



Monday 4th December 2017

Dear Customer,

Without further ado, here are some tasty recipes you could try this week :

Aubergine and Courgette Bake

400g courgettes, cut in 5mm slices
100g kale, leaves stripped and shredded
2 cloves garlic
salt and black pepper

1 aubergine, cut in 5mm slices
400g tin tomatoes
handful fresh herbs
60g cheese (optional)

Preheat the oven to 200C/ 400F. Layer the aubergine and courgette slices in an oven-proof dish, alternating until they have been used. Liquidise the garlic and tinned tomatoes then add the kale and fresh herbs and liquidise again. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Pour the tomato sauce over the aubergine and courgette slices and sprinkle over the cheese if using. Put in the oven and bake for 30 minutes.

Sicilian Stew

1 aubergine
2 courgettes
650g potatoes
1 tsp dried oregano
2 tbsp red wine vinegar
3 tbsp olive oil

1 large onion
2 celery sticks
handful flat leaf parsley
1 tbsp caster sugar
690g passata
500ml boiling water

Trim and halve the aubergine and chop into bite-size chunks. Warm a casserole dish over a medium heat for 2 minutes then add 2 tbsp oil and the aubergine. Fry for 8-10 minutes turning once or twice until the chunks are browned all over. While the aubergines fry, finely chop the onion. Chop the courgettes into chunks that match the aubergines. Trim and finely slice the celery. Lift the aubergine out of the pan and put it on a plate. Add another 1 tbsp oil to the pan and tip in the chopped onion, courgettes and celery. Season with a pinch of salt and pepper. Cover and gently fry for 10 minutes, stirring often, till the veg have softened. While the veg fry, scrub the potatoes and slice them into 1cm rounds. Peel and crush the garlic. Finely chop the parsley stalks keeping the leaves for later. Tip the aubergine back into the pan. Add the potatoes, garlic and parsley stalks. Add the dried oregano and add that with a pinch of chilli flakes. Stir in the caster sugar and red wine vinegar. Pour in the passata and add the 500ml boiling water. Give it all a good stir, put a lid on, turn up the heat and bring to the boil. Roughly chop the parsley leaves. The potatoes should be tender and starting to collapse. Taste the stew and add more salt and pepper or chilli flakes to taste. Ladle into bowls and scatter with chopped parsley leaves.

Spiced Potatoes with Aubergine and Coconut

700g potatoes
2 tsp black mustard seeds
4 tsp turmeric
handful coriander, chopped

1 aubergine
2 red chillies, finely chopped
400ml tin coconut milk

Cut the potatoes into 2cm cubes and cut the aubergine into 1cm cubes. Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a frying pan and fry the mustard seeds for a minute until they start popping. Add the chilli then stir in the potatoes and aubergine and fry for one minute. Stir in the turmeric and 200ml water. Cover and cook for 8 minutes. Stir in the coconut milk, season well and bring to the boil the cook, uncovered, for 7-8 minutes until tender. Serve garnished with chopped coriander.

The snows and bitter Arctic winds came. It felt Hardy-esque dragging bales of hay through the blizzards to the sheep. While I know they are adapted I still lie awake worrying about them. All the geriatrics and the Wensleydale sheep are in the paddock next to my house where they have proper shelters and where I can give them extra food and supplements. The others are up the road where it's wilder and they nestle down in the gorse and in the woods. They are Shetlands, wild weather is in their DNA, we just make sure they have plenty of hay. But still, we lost two this weekend - both very old - along with my little guinea pig Coco who died of old age in his nest on Saturday. With animals comes death but it never gets easier. I always remember my mother saying that if she became old and decrepit and didn't want to go on, she would go to an icy mountain top, lie down and let nature take her. She hated hospitals and anything medical. I must admit, I am the same. Given the choice between Darlington Memorial Hospital connected to tubes, drugs being pumped through my veins, strip lighting and central heating.... or the mountain.... it's definitely the mountain. So maybe my sheep are lucky - after a happy life they have the best sort of death.

So here I am full of Christmas cheer and merriment.

I am ahead of the game this year. I have bought a couple of Christmas presents already knowing that the lead up to Christmas will be very difficult as I have an Airbnb booking from 27th December for 6 nights. The cleaning machine will have to start up again, I need to try to have the house ready by Christmas eve and then go to my friend's Jane Austen house for the duration.

I was in the Coop the other day and I noticed a pricing discrepancy, so I called over a member of staff who was in the aisle. She looked offended and told me she didn't work there, then the logo on her top came into focus, it said 'Specsavers'. It was another of those magical moments.

I just buy those off-the shelf glasses. They're fantastic except the arms break off so I get through a lot of them. Richmond gets more and more downmarket by the day. We have a shop called the Yorkshire Trading Company. It has a perfect Georgian façade but once inside It's like a long, giant, Chinese shipping container - everything is shoddy and very cheap. You have to take a deep breath before you go through the door and run straight to the back where the cheap glasses are, for £1.99, making sure not to breathe in the cocktail of the thousands of noxious chemicals it stinks of. I would worry about the health of the people who work there. But now 'Savers' has just opened up on the market place, behind another stunning Georgian façade, helping keep inflation down, they are selling them for £1 a pair.

Kind wishes,

Isobel