



Monday 7th December 2020

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. I thought we were going to get away with not having winter this time because we were suffering so badly with the pandemic. But it's arrived, with freezing rain. Just two weeks to go and the days will start lengthening again. A few days more and it will be Christmas, and a mere week after that the Garden of England will be full of lorries. We march inexorably on to meet our destiny.

And here are a couple of tasty recipes you could try this week:

Aubergine and Lentil Ragù

2 tbsp olive oil	1 small aubergine, cut into 1cm dice
1 onion, finely sliced	2 garlic cloves, crushed
2 tomatoes, diced	180g dried tagliatelle
250g pouch cooked Puy or green lentils	small handful basil leaves

Heat 1 tbsp oil in a frying pan. Add the aubergine, season and fry for 10 minutes until golden. Tip onto a plate and set aside. Add the remaining oil with the onion and fry for 5 minutes, then add the garlic and fry for 3 more minutes. Stir in the diced tomatoes and cook for a further 2 minutes. Meanwhile, cook the tagliatelle according to pack instructions, then drain. Return the aubergine to the pan, then tip in the lentils. Fill the pouch halfway with water and pour into the pan. Simmer gently until everything is warm, then stir through most of the basil. Serve the ragù over the tagliatelle with the remaining basil leaves scattered on top.

Chickpea and Aubergine Curry

1½ tbsp vegetable oil	1 onion, chopped
3 cloves garlic, chopped	½ red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped
5cm piece root ginger, chopped	1 aubergine, finely chopped
2 tbsp tamari	400g chickpeas, drained and rinsed
2 tbsp curry powder	½ tbsp ground turmeric
300ml coconut milk	400g tin chopped tomatoes
120g spinach or kale, shredded	½ lemon, juice
1 tsp ground black pepper	2 tbsp toasted flaked almonds
wholemeal pittas, toasted	

Heat the oil in a large saucepan and cook the onion, garlic, chilli and ginger for 2-3 minutes, stirring regularly. Add the aubergine and tamari and cook for 5 minutes, continuing to stir. Add 5 tbsp water and cook for a further 3-4 minutes. Add the chickpeas, curry powder, turmeric, coconut milk, chopped tomatoes, spinach or kale, lemon juice and black pepper. Bring to the boil and simmer until the greens are tendre, stirring occasionally. Serve scattered with the toasted almonds and with toasted pitta bread.

The first Christmas card arrived last Thursday, barely December, with a printed address label on - hot off the Christmas card list database. I think I know who it's from and there will be a neatly folded round-robin letter in it. I can't open it, it's too early. It depressed me. I can imagine the production line with all the elements laid out in order on the kitchen table - cards, letter, envelopes, labels, stamps. Life isn't normal and it's surely easier to deal with by not attempting to pretend that it is. But I guess we each have our own way and we do whatever works for us. I'm taking one day at a time and creeping quietly through. The Christmas fanfare is beyond me. And in any case, I always prefer a dark, sombre festive season. I'm bad company, 'tis the season of melancholy. At least I've got a good excuse this year. Every cloud.....

I got a call from Rogerio the other week at 5.30am..... 'My van's gone'.

Newly logoed up, he'd only had it a week. It was taken in the dead of night. It had cost £3300 to insure him the week earlier. We spent a combined 12 hours on hold trying to contact the insurers to change his policy to another van but they never picked up. They ignored all emails and the live chat was dead. We had to take out a fresh insurance and there was only one other insurance offer on him, an eye-watering £4700. He's as rare and precious as Ming vase. I have lost so many hours trying to get the £3k back from the original insurers and now have to contact the financial ombudsman, the police, the fraud department.

Fearful that my absent next door neighbour might soon arrive with lockdown ended, I phoned him yesterday to tell him I'd straightened up our joint fence to put trellis up, something he knew I wanted to do, and that the fencer had made his side look unsightly with big new posts, not removing the old posts and had dug out some of his paving and filled it with concrete. It was a good job I rang as he said they were coming up next morning. Today. So I've just been to see him and said I would do whatever it takes - new fence, new paving...and that the yellow clematis I'd planted would look fantastic and flowers from June right through to November. He was very good about it, said we should see what it looks like when it's bedded in. Phew!

The profound, the banal, the moments that make up our daily lives. What's not to love.

You may have seen in the press that there is a wave of Avian Flu coming through the UK from migratory birds, much worse than in previous years. DEFRA has ordered that all hens have to be quarantined indoors from next monday. So that of course includes our Hen Nation hens. Their 'free range' status is protected and lots of enrichment will be put in their scratching pits like bales of hay and toys to keep them busy. They might not mind in this weather but will be back out as soon as the quarantine is over.

I hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel

PS We will email you in the week with details of delivery days for the Christmas period.