

[Monday 19th December 2011](#)

Dear Customer

I hope all is well with you and you are not too frantic with preparations for Christmas. Here are a few festive recipes you could try:

Leeks Cooked in Spiced Wine

500g leeks

1½ tbsp olive oil

1 bayleaf

¾ tsp coriander seeds

4 peppercorns

100ml red or white wine

Clean and trim the leeks and cut them into 2" lengths. Heat the oil in a large saucepan, add the leeks and stir-fry gently for about 5 minutes. Add the bayleaf, spices, some salt and the wine. Cover and let the leeks simmer gently for 15-20 minutes, until they are tender. Transfer to a serving bowl with their juices.

Creamed Brussel Sprouts with Nutmeg

450g brussel sprouts, peeled

30g butter

100ml double cream

1 tsp grated nutmeg

small bunch fresh parsley, roughly chopped

Simmer the sprouts in a pan of boiling water for 8-10 minutes. Drain and tip into a food processor. Add the butter, cream and nutmeg and three quarters of the parsley and season. Whizz until semi-smooth but retaining a lot of coarse texture. Season and spoon into a warm serving dish, scatter with the remaining parsley and grind over some pepper.

Cream of Carrot Soup with Sesame Stars

1oz butter

1 onion, peeled and chopped

700g carrots

225g potatoes, diced

1.5 litres water

150ml single cream

squeeze of lemon juice

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

grated nutmeg

for the sesame stars:

3-4 tbsp sesame seeds

6 slices of bread

25-50g soft butter

First make the stars, which can be kept in a tin for a few days until needed. Set the oven to 150C/300F/Gas 1. Sprinkle about half the sesame seeds onto a plate. Cut the bread into stars using a pastry cutter. Spread one side of the stars with butter and put them buttered-side down on the plate of sesame seeds, then spread butter on the other sides and sprinkle with the remaining seeds. Place on a baking sheet and bake for 1 hour or until crisp and golden. Cool. Meanwhile, make the soup. Melt the butter in a large saucepan, add the onion and fry for 5 minutes without browning. Then add the carrots and potato, cover and cook gently without browning for 10 minutes. Add the water, cover and simmer for about 20 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender. Whizz the soup in the food processor and put back into the saucepan. Add more water to make a nice light consistency, then add the cream, lemon juice, salt, pepper and nutmeg to taste. Garnish with fresh herbs and a swirl of cream and serve with the sesame stars.

I find buying presents very difficult and always leave it until the very last minute. I haven't bought one present yet. I haven't even started thinking about it. I have no imagination especially buying for men. The gift websites are ridiculous – cufflinks, a drive in a racing car, hip flasks, silver golf tees, embossed leather stuff. My dad had I think calculated that he had enough socks, pyjamas, jumpers etc to see him out. My brother needs nothing. To compensate for lack of imagination I'd take everything up a notch and go super-deluxe on the things they already have. In these austerity days though, that can't be the solution so will have to try and kick-start the rusty imagination. But actually I can't concentrate on anything or think about anything except Myfa. She seems to be displaying the first symptoms of Leishmaniasis which I think she may have caught in the South of France this summer – from sandfly bites. It wasn't until I was down there that I knew of its existence and how prevalent it is. It's a disease for which there is no cure. There are treatments, dreadful in themselves with varying outcomes. I am waiting for blood test results. She is so sleek and fit and beautiful and her coat glistens – she's in the prime of her life. I feel utterly, utterly devastated and as you can imagine, not very Christmassy.

I do hope you have a lovely, happy and restful Christmas.

Kindest wishes,



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