



Monday 21st December 2020

Dear Customer,

It's Sunday. I feel so sad for everyone. What an utterly dismal end to the year with everyone's Christmas plans in tatters. You are reinstating orders, reducing orders. I'm so sorry, it was so sudden.

I ordered some new desk diaries from Ebay and they turned up with the date 2020 on. "No" said Diane, "I can't go through that again".

Nearly a year now since Wuhan. While Whitty told us way back that we would have to live with this thing forever, it was easy to not believe them. It was a novel virus. They couldn't know.

So now we've got MUTANT, son of COVID. What does MUTANT want with us. Can't we get in there and modify it, turn it pink or orange so we can at least see our miserable vaporous enemy.

We've been through so much already our people, it's brutal. Lives, dreams, livelihoods have been wrecked. But the fact that it is mutating, at least allows for the possibility of it becoming less severe and deadly one day. It could burn out, mutate itself out of existence.

And meanwhile, it's just been announced that we are barred from travelling to France as well as Germany, Belgium, Holland, Scotland and Ireland. By the time I finish this letter we will probably be banned from the whole of Europe and possibly the entire world. Trapped, and facing the famous cliff edge in just 11 days.

Sticky Caramelised Parsnips

2 tbsp light brown soft sugar

500g parsnips, cut into slim spears

2 tbsp sherry vinegar

large knob of butter or margarine

Preheat the oven to 220C / Gas 7. Heat the butter or margarine in a large saucepan until foaming, stir in the sugar until dissolved, then splash in the vinegar and stir to combine. Tip in the parsnips and stir until coated, season and scatter into a large roasting tray with any extra caramel. Roast for 30 minutes, turning occasionally, until sticky and golden.

Sage and Lemon-Buttered Sprouts

500g brussel sprouts

50g butter or margarine, softened

2 tbsp chopped sage

150g pecans

1 red chilli, deseeded and finely chopped

zest and juice ½ lemon

Trim the brussel sprouts and cook in boiling water for 8-10 minutes or until just tender. Drain and return to the pan.

Meanwhile, dry-fry the pecans for 1-2 minutes until golden and set aside. Mix together the butter or margarine, chilli, sage, lemon zest and juice. Season well. Stir into the hot sprouts with the toasted pecans.

Sprout Tops with Hazelnuts

50g shelled hazelnuts

30g butter or margarine

500g brussel sprouts

lemon juice to taste

Preheat the oven to 200C/ Gas 6. Bring a pan of lightly salted water to the boil. Spread the hazelnuts on a baking tray and toast in the oven for about 6 minutes until golden brown. Remove and cool, then rub off any brown skins in a clean tea towel. Coarsely chop and set aside. To prepare the sprout tops, remove and discard the tough, larger leaf from the base of the stalks then tear up the leaves. Drop into the boiling water and cook for 3-4 minutes until just tender. Drain well then return to the pan. Melt the butter or margarine in a small frying pan then cook over a medium heat until it's golden brown then tip over the cooked sprout tops. Add the hazelnuts, lemon juice, some salt and pepper, then toss together.

I emailed my accountant to ask him when he was going to submit our VAT returns due at the end of November and also a query about our end of year accounts, which have to be filed on 31st December and which I know to be in a mess. I got a nice note back from him:

'We have retired. Thank you for your business. Good Bye'

And that's that. No further communication. No handover to a new accountant. No refund of the monthly amount I've been paying all year to cover 'end of year' accounts.

I finally wrote my Christmas cards this morning, spoilt a few as usual, so had to rummage about looking for leftovers from last year and envelopes they could fit in. Anyway, good job done.

We are still in Tier 2 miraculously but on borrowed time. So much for not letting Mutant get out of London, as a snapshot, there have been at least 13 people in 5 households within spitting distance of my house arrived from London in the last couple of days.

Oh for those halcyon days when the big news was 2p on beer, 3p on fuel and 5p on a packet of fags.

I want to thank you so much for all your support, for sticking with Farmaround through thick and thin as you do. As ever I feel humbled and privileged that we have such fantastic customers. You're brilliant..... you're just the best.

Happy, so-called, Christmas Like No Other, however you spend it.

Kind wishes,

Isobel

PS Terry wants me to send a message to his 'lovely old customers', to wish you a 'Merry Christmas' **and tell you that he is sorry he hasn't been delivering to you through the pandemic. He will see you again soon.**