

Monday 28th January 2019

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. We have butternut squash in the bags this week. Technically a fruit and sneaking into the wrong bag, it is boosts the immune system, packed with vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin B6, and lots of magnesium, calcium, potassium and iron. You could cook it whole. Simply wash it, pierce it in a few places with a sharp knife and place on an ungreased baking sheet. Bake it at 180C/ 350F/ Gas 4. Cook for 60-90 minutes until tender and easily pierced with a fork. Cut it in half lengthways and remove the fibre and seeds. You could scoop out the flesh or season each half with some lemon or lime juice, salt and pepper, cut in half again and serve as is.

Here are some other tasty recipes you could try this week:

Butternut Squash, Mushroom and Sage Pasta

600g squash, peeled and cubed	4 garlic cloves, chopped
a few sage leaves, roughly chopped	200g mushrooms, sliced
350g pasta	2 tbsp olive oil
2 tsp cheese, optional	

Heat the oil in a non-stick frying pan then fry the squash, garlic and sage for a few minutes until beginning to brown. Splash in some water then cook fiercely for about 20 minutes until the squash is softening and the pan looks dry. Add the mushrooms then fry for 5 minutes more, stirring occasionally until it all is tender and beginning to caramelise. Cook the pasta to packet instructions then add it to the squash mix with a little of the pasta water. Toss with the cheese, if using, and season to taste.

Butternut Squash and Potato Pie

1 large onion, halved and finely sliced	500g potatoes, peeled or scrubbed
500g butternut squash, peeled	½ bunch sage, chopped
butter or margarine	100g Gruyere or vegan cheese, grated

Heat the oven to 190C/ Fan 170C/ Gas 5. Heat a knob of butter or margarine in a pan and cook the onions until softened. Thinly sliced the potatoes and squash. Melt another knob of butter or margarine and crease an 18cm springform tin all over, line the bottom and sides of the tin in alternating layers of potato and squash. This will be the top when you turn it out, add a layer of squash, onion, sage and cheese then dot some butter or margarine over the layer. Repeat the layering until everything is used. Cover with foil then put on a baking tray. Bake in the oven for an hour or so, or until tender. Remove from the oven and leave in the tin for 10 minutes to cool slightly then turn out and cut into wedges.

Polenta and Chard Chips

200g chard	40g butter or margarine
1 medium onion, finely chopped	280g medium or coarse polenta
salt	oil for brushing

Cut the stalks off the chard leaves, chop them into small pieces and set aside. Chop the leaves into bite-size pieces and set aside separately. In a large saucepan, melt the butter/ margarine and fry the onion with a pinch of salt over a medium heat. Add the chopped chard stalks and cook for 5-10 minutes until tender. Add the leaves and saute for 3 minutes. Bring 1.4 litres water to the boil in a large saucepan then stir in the polenta. Whisk until thickened and season with salt and pepper. Cover and cook over a low heat until the polenta thickens and begins to come away from the side of the pan as you stir. Stir in the chard and onion then transfer to an ovenproof dish and smooth with the back of a spoon. Leave to cool, then chill for a few hours to set. Turn up the oven to 200C/ 180C/ Gas 6. Cut the polenta into chips 1.5cms thick and 8cms long. Put on a baking sheet and brush all over with vegetable oil. Roast for an hour or until golden, carefully turning after 30 minutes. Serve with a rich tomato sauce.

It's bright and blustery up here. They keep showing snow in the forecast but as yet we still haven't seen any. It's February this week, a good hour of extra daylight over December. Many reasons to be cheerful. But I'm really fed up as I have developed a new habit of watching junk TV programmes - Place in the Sun (the same long, thin apartment for 60k on the Costa Blanca over and over again), and newly discovered, Tipping Point and The Chase (take the £1,000 and get back here, we need you on the team). It felt reasonable watching them when it was dark outside but not in daylight as it now is. Infuriatingly one can still shove them into the dark again by watching 'ITV plus 1'. I need to break out of it, it's ridiculous. Time is marching on and what there is left is precious. Luckily I don't watch much else apart from a lot of news, and Andrew Dixon Wright's art documentaries, and perhaps The Voice and the Antiques Roadshow... and Dragons Den. Most of the films are unwatchable- too sinister, gory or frightening, too Hollywood, or just banal. I've also seen my fill of wildlife documentaries – and they are always upsetting.

After having a go on the piano I decided I would go to my dusty bookshelves and pick up a book. It's been a while. Voltaire's Candide looked thin and manageable. I took it to bed with me but I found it hard to focus on the written page.

I started with the chronology. '1756 Outbreak of the Seven Years' War instigated by Facebook'. That is what I read. I don't know which I should be most worried about – my eyesight or my brain. It should have been '1756 Outbreak of the Seven Year's War instigated by Frederick II. I use Facebook for the businesses, a lot, but I never use it for private use as I still don't understand it. My friends and family and contacts are odds and sods of disparate people from all over the place and have no idea how I could possibly communicate with them in the same post. With some one is reserved, with others less so... ad infinitum .

I started reading the Introduction, and was already distracted by the theme of the book and miles away before even starting on the first chapter, which I didn't start as I fell asleep - musing on reasons to be cheerful, what it is to be a pessimist, what it is to have unfounded optimism. I think optimism is a Darwinian survival trait. Early man had to be optimistic, the hunter gatherers had to believe they might spear a bite to eat before setting off on their hunt, a pessimist would see no point bothering in the first place and thus perish. Survival of the optimists. Voltaire was certainly an optimist, and found this hard to come to terms with when the world he was living in was so hideously cruel. But then so is ours isn't it. Just that we have a thick veneer of respectable 'civil society' masking it. Well....not masking it very well at the moment, it's bursting out all over the place.

Kind wishes from here in Richmond.... the best of all possible worlds,

Isobel