

Monday 8th July 2019

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. There's a cool-ish breeze, there is a bit of hazy sunshine coming through the cloud. Its not bad, but it's not great. Tomorrow it rains, and for the foreseeable future....up here that is. Oh for the summer of 2018.

Here are a few tasty recipes you could cook up with this week's ingredients:

Mushroom and Fennel Lasagne

3 tbsp olive oil	1 large fennel bulb, finely chopped
100g mushrooms, sliced	1 onion, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped	75ml red wine
½ tsp oregano	½ tsp thyme
400g tin chopped tomatoes	1 tbsp tomato puree
250g mozzarella, soft balls	250g ricotta
125g lasagne sheets	grated cheese, for topping

Preheat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. In a heavy pan heat 2 tbsp oil. Add the fennel and cook on a low to medium heat for 30-40 minutes until soft and caramel colour. Increase the heat, add the mushrooms and cook for another 4-5 minutes until soft. While the fennel is cooking, in another pan heat 1 tbsp oil, add the onion and cook on a low heat until soft, add the garlic and cook for another few minutes. Add the wine and cook until the liquid has reduced by half. Add the herbs, chopped tomatoes, about 50 ml water and the tomato puree then season well. Simmer until the fennel and mushrooms are ready. In a baking dish spread some tomato sauce over the bottom of the dish. Add a layer of lasagne sheets then layer the fennel mixture, mozzarella and ricotta, lasagne and tomato sauce, finishing with a layer of tomato sauce. Cover with foil and bake for 20 minutes. Remove the foil, sprinkle over the grated cheese and bake for another 15-20 minutes until the lasagne is soft and the cheese has melted.

Chard Bulgur Pilaf with Caramelised Fennel

1 bulb fennel, finely sliced	1 onion, finely sliced
3 tbsp olive oil	10g margarine
zest and juice of small lemon	
Pilaf:	
2 tbsp olive oil	350g coarse bulgur
500ml vegetable stock	bunch swiss chard leaves, finely chopped

To make the caramelised fennel saute the fennel and onion in the olive oil on a low to medium heat for 10-15 minutes. Stir from time to time until they are soft and caramelised. Remove from the heat and add the margarine, lemon zest and juice. Stir until the margarine has melted then put to one side. To make the pilaf, warm the olive oil in a large pan and stir in the bulgur until well-coated. Pour in the stock, cover and cook on a low to medium heat until the bulgur is soft. A few minutes before the bulgur is cooked, add the swiss chard and season well to taste. Serve the pilaf topped with the caramelised fennel.

Swiss Chard and New Potato Dahl

2 tbsp sunflower oil	1 onion, finely chopped
3 cloves garlic, crushed	3cm piece ginger, grated
1 tsp turmeric	1 tsp cumin
1 tsp chilli flakes	1 tomato, roughly chopped
300g new potatoes, sliced in thick rounds	200g chard
200g lentils, red or green or a mixture	500g water
1 lemon	

Heat the oil in a large pan and add the onion. Fry over a gentle heat for 2-3 minutes then add the spice ingredients. Continue to fry gently for a further 3-4 minutes. Chop up the chard stalks, setting aside the leaves, and add these to the pan with the tomato, potatoes and lentils then pour over the water. Season well. Stir, bring to the boil, then gently simmer. Cover with the lid and leave to cook for 40 minutes or until the lentils are soft. Stir and add a little more water if necessary. Finely chop the chard leaves then stir these through the dahl. When cooked, squeeze the juice of the lemon into it and stir through. Serve with rice and naan bread.

I have a new pal. Each morning when I get up there's a little blackbird waiting for me outside the door. I find him some breakfast - pieces of apple, avocado, over-ripe bananas, bits of bread. I work on a table next to bi-fold doors. He appears about 10 times every day and hops about next to me until I go and find him a snack. I'm becoming overly attached to him. When I lay the paving at the back of my house, I chose New York slabs – a beautiful pale stone, almost white. Over the years despite pressure washing they have turned grey. I have been trying to get them back to their original colour using natural ingredients. The Google consensus seemed to be white vinegar and bicarbonate of soda, then a good scrub with washing powder and a stiff brush. It made no difference whatsoever. A man with a powerful industrial cleaner came, he does council car parks, I thought he might make some impression. But nothing. On the slabs are a few small puddle shapes and two paw prints of the original colour. This is where Lainey peed when she was a puppy and couldn't make it as far as the lawn in time. The industrial pressure washer man said it needed chemicals – something I would never do. What I really need is puppy pee, or a recipe to make it. I wonder if just any pee works. Something I shall not seek to answer.

I didn't have a good weekend. On Friday I visited a friend up the Dales, and on our walk happened to mention that I didn't know what my blood pressure was, hadn't had it taken for years. After brainstorming about something and being hyped up and then walking up a hilly field of long grass and nettles, we went into her house and she immediately, out of the blue, thrust a blood pressure cuff onto me. I freaked out, couldn't breathe, just at the sight of it, like putting a gun to my head. The result was of course very high, she said to take it again. I waited a minute tried to deep breathe then took it again. It wasn't quite as high, but it was still high. Since then my life has been a misery of anxiety. I brought the cuff away with me so I could take my pressure properly as it's supposed to be taken, in a relaxed state. However, I am anything but. Just the thought of it sends me erupting like a volcano. So I am stuck in this terrible state now of not knowing, and not being able to find out. And I really have to stop reading about it on the internet. Just writing this sets me off !

Kind wishes, Isobel