



Monday 5th November 2018

Dear Customer,

This year has flown, November already, and only 8 weeks to 2019. After a nippy few days when I panicked and brought all my geraniums indoors, it is again, very mild. A tree in my neighbour's garden is blooming with pink spring blossom. Just like last year ... spring doesn't know where it should be anymore. It is the eternal optimist, popping up wherever it can, just to be obliterated by winter or bullied out by summer. Poor spring.

Spiced Cauliflower Dhal

1 cauliflower, in florets
2 tsp cumin seeds

2 tsp sumac

For the Dhal:

1 onion, chopped
pinch chilli flakes
2 tsp ground coriander
100g red lentils
juice of ½ lemon

15g grated ginger
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground turmeric
100ml unsweetened almond milk

Heat the oven to 190C/ 170C Fan/ Gas 5. Wash the cauliflower florets and arrange them while still wet in the baking tray. Scatter over the sumac, cumin seeds and some salt and pepper and toss to coat. Cook in the oven for 30-40 minutes, moving them in their tray occasionally so they cook evenly. Meanwhile start the dhal. Fry the onion in a saucepan with a little water over a medium heat for about 8 minutes until soft and translucent. Add the ginger, chilli and dry spices. Stir and then add the lentils, mixing them well with the spices. Add 450ml water along with the almond milk. Bring to a bubble and simmer for about 30 minutes until the lentils are soft and the liquid has reduced. Serve the dhal with a squeeze of lemon and the roasted cauliflower on top.

Cauliflower and Pear Bake

1 cauliflower
4 Hen Nation eggs
½ tsp black pepper
4 tbsp breadcrumbs
6 black olives, stoned and sliced

3 pears, peeled, cored and sliced
1 small onion, chopped
½ tsp nutmeg
1 tbsp parsley, chopped
6 mushrooms, thinly sliced

Chop the cauliflower into florets. Drop them into a large pan of boiling water. After 10 minutes, add the pear slices and cook until just tender. Drain and put the cauliflower, pears, eggs, some salt, pepper, nutmeg and breadcrumbs into a liquidiser and blend. Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4 and lightly oil a large baking dish. Pour a quarter of the cauliflower mixture into the dish. Cover with half the olive slices. Pour in another quarter of the cauliflower mixture and cover it with the mushrooms and onion. Repeat a cauliflower layer and then add the remaining olive slices. Top with the remaining cauliflower. Bake for 30-45 minutes until the top is golden. Finally, sprinkle with the parsley and serve.

Kale and Potato Gratin

600g potatoes, finely sliced
1 onion, finely chopped
½ tsp chilli flakes (optional)

1 tbsp olive oil
3 garlic cloves, chopped
bunch of kale, chopped

Gruyere Sauce:

120g Gruyere, grated
50g plain flour

50g butter
500ml milk

Preheat the oven to 220C/ Gas 7. Boil the potatoes in water until just tender and drain. Heat the oil in a large frying pan over and saute the onion for 8 minutes till softened then add the garlic and chilli, if using, and fry for another minute. Stir in the kale, cover and cook for 6-8 minutes until wilted. Season and set aside. Meanwhile make the sauce. Melt the butter in a saucepan over a low heat then add the flour and cook, stirring constantly for 3-4 minutes until pale golden. Gradually whisk in the milk until you have a silky sauce. Heat, stirring almost to a simmer then take off the heat, stir in two thirds of the cheese and season. Lay half the potatoes in a baking dish and cover with the kale mixture. Top with the remaining potatoes, pour over the sauce and scatter with the remaining cheese. Bake for 25 minutes until golden and bubbling.

Knowing I was bringing my geraniums in, and not leaving them to perish in the frosts as I usually do, I'd been trying to work out where to put all the big pots. They have holes in the bottoms. I went on ebay and put low bids on a ton of kitsch vintage trays from the 60's and 70's to sit them on. I 'won' most of them so now have them flooding in. Diane said her mother still has the bread board and Kenwood mixer cover of one of the designs that arrived – 1970's St Michaels (M & S). I suggested she might give it her for Christmas – dark brown with an orange floral design. In my ebay travels I came across designs I recognised from childhood and I mourned my parent's tea trolley. It had a gilt frame and white trays with a pink rose on. I never liked it but loved the functionality as it was trundled into the lounge with the tea pot, sandwiches and cakes on. Happy memories. I wondered what today's equivalent is. There isn't one. Ikea do a horrible angular woody thing that bears no comparison. If ever there was an item due for a comeback it is this, the hostess trolley. In the meantime I am going to get myself a vintage one on ebay. Followed perhaps by a visit into my loft to dig out their old teas-made.

While checking the sheep on Saturday Lainey was trying to drag me over the river embankment. I feared what I might find, she picks up the smell of rotting flesh. What I did find was a beautiful deer whose bleeding hind foot was caught in the high barbed wire fence, almost dangling. It was so beautiful and staring at me in terror. It needed cutting free but had it broken it's leg or dislocated it. Impossible to know, or how long it might have been there. We carry antibiotics for the sheep so we injected it with some and then severed the wire with foot clippers. It cried out in pain and fear. It limped off and lay down. The sheep gathered round to see what was happening and formed a semi-circle round it. We then just had to leave it, it was a big wild animal. I am going back up there this morning to see if it is still there. I hope it won't be. I really hate wire fences and barbed wire. As far as most farmers are concerned a fence isn't complete without a strand of barbed wired on top. Ernest was the same, how I used to argue with him about it.

Kind wishes and have a good week, Isobel