



Monday 11th April 2016

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. It's Sunday and I can announce there isn't a cloud in the sky and despite an icy wind we are promised wall to wall sunshine for the whole day. There is panic – does one sit in the sun, do the garden, organise an impromptu picnic, go to the seaside. As they say up here - 'make the most of it, this is our summer', and they are generally right.

Here are some simple and tasty recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Cauliflower, Onion, Potato and Cheese Bake

2 large potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2" slices *1/2 cauliflower, cut into 1/2" slices*
1 medium onion, peeled and cut into 1/2" slices *8oz grated mature Cheddar*
2 tsp dried thyme *80ml vegetable stock*
butter, to dot *salt and black pepper*

Put the potatoes in a saucepan, cover with plenty of cold water, add salt and bring to the boil. Add the sliced onion and cauliflower, and cook at a fast simmer for 8-10 minutes until the potatoes are tender. Drain and set aside. Preheat the oven to 220C /425F /Gas 6. Butter a shallow casserole dish. Layer half of the potatoes in the bottom of the dish with all of the onion and half of the cauliflower. Season it with some black pepper and half of the thyme. Cover with half of the cheese then add the rest of the potatoes and cauliflower, followed by some more pepper and the rest of the thyme. Pour the stock over the top, cover with the remaining cheese and dot with butter. Bake in the heated oven for 20 to 25 minutes until golden brown and bubbling. Serve hot.

Spiced Lentil and Carrot Soup

2 tbs rapeseed or sunflower oil *1 tsp cumin seeds*
1 medium onion, finely sliced *2 cloves garlic, finely chopped*
2 green chillies, finely chopped *1/2 tin tomatoes*
1/2 tsp turmeric *200g carrots, peeled and grated*
50g split red lentils *1 litre vegetable stock*

Heat the oil in a heavy-based saucepan. Add the cumin seeds, onion, garlic and chillies and cook gently until the onions are slightly golden. Add the tomatoes and turmeric, stirring well for a further few minutes. Add the carrots and continue cooking gently for another few minutes. Add the lentils, stir well and pour the vegetable stock and bring to the boil. Lower the heat, cover and simmer gently for about 20 minutes or until lentils are just tender. Season to taste and garnish with fresh parsley.

Carrot and Apple Cake

150g wholemeal flour *150g self-raising flour*
150g carrots, peeled and roughly grated *125g soft light brown sugar*
175ml sunflower oil *2 apples, peeled and cored and roughly grated*
3 free-range eggs *1 medium egg white*
1 tsp baking powder *1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*
1 tsp ground ginger *18 pecan nuts*

Cream Cheese Frosting (or maybe not !):

300g low-fat cream cheese *3 tbsp icing sugar, sifted*
1 tbsp crème fraiche *1 tsp vanilla extract*

Preheat the oven to 180C / Fan 160C /350F /Gas 4. Grease two 8" sandwich cake tins with a little oil, line the bottoms with discs of baking parchment and set them on a baking sheet. Put all the cake ingredients, except the pecans, into a large bowl and mix it all together until well-combined. Divide the mixture evenly between the two tins. Bake on the middle shelf of the oven for 30 minutes or until the sponges are springy. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool in the tins. To make the frosting put the cream cheese, icing sugar, crème fraiche and vanilla extract into a medium bowl and mix together until smooth and well-combined. Cover and put in the fridge to cool. Once cakes are cool, remove from their tins. Sandwich together with half of the frosting, then put the rest on top. Decorate with the pecans.

I'm finding the internet very abrasive these days. My laptop, of its own accord replaced Google with Bing as it's search engine so when I switch on I'm bombarded by trite celebrity news and advertising. With all the big advertising budgets now vying for prominence, it's getting unbearable. In a newspaper it's easy to not see the subdued matt adverts but on the internet the adverts flash in your face everywhere you go. Where we used the internet as a tool, it is now using us as fodder. I'm really going off it and its bombardment. Everything is global – the funny clips, news, campaigns, celebrity bloggers, celebrity twitter, advertising - it scrambles the brain. Things trend – here today, gone tomorrow.

When we had our organic revolution in the UK in the early 90's, it was led, initially by the pioneers and then by the media – our newspapers, radio, TV. It was long, intense and focused and transformed attitudes – organic food consumption rocketed and so did the number of acres farmed organically, it was a strong domestic movement – we were singing off the same hymn sheet. I wonder if that same thing could happen today with the same momentum. I don't think it could. Organic acreage in the UK is in decline – there is no more depressing a fact than that.

We used to have our green campaign groups and they were prominent, like Friends of the Earth and Campaign for Rural England. I barely see them mentioned these days – lost in the vast global mash-up. It made me realise how easy it is for things to be forgotten now, go un-noticed. The bees have lost most of their habitat in the past 60 years, including 98% of wildflower

However the butterflies, ladybirds, field mice, voles and the other thousands of species of flora and fauna which populate our increasingly rare suitable habitats are not, and the attrition continues as they are forced to adapt themselves out of existence. As our population increases, increasing the need to take ever more of our land for housing and infrastructure and get more yield from every cow and inch of land to feed the growing population, I fear we are getting too 'distracted' by the mash-up to do anything to safeguard nature's future. I fear we are letting it slip. And on that cheery note

Kind wishes,

Isobel