

Monday 30th March 2015

Dear Customer,

Hello... and did you realise that aubergine is a very good source of dietary fibre, potassium, manganese, copper and vitamin B, as well as being a good source of vitamin B6, folate, magnesium and niacin. Not only that but they contain potent phytonutrients. One of those is nasunin – an antioxidant which protects cell membranes from damage. Also phenolic compounds which function as antioxidants. The predominant phenolic compound in aubergines is chlorogenic acid, which has many benefits including anti-cancer, antimicrobial, anti-bad cholesterol and antiviral. I can't tell you how intelligent I feel typing up that little lot. And here are some delightful ways to cook it:

**Caponata on Broccoli Polenta
For the Caponata**

3tbsp olive oil	1 large aubergine
1 medium onion	1 stalk celery, chopped
2 medium tomatoes, chopped	60ml water
2 tbsp red wine vinegar	1 tbsp tomato paste
1 tbsp honey	100g green/black olives, chopped
1 tbsp capers, drained	freshly ground black pepper

Cut the aubergine into 1.5cm cubes, place in a colander, sprinkle with salt and allow to drain for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, heat 1 tbsp of the oil in a pan over a medium heat, add the onion and celery until softened (approx. 5 minutes), add the tomatoes, reduce the heat to medium low and cook, uncovered for about 25 minutes, until the tomatoes are of a pulpy consistency. Rinse and pat dry the aubergine and fry in 2 tbsp of the olive oil over a high heat, stirring often until they have good colour. Add the water, vinegar, tomato paste and honey to the tomatoes, onions and celery. Stir well and add the aubergine, olives and capers. Cook for 5 minutes and serve warm or at room temperature on the broccoli polenta.

For the Broccoli Polenta

850ml water	250ml polenta
2 tbsp olive oil	1 well-chopped head broccoli (pieces no bigger than 1cm)
½ tsp salt	

Bring the water to the boil and add the salt. Add the polenta slowly in a steady stream whisking as you do so. Add the oil and the broccoli, turn heat to low, cover and simmer for 15 minutes, stirring often. Take off the heat and let it sit, covered, for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Pour into a shallow dish which has been oiled with a small amount of olive oil so it is 1½ cm thick and let set. This can then be cut into portions; shallow fried in olive oil, grilled or roasted in a hot oven until crisp on the outside. Drain on kitchen paper before serving.

Stuffed Aubergine Rolls

<i>aubergine(s) cut lengthways into ¼" thick strips</i>	olive oil
For the filling	
100g ricotta	100g mozzarella
pinch nutmeg	2 spring onions, finely chopped
For the sauce	
150ml olive oil	250g cherry tomatoes, halved (could substitute with tinned)
1 garlic clove, crushed	pinch sugar

Preheat oven to 180C /355F/ Gas 4. Season the aubergine slices with salt and black pepper and brush with oil. Griddle for a couple of minutes on each side in a hot griddle pan, or until golden-brown grill marks are formed. Remove from the pan and drain on kitchen paper. For the filling, mix the ricotta, mozzarella, nutmeg and spring onions together in a bowl. Lay out all the slices of aubergine onto a clean surface. Place about one teaspoon of filling at the bottom edge of each on. Roll up the aubergine slices, like a cigar, around the filling, then rest seam-side down on a plate. For the sauce, heat the olive oil in a pan and add the cherry tomatoes. Simmer for 8-10 minutes until the tomatoes begin to break down. Remove from the heat and stir in the garlic and sugar. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Spoon some of the sauce into the bottom of an ovenproof dish. Carefully place the aubergine rolls, seam-side down onto the sauce, and spoon over the rest of the sauce. Transfer to the oven and bake for 12-15 minutes, until the cheese begins to melt. To serve, spoon the rolls onto plates.

On Friday at 2pm, I finally signed the lease, the plans are no longer merely hypothetical. Our warehouse staff in Leyburn have been getting very excited and have been asking Diane if they'll be able to come and have hot soup and chips in the café, and cappuccinos. She told them they won't be allowed in it because they are always covered in potato dust. She wants complete segregation. I had to argue with her to leave a door from the packing warehouse into the shop. She wants it concreting up so they have no access whatsoever to the shop and café.

Having now purchased all the cooking hardware we need on ebay, my thoughts turned to the furnishing. I had found some nice wooden tables and chairs in Scotland that I wanted to go and see. However, having now decided to reduce the size of the shop and expand the café area – there weren't enough so I went on ebay again and started bidding on lots of nice looking sets of chairs. I couldn't sleep that night imagining all these un-matching miscellaneous pieces, it looked an auction room. The next morning after my cold sweats, I had to try and retract all my bids.

Next night on ebay I made the mistake of looking at retro Danish furniture and found myself in specialist shop. It was now 1am and the line between what one would put in a commercial café and what one would put in ones home became very blurred and I started bidding on some stunning coffee tables and iconic swivel chairs. Worse than that, I 'won' them. The coffee tables are so designer and precious I will have to cover them in glass and tie plastic bags round their legs so they don't get damaged by a wet mop..... but they will look fab ! Moving on to more sensible things, I then found some really nice round G Plan tables and chairs designed by - Kofod Larsen in the 60's. They looked very cool and I managed to find sets of them all round the country - some people realising the value of what they had, others not. I have bought 5 sets so far but they haven't come easily. Some have been complete but I've also had to buy some horrid tables to get the right chairs and some horrible chairs to get the right tables, which will all have to go back on ebay. It's a work in progress as I need 12 sets. At least my café furniture will all appreciate in value and is going to look very cool indeed.

I hadn't heard a peep from my brother since he rented his London house out and moved up to Harrogate a couple of weeks ago. He finally answered the phone to me on Friday. My announcement that I had just signed the lease was met with silence. And then " well how are you going to heat it ?" I told him I was going to get some woodburners. " WOODBURNERS, WOODBURNERS" he said. " Whose going to keep filling them up, where are you going to get the wood from, who's going to chop it up, how much is that going to cost." "Or electricity, or gas" I said. "That will cost an absolute

fortune. Have you done a high level business plan ?” I told him I’d done some jottings down on bits of paper. “Well, I hope it’s successful.....” he said, leaving hanging in the air the unspoken words that he desperately wanted to utter but didn’t (“but I don’t think it will be”).

Well, it’s Monday morning and David Cameron has just been to see the Queen to launch the campaign of the most terrifying election in history, in the whole world. God help us !

Kind wishes and..... Happy Easter,

Isobel