



Monday 25th November 2019

Dear Customer,

Blimey, the last week of November already. December on Saturday, the election, then Christmas, that much we know. Beyond that is anyone's guess. It will be 2021, the only certainty.

It's very November up here - dark, wet and foggy. I don't remember the last time we saw the sun. We had some hard frosts in the week which did it for the garden, now a brown vegetal mush. I remember last year when I raked off the mush I disturbed frogs so vowed that this year I would leave it for them to hide in. It's not pretty but it is nature. At least the more horrible things look now the better they'll look when spring comes.

We have squash in the bags this week. I know it can be quite a bind cutting into it. You could bake it whole. Preheat the oven to 210C / 425F / Gas 7. Simply put it, as is, in a tin or dish lined with aluminium foil. Pierce it in 5 or 6 different places with a skewer or sharp knife then roast it for 60-80 minutes until a skewer goes in easily, it will be mottled brown and a bit shrivelled on the outside. Cut it in half lengthwise, scoop out the seeds and any stringy flesh surrounding them with a spoon, then use the remaining flesh. You can eat as it is with a bit of butter or margarine and seasoning or use in a recipe.

We also have delicious sweet, nutty purple sprout tops. They are full of vitamins, most notably vitamin C and vitamin K, which like calcium helps build bone density, plus lots of iron, manganese and folate. You can use them as you would any other green. You could steam for 5 minutes until tender or stir-fry with some chopped onion, sesame oil and garlic. Or you could try one of these tasty recipes:

Sprout Tops with Tofu

*block of tofu, in small cubes
2 tbsp sesame oil
1 tbsp fresh ginger, grated
red pepper flakes
sprout tops, shredded*

*3 tbsp soy sauce
juice of ½ lime
3 cloves garlic, minced
sesame seeds*

Combine the soy sauce, sesame oil, lime juice, ginger and garlic in a bowl. Heat a pan and add half of the sauce. Add the tofu and cook for 5 minutes. Then add the sprout tops and the rest of the sauce and cook until tender. Sprinkle with red pepper flakes and sesame seeds to serve.

Sprout Tops, Squash and Bean Soup

*½ tbsp olive oil
1 tbsp chopped rosemary
1 ½ litres vegetable stock
125g orzo pasta
sprout tops, tough stems removed, shredded*

*1 onion, finely chopped
½ squash, peeled, deseeded, diced
400g can chopped tomatoes
400g tin cannellini beans, drained*

Heat the oil in a large saucepan, add the onion and rosemary and cook over a medium heat until the onion has softened. Tip in the squash, stock and tomatoes, then season. Simmer for 10 minutes, adding the orzo with 5 minutes to go. The orzo and squash should be just tender. Stir the beans and shredded greens into the soup and simmer until the greens are tender.

Squash Macaroni Cheese

*500g squash, peeled, deseeded
1 tbsp chopped fresh sage
225g macaroni
40g plain flour
175g extra mature cheddar, grated*

*1 clove garlic, crushed
1 tbsp olive oil
40g butter
600ml semi skimmed milk*

Preheat the oven to 190°C / Gas 5. Cut the squash into 4cm chunks and put in a roasting tin. Scatter over the garlic and sage then drizzle over the oil. Roast for 30 minutes until the squash is tender. Meanwhile, cook the macaroni in boiling water for 8-10 minutes until tender. Drain well and set aside. Melt the butter in a pan and stir in the flour. Remove from the heat and gradually stir in the milk to form a smooth sauce. Return to the heat and cook, stirring continuously, until it comes to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 2 minutes. Remove the sauce from the heat and stir in two thirds of the grated cheese. Preheat the grill to high. Stir the macaroni into the cheese sauce, then carefully fold in the squash, taking care not to break it up. Spoon the mixture into an ovenproof dish and scatter over the rest of the cheese. Place under the grill for 3-5 minutes until bubbling.

Whoever wins the election, their manifestos are all committing to building hundreds of thousands of new homes. When I've been out and about in England there seems to be a lot of new building going on everywhere, on the edges of towns and villages. What they have in common is they are all built with the same template, the one they've been using since year dot, the Wimpey template. Nice comfortable homes I'm sure.

When I was discussing this with a friend who came to stay, I said it was ridiculous because most people would much rather live in a cube. ' You really think so ?' he said. I said I did, and what would he prefer to live in..... ' a cube', he said. Cubes don't go for less than a million – the preserve of the wealthy. Modernist architecture has been around for 100 years yet it's never filtered down into housing estates. We need some mini modernism, mini cubes. What could be cheaper and quicker to build than four breeze block walls rendered with concrete (or something like that !) and painted white – open plan, big windows, upstairs balcony an optional add-on. Up here, they are forbidden, too edgy, they're blasphemous. Only a cube would get me out of this house if I ever had a plot to build one on.

I got a letter back from my MP Rishi Sunak this morning after my latest letter to him. I think I drive him mad. I had a long list, nothing extraordinary – banning factory farming, banning of fur sales, matching California by banning foie gras, severe penalties for dog theft, stopping the clocks from going forward and plunging us into misery every year. I received copy and paste answers for all of these with a few personalised pleasantries added in. What I received no answer to was banning lorries from the roads on Sunday as they do in France. A 9am to 9pm respite I suggested. I got him there, there was nothing for him to copy and paste, so it remained unanswered

Kind wishes,

Isobel