



Monday 23rd May 2016

Dear Customer,

It's a mixed bag of weather up here at the moment. My bug only just seems to be clearing up...a bit... I hope. I've already had it for 8% of a year – a really nasty piece of work. I've been mulling over garlic and its antibiotic properties. One might assume that if one chose to treat oneself with garlic, it would be important to treat it like an antibiotic and have it consistently 3 times a day until the bug cleared. Otherwise, presumably, like antibiotics, the strongest bacteria would gain a useful window of opportunity to survive and multiply. So my sporadic garlic mushrooms, garlic salad dressing and garlic beans on toast may just have perpetuated it. Everyone has been telling me to go to the doctor and get antibiotics but I don't want to hasten the end of humanity. It could well be a virus in which case antibiotics are useless anyway. Pre-1940 everybody didn't die each time they got a persistent chesty cough.

Aubergine, Pepper and Tomato Cannelloni

<i>vegetable oil</i>	<i>1 aubergine, finely chopped</i>
<i>1 medium onion, finely chopped</i>	<i>1 medium pepper, deseeded and finely chopped</i>
<i>4 tomatoes, finely chopped</i>	<i>100g mushrooms, finely chopped</i>
<i>2 tbsp tomato puree</i>	<i>250g lasagne sheets, but in half</i>
<i>350g of a tomato pasta sauce</i>	<i>8 tbsp dried breadcrumbs</i>

Oil a large non-stick frying pan and stir-fry the aubergine, onion and pepper for 2-3 minutes. Add the tomatoes and mushrooms and cook, stirring for another 2-3 minutes, then add the tomato puree. Remove from the heat, season to taste then cool for 5-10 minutes. Preheat the oven 190C/ 170C Fan/ Gas 5. Oil a large oblong baking dish. Lay the lasagne sheets on a work surface and share the filling between them. Toll them up and place in the baking dish. If the sheets are not flexible, put them in a dish and pour boiling water over them before adding the filling. Pour the pasta sauce on top. Sprinkle the breadcrumbs evenly over the sauce. You could add a sprinkling of cheese if desired. Bake for 20 minutes until golden brown and bubbling.

Spaghetti with Roast Cauliflower Pesto

<i>1 cauliflower, in florets</i>	<i>150ml olive oil</i>
<i>40g blanched hazelnuts</i>	<i>30g Parmesan or other hard cheese, grated</i>
<i>bunch fresh basil</i>	<i>zest and juice from one lemon</i>
<i>400g spaghetti</i>	

Heat the oven to 210C/ Fan 190C/ Gas 6. Toss the cauliflower florets with the olive oil and hazelnuts and roast for 10-15 minutes until the nuts are golden and the cauliflower is starting to char. Remove from the oven and season well. Cook slightly then whizz all but a few florets in a food processor with the cheese and basil and 1 tbsp olive oil. Season then add a grating of lemon zest and a squeeze of the juice. Cook the spaghetti according to packet instructions then drain and toss with the pesto. Serve topped with the reserved cauliflower florets, extra grated cheese, lemon zest and basil leaves.

Roasted Aubergine, Cauliflower and Chickpea Curry

<i>1 medium aubergine</i>	<i>1 tbsp coconut oil</i>
<i>1 medium onion, finely chopped</i>	<i>2 garlic cloves, crushed</i>
<i>½ tsp fresh root ginger, grated</i>	<i>1 tbsp curry paste</i>
<i>1 cauliflower, cut in small florets</i>	<i>350g butternut squash or sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped</i>
<i>400g tin chick peas, drained and rinsed</i>	<i>500ml coconut milk</i>
<i>2 tomatoes, chopped</i>	<i>handful cauliflower leaves, finely shredded</i>
<i>150g natural yoghurt</i>	<i>2 tbsp coriander, finely chopped</i>

Preheat the oven to 190C / 170C Fan/ Gas 5. Put the aubergine directly onto the oven shelf and roast for 20 minutes. Remove and allow to cool slightly. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a medium saucepan and saute the onion for 3-4 minutes until starting to soften. Add the garlic and ginger and fry for a further minute. Stir in the curry paste and cook for 1-2 minutes over a gentle heat, stirring continuously. Add the butternut squash, cauliflower florets, chickpeas, coconut milk and a pinch of sea salt. Bring to the boil then simmer for about 20 minutes, until the potato and cauliflower are just soft. Peel the aubergine and roughly dice the flesh and add to the curry with the tomatoes and greens. Simmer for 5-10 minutes until all the ingredients are tender. Divide into bowls and top with the natural yoghurt and coriander. Serve with naan breads and side salad.

I've decided to try and rent my house out for the summer period – make it earn its keep, contribute. I'm in a tourist area – theoretically. I had some old photos of the inside of the house and the garden so I set myself up on Airbnb. I didn't see any reason why I couldn't start from next week so I've made it available from next weekend. I can just sleep in the car. I went round each room with a pen and paper making a list of everything I needed to do to get it ready for guests. I started in the first bedroom: replace the en-suite bathroom I tore out – new sink and toilet, screens and a freestanding bath; new carpet; new venetian blinds; new bed; new bedding – duvets, pillows, sheets, covers; nice new rug. I made my way round the house.....new fire alarms; clean the carpets; replace all the dead lightbulbs; fix the shower; another new bed; replace missing sink plugs; new washing machine and dryer – 23 years old and they require a technique; buy an ironing board; new towels; replace all the shot, steamy double-glazed windows so the guests can see out; curtains in the office, lockable cabinet and new sofa bed to create 4th bedroom; redecorate downstairs as starting to look a bit grubby; find somewhere to put my rails of clothes and my porch full of boots and wellingtons; rehome Kiki, Tilda and Tub (the guinea pigs); buy drinking glasses and new cutlery; get the piano tuned just in case; get the outdoor paving jet-washed; weed the garden properly, including the prickly stuff, and dig the dandelions and

welsh poppies out the drive – could probably do with a few tons of new gravel on it; empty the food cupboards and fridge; deep clean the oven; clean the windows inside and out. And that's for starters. I just hope to God no-one makes a booking. Did you watch the Angela Ripon programme about dementia last week? It was very interesting. The over-riding message was that to protect ourselves we have to keep using our brains. I'm not sure what constitutes using our brains. Does thinking count? It suggested that learning other languages helps significantly. Good, because I am learning textian. I've just received one which ended with ... "No, tends to be quite a quick sea icon".... I can't even take a guess on it.

Kind wishes,

Isobel