

CHARLIE HICKS MARKET REPORT



Tel: 0117 9712127

charliehicks.com

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Yorkshire Forced Rhubarb.

An unusually mild winter has meant a rather poor start but hopefully recent heavy frosts will improve things. The crowns need sub zero temperatures to convert carbohydrates into sugars which fuel growth when they are transferred from the fields into the dark and heated forcing sheds.



The rhubarb that is arriving is in fine shape but supplies are limited and prices on the dear side. A few more frosty nights and everything should be back on track rhubarb wise. Stick with it though, PDO status Yorkshire forced rhubarb is a national culinary treasure, geographically and culturally unique and no self respecting menu or food store is complete without it.

NB. Imported rhubarb is often forced by putting acid on the roots, NOT something they'd ever do in the Wakefield triangle.



Purple Sprouting Broccoli is at its absolute best as we reach the traditional season (January till April) when old fashioned varieties are ready for harvest. Some of the rather inferior modern varieties are ready much earlier but **PSB** in August, it's against God and nature innit?



Blood Oranges from Sicily are underway. These are PDO status Arancia Rossa di Sicilia. The real thing, none of your snide faux bloods from the southern hemisphere. The early Moro variety kick things off, superb flavour and colour, get that vodka in the deep freeze NOW.

More seasonal citrus with the **Seville oranges** from Spain. It seems the season is even shorter than usual this year, almost certainly finished in the next week or two, so don't miss out. And remember Sevilles are not just for marmalade, we love them salted Maroc style, in ceviche and Nigella's ice cream.

Large leaf **spinach**, mostly from France, is expensive. French **chard** is much less dear and, arguably, even more delicious



Our favourite home-grown **brassicas**, Savoy cabbage, cavolo nero and curly kale, are all in cracking form, that magical combination of quality and value.

There are still **quinces** from Turkey and **clementines** from Spain and Italy but not for long. They'll be over soon.

A splendid time for **roots** now that colder weather means they are even sweeter. Roots increase their sugar levels to protecting against freezing, a sort of natural anti-freeze.

There are home-grown parsnips, swedes and turnips; celeriac and Jerusalem artichokes from France, salsify from Belgium and French crosnes to order (usually 24 hrs notice).

Golden and candy **beetroot** are all but over.

French **Parsley & Chervil** root are available to order, again usually 24 hrs.



Our current selection of smaller spuds. **Pink Fir Apple** from Suffolk, West country **Charlottes**, French **Roseval**, French **Black Truffle** and some very price friendly washed **Maris Peer** from Wales.

The European **wild mushroom** season is over and wild mush is now only available from much further afield. Prices and quality are all over the shop so you're much better off with exotic cultivated varieties like shitake and enoki. Give us a call to see what's about.

Grapes and plums, mostly from S. Africa, are **very expensive indeed**, use with caution.

Supplies of **tarragon & chervil** are very limited due in no small part to Israeli grower's co-op Agrexo going belly up last September.