighing in at a perfect sack of potatoes – 25 kilos.

Kind wishes and hope you have a good week. By the way, the deer that we freed from the barbed wire was nowhere to be seen the next day, so I think she was ok. She had managed to jump backout of that field.

Isobel