

essence artisan food



# GREEN

---

## CREDENTIALS

**Shirlee Posner of Eat Surrey** seeks and finds the best small food producers, restaurants, cafés, pubs and shops, publishing a weekly review on her website. This month, she introduces essence readers to a local, natural and ethical supplier: Village Greens, a model Surrey food business.

**W**ith two farm shops, a young family and a determination to stick to a strict self-imposed set of criteria, the owner of this established, award-winning business is one of a kind.

I first met Catherine Dampier in 2006 just before she and her husband James started their first farm shop in Ockley. It was hard not to be full of admiration from the start as Catherine spoke about an ethos that ticked so many boxes. The couple set out to support local suppliers from the outset: buying meat from high welfare farms, growing their own produce to sell in Village Greens and employing local people. They were also determined to only choose and produce food that delivered on taste too.

Eight years on and James and Catherine have worked incredibly hard to make their dream a reality. It's fantastic to see that they have stuck to their original ethos throughout, even though it has been a huge challenge at times.

They opened their first shop in Ockley, near Dorking, in 2007 much to the delight of locals. On discovering that this wasn't just another village shop, customers were and still are continuously delighted by new, never seen before products. An example of this is



Dineke van den Bogerd of Crumbs of Capel, an artisan baker of sourdough bread. Dineke got her first break with Village Greens and now supplies two other farm shops in Surrey.

Two years ago James and Catherine opened their second shop at Denbies Vineyard selling plants and food. The owners also let them have use of their walled vegetable garden. A large greenhouse provides space for starting off seedlings for the sister site in Ockley.

For those concerned about how far food travels, there is no need to worry at Village Greens. James and Catherine have joined a growing band of smallholders who produce stock for their own retail outlets. Using traditional farming methods, they get as close as possible to organic. Salad leaves, green beans, courgettes, kale, kohlrabi and even fresh cut flowers are grown just across the road from the shop. Buy a bag of their salad leaves and there'll be edible flowers, herbs and amaranth thrown in too.

Village Greens also run a vegetable bag scheme for pick up or delivery as long as purchasers are local. To supplement their own produce, they buy from other local producers such as Secretts in Milford and Nutbourne tomatoes in Sussex.

It doesn't stop with vegetables and fruit. Before buying meat or poultry, the couple meet suppliers and check production methods are in keeping with their ethos that all should be raised and slaughtered humanely. For example, poultry is from Etherley Farm, down the road from the shop, where birds are raised in a free-range environment. Drive into the farm and see hens and ducks roaming freely.



James and Catherine are proud to tell customers that the majority of products come from within thirty miles of the shop and eighteen are based within ten miles. With the exception of coffee and tea, this is an extraordinary achievement. Within that ten miles they source a wide range of diverse products including beef, lamb, chicken, sausages, wine, bread, milk and chocolates.

But the culinary journey doesn't stop here. There are local cheeses on offer at Village Greens, of which the closest producer to the shop is Norbury Park Farm who produce Norbury Blue and Dirty Vicar from their own milk. From further afield comes Sussex Charmer and a selection from High Weald Organic Dairy in West Sussex, plus charcuterie produced at the Weald Smokery in East Sussex. Coffee, of course, we expect to be imported, but by using Coffee Real (an ethical coffee business) means this box is also ticked.

Unlike other farm shops, there aren't any big brands; instead there is a changing display of wonderful products that deliver on all counts. Expect tasters too. On my last visit I tried Silent Pool gin which was full flavoured, aromatic and strong. This helped to wash down the Chalk Hills Bakery lemon drizzle cake, so lemony, moist and dense, it was delightful.

Catherine and James are wonderful hosts and happy to share their vast product knowledge with visitors. For those travelling a distance and wanting to make a day of it, why not check the Village Greens website for dates of their food fairs? Both shops host them and it's a great opportunity to sample lots of wonderful local products, meet the suppliers and support a growing community of talented artisan food producers. ●

### essence info

#### Village Greens Farm Shops

Coles Lane, Ockley, Dorking RH5 5LS

Telephone: 01306 713474

and Denbies Wine Estate, London Road,

Dorking RH5 6AA

Telephone: 01306 880720

Websites: [www.vgfarmshop.com](http://www.vgfarmshop.com)

[www.eatsurrey.co](http://www.eatsurrey.co)



## Early summer asparagus soup with herb oil

A warming favourite with wonderful seasonal vegetables from Village Greens in Ockley.

### Serves four

### Ingredients

One 15ml spoon olive oil  
A handful of green garlic shoots or two salad onions, finely chopped  
One red onion, finely chopped  
One clove smoked garlic, crushed  
150g to 200g fresh asparagus spears, halved lengthways for bigger spears  
150g fresh broad beans, podded weight  
200g courgettes, cut into julienne strips or spiralised  
One litre of fresh chicken stock  
Two 15ml spoons of crème fraîche  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

### For the basil oil

A handful of fresh basil leaves  
A handful of fresh mint leaves  
A handful of fresh marjoram leaves  
Four 15ml spoons extra virgin olive oil

### Method

1. Heat the olive oil in a heavy based pan and add the green garlic, salad and red onion. Sweat with the lid on the pan for four to five minutes and then add the smoked garlic.
2. Pour in the stock and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and add the asparagus, broad beans and courgettes. Simmer for seven to eight minutes or until the vegetables are tender.
3. While the soup is cooking, put the ingredients for the basil oil into a blender and blitz.
4. Stir the crème fraîche into the soup with two to three spoons of basil oil.
5. Season the soup and serve with an extra spoon of cream, a drizzle of oil and a sprig of fresh herbs.

Serve with some warm crusty sour dough bread.

Shirlee Posner



## PROVIDER OF CREATIVE PR SERVICES, COPY WRITING & FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY

TO ARTISAN FOOD PRODUCERS

Shirlee's food reviews of independently owned cafes, restaurants, artisan food producers and farm shops in Surrey. A supporter of the local food movement with an aim to promote, support and champion their work. I always tell a personal story by taking the time to meet the people behind the products or the brand.

Read my reviews here [www.eatsurrey.co](http://www.eatsurrey.co)

**Twitter:** @eatsurrey

**Instagram:** @eatsurrey

**Telephone:** 07917 891881

**Email:** eatsurrey@gmail.com



Member of the Guild of Food Writers