



Monday 18th May 2020

Dear Customer,

We are racing through May aren't we. These will be the lost months. We look out the windows at the same old world, none the wiser as to when we might be able to re-enter it with the same verve and gusto as when we left. It's hard not to feel terrified of this miserable, creepy virus about which we still know so little. I just hope it gets fed up with us, fed up with the Daily Briefings, and slopes off to oblivion.

In the meantime, here are a few tasty recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Roast Vegetable and Lentil Salad

200g peppers, cut into bite-sized chunks
2 onions, cut into bite-sized chunks
6 tbsp olive oil
1 red chilli
1 tbsp fennel seeds
2 tsp clear honey

1 courgette, cut into bite-sized chunks
1 fennel bulb, cut into bite-sized chunks and fronds reserved
3 garlic cloves, unpeeled
3 tomatoes
2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
500g cooked Puy lentils

Preheat the oven to 220°C/ Gas 7. On a large baking tray, toss the peppers, courgette, onions and fennel in 2 tbsp oil; season. Add the garlic and chilli and roast for 20 minutes. Remove the garlic and chilli (set aside), cut the tomatoes into wedges and add to the tray, tossing everything together, and cook for 15-20 minutes more until soft and golden. Meanwhile, heat a small frying pan and toast the fennel seeds for 1-2 minutes until fragrant. Tip into a small blender. Roughly chop the roasted chilli, discarding the stalk, and add to the blender with the garlic (squeezed out of their skins), remaining 4 tbsp oil, balsamic vinegar and honey. Whizz until mostly smooth; season. Chop the fennel fronds and stir into the dressing. Heat the lentils according to pack instructions; tip into a large bowl then stir in the dressing and roasted veg.

Rhubarb and Banana Cake

115g butter
170g caster sugar
225g self-raising flour
2 tbsp milk

2 very ripe bananas
4 Hen nation eggs
1 tbsp baking powder

For the Rhubarb:

350g rhubarb, trimmed chopped in 3cm pieces
1 tbsp elderflower cordial

2 tbsp caster sugar

Preheat the oven to 190C/ Gas 5. Grease a 20cm round springform cake tin and line with baking paper. First make the rhubarb. Mix together the rhubarb, sugar and elderflower in a small pan over a low heat to soften for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, then set aside to cool while you make the cake. Mash the bananas in a food processor then add the butter, sugar, eggs, flour and baking powder. Whiz until well blended. Add the milk and whiz again. Pour the mixture into the prepared tin then spoon the rhubarb on top. Bake for about 50 minutes or until a skewer inserted comes out clean. If the top is browning too much, cover loosely with some foil. Remove from the oven and leave to cool on a wire rack before releasing from the tin.

I was watching the local BBC news the other night, always depressing, with the daily 'what's going on locally' roundup of murders and arson attacks. Our region now has the highest Covid-19 cases in the country. They were interviewing some locals in Wensleydale. "We don't want THEM coming here" they said, in reference to people from towns and cities coming to the countryside to find some nature..... and bringing the virus presumably. It really infuriates me.' THEM' slog their guts out in towns and cities, keeping the cogs turning to pay your farm subsidies and your pensions dear locals. THEM is who treat you when you need specialist care, and who make much of what you need and use in your life. The wild garlic and bluebells in the woods, the green meadows, the stoats, the sticklebacks, the sun setting over the hills, the rivers meandering through green valleys – you do not own them'.

I hark on a lot about the National Parks, set up in post-War Britain precisely that there should be swathes of our land where everyone is free to roam, to enjoy and find solace in nature. Except the land in National Parks is actually in private ownership and is almost exclusively managed not for the benefit of nature, wildlife and the people, but for grouse shooting. But it is somewhere to roam if your dog's on a lead and you can dodge the bullets.

But therefore what land do we own as a nation, what is ours, now that we need it so much.

I will tell you. In order of acreage, these are the biggest landowners:

1. Forestry Commission owns 2.2million acres, established in 1919 to replant and restore forests after WW1... (OURS)
2. The National Trust owns 815,000 acres..... a bequeath to the Trust is a bequeath to the nation....surely (OURS)
3. Ministry of Defence 750,000 acres (OURS)
4. Crown Estates 360,000 acres (OURS one would think)

- 5 RSPB 324,000 (should be OURS)
- 6 DEFRA 150,000 (OURS)
- 7 Church of England 105,000 (OURS, if God consents)

The water companies own hundreds of thousands of acres, and needless to say, the rest in the top results are mainly wealthy private individuals.

So all in all, about 5 million of the 60 million acres in the UK, are owned by us collectively, more or less, and should be opened up. That's plenty of room for our socially distanced UK camping holidays. Might also want to add in the 4.3 million acres (6820 square miles) of National Parks in England and Wales with a quick compulsory purchase, what difference will a few extra billion make. Dump HS2 and give us back our countryside.

Hope you have a good week, and vive la revolution !

Kind wishes,

Isobel