



Monday 2nd April 2018

Dear Customer,

It's Easter Monday. I hope you have had a nice weekend. It is snowing hard here, there must be a couple of inches on the ground already and its only 8.50am and set to continue all day. I've been fantasising, busy looking at long-term rental property in the South of France – just need a few sharers. The weather here is ridiculous. I keep looking at the online BBC forecast and all it shows is grey/rain every day. Occasionally a partial sun appears in the future but it always then gets erased and replaced by the grey.

So while we wait for spring, here are some tasty recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Courgette and Tomato Gratin

<i>500g courgettes, sliced</i>	<i>400g tomatoes, sliced</i>
<i>2 tbsp pesto</i>	<i>4 tbsp breadcrumbs</i>
<i>25g Cheddar cheese</i>	<i>1 clove garlic, finely chopped</i>
<i>pinch cayenne pepper</i>	<i>1 tbsp oil</i>

Preheat the oven to 220C/ Gas 7. Toss the courgettes in the pesto until lightly coated. Arrange the courgette and tomato slices in a single layer in a large gratin dish. Season with salt and pepper. Mix together the breadcrumbs, cheese, garlic and cayenne pepper and sprinkle over the top. Drizzle with the olive oil. Bake in the oven for 30 minutes until the top is golden and the vegetables are tender.

Indian Vegetable Curry

<i>600g potatoes, peeled and diced</i>	<i>1 head broccoli, in florets</i>
<i>25g sliced almonds</i>	<i>3 tbsp sunflower oil</i>
<i>1 courgettes, finely sliced</i>	<i>1 onion, finely sliced</i>
<i>1 garlic clove, crushed</i>	<i>1 red chilli, sliced</i>
<i>1 red pepper, deseeded and sliced</i>	<i>400ml vegetable stock</i>
<i>400ml tin coconut milk</i>	<i>2 tsp garam masala</i>
<i>1 tsp turmeric</i>	<i>1 tsp curry paste</i>
<i>2 tbsp cornflour</i>	

Cook the potatoes and broccoli in separate pans in salted water for 3-4 minutes then drain. Meanwhile toast the almonds in a saucepan without oil for 1-2 minutes until golden then remove from the pan. Add the oil to the pan then the courgette and potato and saute for 3-4 minutes. Add the onion, garlic, chilli, broccoli and pepper to the pan and continue to cook for a further 3-4 minutes. Pour in the stock and coconut milk then stir in the garam masala and turmeric. Stir in the curry paste and cook for 6-7 minutes. Mix the cornflour with a little water then stir into the pan. Simmer for a few minutes until thickened. Sprinkle with the almonds to serve.

Parsnip, Potato and Apple Soup

<i>20g margarine</i>	<i>1 tbsp oil</i>
<i>1 large onion, diced</i>	<i>3 cloves garlic, minced</i>
<i>250g potatoes</i>	<i>250g parsnips</i>
<i>250g apples</i>	<i>450ml vegetable stock</i>
<i>black pepper</i>	

Heat the oil and margarine in a large saucepan and cook the onion and garlic over a low to medium heat for 5 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally until soft and translucent. Chop the potatoes and peel and chop the parsnip and apple. When the onions are cooked add the other vegetables to the pan and mix well. Add the stock and cover with a lid, leaving a small gap for ventilation. Simmer over a medium heat for around 25 minutes, stirring every now and then until all the vegetables are very soft. When the vegetables are ready blend the soup until smooth. Season generously with black pepper. Adjust thickness of the soup as desired by adding more stock.

The other morning I came downstairs, made a cup of tea, looked out the window and saw all the sheep from the paddock ambling nonchalantly past, heading down the road towards Richmond. Luckily Barney was the one leading them, I leapt up and shouted him out the window and he turned round and led them all up my drive. I know he was looking for me, he always does. I ran out in my pyjamas and managed to get them back into their field. Barney is 12 now, he was the same age as Myfa, he came running after me jumping and bucking – very pleased with himself. There are 28 sheep still here and the rest are in the new place.

But then on Friday evening the farmer rang and said that 80 of them had crawled through a hole under the fence and were in adjacent fields eating his arable crops and could I come quickly. They are about a 20-minute drive from me. I belted over there. When he'd previously asked me if I used a dog, I told him 'no', that they all came to the bucket – I prayed. When I got there he had his young child on his shoulders as his wife was out. He said he must have walked 3 miles like that trying to round them up.

After considerable effort and dealing with various breakaway groups we managed to get them back in. But just as we were doing so the rest of them found the hole and they all got out too. It was now practically dark and they could only be seen when he scanned the fields with his torch and lit up their eyes. Anyway, eventually we got them all back. I apologised to the farmer, said they were over-excited in a new home and with spring on the way. I warned the sheep that they better behave themselves or they would be homeless again.

I adore my new puppy. The house training is going well, she has vastly improved in just one week. She slithers about on the furniture and is chewing everything, including my arms and ears and she punctured the end of my nose with blood everywhere. I have just discovered that she has just chewed through the landline phone lead as I've been writing this, silently severing the plug from the lead – which was thankfully unplugged. She's now grinding the coffee table leg.

Hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel