

**Monday 5th November 2012**

Dear Customer,

I hope you are well and enjoying the beautiful, crispy autumn weather.

We have aubergines in the bags this week. They are thought to have originated in India 4000 years ago, where their mild flavour and spongy texture meant they paired wonderfully with spices. They arrived in Europe through the Moors invasion of Spain and via Italian trade with the Arabs. Their Italian name, 'melanzana', comes from the Latin 'malum insanum', meaning 'crazy fruit'. You could dice in into large cubes and stir-fry, or cut into slices lengthways, brush both sides with olive oil and cook on a griddle pan or bake these slices in the oven for 10 minutes at Gas 5/190C. They are a great addition to curries and tomato-based stews and sauces.

**Easy-Fried Crazy Crazy Fruit**

2 tsp vegetable oil  
3 eggs, beaten

1 aubergine, thinly sliced  
225g dried breadcrumbs

*Heat the oil in a large frying pan over a medium-high heat. Dip each aubergine slice in the egg, then the breadcrumbs and place in the hot oil. Fry for 2-3 minutes on each side, or until golden brown. Drain on kitchen roll.*

**Tomato and Aubergine Pasta Bake**

1 aubergine, cut into 2cm chunks  
1 tbsp oregano  
2 onions, chopped finely  
handful basil leaves, torn up  
1 ball of mozzarella, grated

salt and pepper  
olive oil  
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
350g macaroni  
handful Parmesan cheese

*Heat the oven to 200C. Spread the aubergine out on a baking tray and toss with olive oil, some pepper and the oregano. Roast for 20 mins or so until the aubergine is golden and crisp. Meanwhile, make a tomato sauce by sautéing the onion in a little olive oil until soft. Add the garlic and cook a minute more. Stir in the tomatoes. Cook over a medium-low heat for 30 minutes until slightly thickened. Stir in the basil leaves. Cook the pasta in salted, boiling water and drain. Stir the tomato sauce and aubergine through the pasta. Spoon half the pasta into an oven dish then add half the mozzarella cheese. Spoon the rest of the pasta on top of the first layer and top with the remaining mozzarella and all of the Parmesan. Cook at 200C for 15 minutes if you are cooking straightaway. If from chilled, cook at 190C for 40 minutes. The cheese should be golden and the sauce bubbling around the edges.*

This morning, I finally waved my guests off on the 9.26am to Kings Cross. As you probably know, French people, for all their refinement, make of a hell of a mess at breakfast because they don't use plates. The adults are bad enough, then add in a 2yr old, a 5 yr old, some confiture, chocolat chaud with shredded wheat crumbled into it and it is beyond words. I took to lie-ins, and coming down after breakfast. Given that my plan to take them to a different moor every day was out I had to come up with some softer options..... and I'd worked out how to acclimatise them, starting with a grade 1 gradually increasing in severity to a 7. The Beatrix Potter Attraction by Lake Windermere looked like a good alternative.

If I've learnt anything this week, it is that it takes roughly 35 minutes to get into the car and then 28 minutes to get out. The rain was torrential and we got soaked to the skin during the 28 minutes of getting out the car. Feeling reasonably dismal we took our places in the queue to see Peter Rabbit. I was astounded that adults had to pay full price and that the concessions were for the children. It cost £20 for the four of us. The place was heaving and as we shuffled round I worked out that if an average of 150 families shuffled round each day, they would be taking over £20k a week, £1 million pounds a year – nearly all profit as their only overheads looked to be a bit of electric and wages for the one and only staff member – the lady taking the money. It was just the ground floor of a modest terraced house – one wended one way around 3 small rooms with a few stuffed characters - small ones. I wondered if they paid any money to the Beatrix Potter estate. I could do with a million pounds a year. As I shuffled, I decided I needed to start an attraction – something relevant to the Richmond and out of copyright. The Vikings ? No, it had to be Alice in Wonderland. Lewis Carroll lived in Croft Rectory which is just 10 miles away and the garden there was supposed to have been his inspiration. So if you're a stage set designer and want to get rich quick - get in touch !!

My whole house had gone sticky. Myfa, covered in jam. When I got back from the station, I rolled up my sleeves and cleaned every surface – stripping the beds, the sofas, and to their astonishment, and for the first time, the dining table chairs. I deliberately hadn't bought felt tips, I'd had an inkling, and got them some coloured pencils but they brought their own. After a trip to the Baltic art gallery in Newcastle, the bright white Egyptian cotton duvet received a purple felt tip line drawing. God only knows how they broke the bath tap.

As my friend clambered onto the train with one child under her arm, one loose, a pushchair, and three bags with a combined weight of 60 kilos, I did muse that they will not stay that way for long. She knows that and it's why she moves heaven and earth as a single mother to expand their horizons and stimulate their senses so that they can go on to live bold lives and achieve their potential.

I am now going to go and make a cup of tea and sit down in blissful peace and quiet with sun pouring through the windows.

Kind wishes,

Isobel