



Monday 17th May 2021

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. It is such lousy weather for May - all April's rain – it's cold and wet. There are still daffodils in flower, a bit soggy but nevertheless. Everything is on hold. I keep looking at the tightly closed buds of my prized yellow magnolia hoping it will bloom, but it's nowhere near. For the first time I managed to book a sheep shearer to come early, a new lady shearer. She is due on the 7th June but I will have to rearrange. It's too cold for them to be stripped bare and the wool won't have 'risen'. It needs a period of hot weather for that, which usually, by June, we have had.

It's Monday morning and I'm so envious of everyone who's flown off to Portugal today. I can see them now, our fellow compatriots, smugly padding about in their shorts and flip flops in the baking sun, celebrating their great escape. They were so quick off the mark. No doubt many are also sneaking off to the orange zones.

For us, left behind, here are a couple of tasty recipes to try:

Beetroot, Carrot and Orange Salad

450g raw beetroot	450g carrots
olive oil	2 oranges
1 tbsp sesame seeds	fresh coriander

Preheat the oven to 200°C /400°F/ Gas 6. Peel and halve the carrots then scrub the beets clean and chop into wedges. Parboil the carrots in boiling salted water for 5 minutes, then transfer them to a colander using a slotted spoon. Lower in the beets and parboil for 5 minutes, then drain. Transfer the carrots and beets to a roasting tin, drizzle with olive oil and season with sea salt and black pepper. Roast for 30 to 40 minutes until turning sticky, jiggling the tray occasionally. Meanwhile, finely grate the orange zest. Trim off the skin and pith, then cut the orange into segments. Toast the sesame seeds in a dry pan on a low heat for a couple of minutes or until golden, tossing regularly. Chop the coriander leaves. When removed from oven let the roasted veg cool a little, then toss with the orange zest and segments, some more olive oil and a little extra seasoning, if needed. Scatter over the toasted sesame seeds and coriander leaves to serve.

Spiced Carrot and Courgette Fritters

2 courgettes, coarsely grated	2 medium carrots, coarsely grated
2 tsp nigella seeds / black cumin	150g yoghurt
handful coriander, stalks and leaves finely chopped	1 tsp medium curry powder
3 tbsp plain or spelt flour	¾ tsp baking powder
1 Hen Nation egg	3 tbsp olive oil

Toss the grated courgette with a large pinch of salt in a colander. Set aside for 10 minutes, then tip onto a clean tea towel, roll it up and wring out firmly. Set 2 heaped tbsp of the courgette aside and add the carrot to the tea towel. Wring out again to remove as much water as possible, then tip the courgette and carrot into a large mixing bowl. To make the raita, toast the nigella seeds in a dry frying pan on a medium heat, stirring for a minute until fragrant. Crush lightly in a pestle and mortar. Put the reserved 2 tbsp grated courgette in a bowl and add the yogurt. Stir in the crushed seeds, a pinch of salt and ½ the coriander, combining evenly. To make the fritters, add the curry powder, flour, baking powder, egg and remaining coriander to the courgette and carrot bowl, season and mix well. Put ½ the oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat. Working in batches, scoop heaped spoonfuls of the fritter mixture into the pan (12 in total), pressing them down with a spatula to flatten slightly. Cook the first batch for 2-3 minutes undisturbed, until crisp and browned underneath. Flip over and cook for 2-3 minutes more. Transfer to a plate and keep warm in a low oven while you fry the rest in the remaining oil. Serve hot with the courgette raita.

There has to be some good news and the Animal Welfare Bill is just that, especially the banning of live exports, something I'd grown to think I wouldn't see in my lifetime. I hope the legal recognition of the sentience of vertebrate animals is just the first step towards challenging the misery and gruesome practices of factory farms. However, those in the wild don't count – the trespassers – the badgers, deer, rabbits, squirrels – even if they have got a backbone – no rights for them.

As for banning primates as pets, I thought it already was illegal. Seemingly there are about 5000. Yet it's still fine to experiment on them – drip acid into their eyes; saw their skulls open to poke about in their brains, infect them with Covid. If I had a monkey, it would have a great life: I'd teach it to read and write; we'd go all over; stay in nice hotels; eat lovely organic bananas; have forest walks and swing in the trees.

I've been trying to edge a bit closer to a more sociable life. Have had to force myself I must admit. Had twice arranged to meet a friend for lunch but twice got rained off. A few further attempts at meet-ups are tentatively pencilled in pending the weather. Whatever the rules are, I've no plans to meet anyone indoors. As every single person in the country must have predicted, aghast at the planes from Delhi and Mumbai descending into Heathrow, we are now battling the Indian variant. Serendipitous timing just as we come out of lockdown. A high price to pay for an Indian trade deal, and where is the deal.

I saw graveyard 'Shirley' again last night on my evening walk, through the graveyard. We are on first name terms now. She was trying to decide whether to have beans-on-toast or spaghetti-on-toast for tea. She'd had a crisp sandwich the night before but couldn't have that again as she hadn't taken any bread out of the freezer. I wondered therefore how she was going to have toast. She told me you can toast bread straight from the freezer. She asked me if I'd had my tea yet. I'd actually just had some bread and jam. I never have bread and jam but had bought a pot from Kiplin Hall which they make with the raspberries from their walled garden and it's really good, not too sweet, delicious dolloped on some nice sourdough.

I hope you have a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel