



**Monday 30<sup>th</sup> December 2019**

Dear Customer,

I hope you had a lovely Christmas. Over for another year and back to grind, or the blissful humdrum of ordinary daily life. No more Sellotape.

And Happy New Year and Happy New Decade. We shall see what the twenties has in store for us. I think we can rest assured, it will be eventful.

Here are a few tasty recipes you could try this week:

**Roasted Parsnip and Carrot Soup**

500g parsnips	300g carrots
1 tbsp maple syrup	olive oil
2 onions, roughly chopped	2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tsp ground cumin	500ml fresh vegetable stock
1 tbsp lemon juice	4 tbsp dairy or non-dairy yoghurt

*Preheat the oven to 200°C / 390F/ Gas 6. Peel the parsnips and carrots and cut into 3cm chunks. Toss with the maple syrup and 1 tbsp oil, then spread out on a baking tray. Season and roast for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, heat another 1 tbsp oil in a saucepan over a medium heat and add the onions, garlic and a pinch of salt. Cover, and cook gently for 12 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the lid, add the cumin, and cook, uncovered, for another 3 minutes. Tip in the roasted parsnips and carrots, stock and 750ml water. Bring to the boil then simmer for 10 minutes. In a blender, whizz the soup with 1 tbsp lemon juice until smooth. Add a splash of water to loosen if needed, then reheat. Serve with a dollop of yoghurt and a grinding of black pepper.*

**Roasted Squash & Leek Risotto**

400g squash, in small chunks	4 tsp olive oil
20g butter or margarine	375g leeks, trimmed, halved lengthways then finely sliced
250g risotto rice, arborio	175ml dry white wine
1 litre hot vegetable stock	juice of ½ small lemon
30g freshly grated hard cheese	

*Preheat the oven to 220°C/200C Fan/ Gas 7. Toss the squash with 2 tsp oil and roast for 20 minutes. Set aside 8 smaller pieces then roughly mash the rest. Heat the remaining oil and butter or margarine in a large saucepan. Fry the leeks with a pinch of salt for 8 minutes until soft but not coloured. Stir in the rice, add the wine and stir until absorbed. Stir the mashed squash into the rice, then add 2 ladles of hot stock and stir until all the liquid is absorbed. Keep adding the stock in the same way for 20 minutes, or until the rice is just tender. Season with the lemon juice and stir in the remaining butter or margarine and half the cheese. Remove from the heat and cover. Top with the reserved roasted squash and remaining cheese to serve.*

**Potato and Cauliflower with Lentils**

400g potatoes	1 cauliflower, cut in florets and stalk diced
1 tbsp garam masala	3 tbsp oil
2 garlic cloves	200g Puy lentils
thumb-sized piece ginger, grated	fresh coriander

*Heat the oven to 200C/ 180C Fan/ Gas 6. Toss the sweet potato and cauliflower in the garam masala, half the oil and some seasoning. Spread on a large roasting tray, add the garlic and roast for 30-35 minutes until cooked. Meanwhile put the lentils in a saucepan with 400ml cold water. Bring to the boil and simmer for 20-25 minutes until the lentils are cooked but still have some bite, then drain. Remove the garlic cloves from the tray and squash them with the blade of a knife. Put in a large bowl with the remaining oil, ginger, mustard and pinch of sugar and a good amount of lemon juice. Whisk, then tip in the warm lentils, season and stir. Divide the lentil mixture into bowls and top with the sweet potato and cauliflower mixture. Garnish with coriander.*

At this time of year the ambiance of Richmond changes, the population doubles and fills up with attractive young people, fashionable people, all home for Christmas. Normally it's a bit Bournemouth. If the children want a life, a career, they have to leave, there's nothing here for them. Just a glance down my road, the offspring are mainly in London, a few dotted round the world. Some may come back eventually, but certainly not before early retirement.

Coming home for Christmas, I remember it well. Pre getting an old bronze-coloured car that used to cut out at every roundabout on the A1, it would usually be the bus from Victoria station, or sometimes a lift with my brother in his then Porsche when I would fall asleep as we left London and wake up 5 hours later as we pulled into our road. Mum would be waiting anxiously for us all to arrive, Christmas was ready and waiting. My poor parents never knew what incarnations of their children would walk through the door – the disco queen, the punk, the hippy, the radical feminist, the Bohemian, the indie popster – the attire, the hair colours, always a surprise. All part of one's evolution ! But as long as we got there safely. Thankfully they never cared much what the neighbours thought.

Yesterday when I was at the garage I thought it perhaps time to check the air pressure in my car tyres. I'm impressed because I know how to do it now. I put the nozzle on the first one. It was 11. That didn't seem much. And 11 what I have no idea, 11 litres, 11 cubic metres of compressed air, is it pounds, 11 pounds, pounds ring a bell but is incomprehensible. I filled it to 38. The other 3 were between 17 and 20. I thought it had felt like I was driving through a bog. Anyway, another good job done. The car's all ready for 2020.

My brother and his partner and nephew and his partner came over yesterday. We went for a meal and then back here to mine for the afternoon and presents. Talking politics, which we do jovially and amicably, the conversation obviously led to my specialist subject of Rishi Sunak and my compulsive letter writing. Then the revelation of Christmas, my brother's partner said that every week at theirs, a letter drops on the mat in a House of Commons envelope. My brother looked sheepish. 'Is that true, is that true?' I said. He finally admitted that he too is constantly writing to his MP. My God it's in our DNA, the MP stalker gene.

Hope you have a good week,

Isobel