



Monday 5th October 2015

Dear Customer,

October again already – Strictly, X Factor, Downton, clocks back, half-term, fireworks, Christmas – it's getting a bit boring – the déjà vu, the same year, year in year out. It makes one feel very mortal. Well it makes me feel very mortal - life just sliding away. Can't there be a decision to jiggle things up a bit, change it every year – Christmas in September, put the clocks back in January, Downtonon a Saturday night. I'm probably missing the point aren't I and it's me that needs to jiggle myself up – all that stuff should be a default, the fall-back position, not a lifestyle choice. As I write this it has become obvious I am starting a new mid-life crisis, my 15th. The 'pop-up' farm shop and cafe, well..... that was my 14½th. What on earth is the 15th going to bring on. Boredom is a worryingly fertile ground for new ideas to germinate - our survival mechanism I suppose - we could not exist in a state of perpetual boredom. The farm shop was hogweed. I hope something of more interest and worth might take root this time.

Savoy Cabbage with Cream and Garlic

1 savoy cabbage, shredded thinly
6 big cloves garlic, grated

salt and freshly ground black pepper
5 tbsp cream

In a large-based pan with a lid, cover the bottom of the pan with a cm of water and turn the heat up to high. Add the shredded cabbage and stir as the water heats up. When the water starts to boil, reduce the heat, stirring all the time. When the cabbage starts to wilt but is still crisp, season and add the garlic. Stir well and taste. Keep stirring and stir in the cream and serve immediately.

Courgette Pasta Bake

225g uncooked pasta
450g courgettes, diced
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tbsp fresh basil, chopped
3 tbsp fromage frais (optional)
salt and black pepper

1 vegetable stock cube
300g pink onions, finely sliced
1 red chilli, sliced
600g passata or chopped tomatoes
2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped

Preheat the oven to 190C / Gas 5. Cook the pasta in a pan of boiling water containing the stock cube, then drain. Preheat a large non-stick pan. Dry-fry the courgettes, onion and garlic in the pan for 3 to 4 minutes. Add the chilli, basil and tomato passata. Bring the sauce to a gentle simmer, then stir in the cooked pasta and season with salt and pepper. Transfer to an ovenproof dish. Bake in the oven for 30 minutes. Just before serving, dot with the fromage frais if using and sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley.

Courgette, Golden Raisin and Pistachio Cake

60g pistachios
1 tsp ground ginger
200g light brown soft sugar
2 Hen Nation eggs
200g grated courgette

175g self-raising flour
½ tsp ground star anise
50g caster sugar
60g golden raisins
zest of 1 lemon

Preheat the oven to 190/Gas 5. Grease a 1k loaf tin and line the base and long sides with a sheet of baking parchment, allowing a little to overhang at the sides. Once the oven is hot, roast the pistachios for 8 minutes. Keep them whole and leave to cool. Mix the flour, a pinch of salt, the ginger and star of anise together and add the pistachios. Place the sugars and oil in a large mixing bowl and whisk together until combined. Whisk the eggs in one at a time and keep whisking until you have a texture a little like mayonnaise. Then add the rest of the ingredients and fold in with a large wooden spoon. Put the batter in the lined loaf tin and bake for 35 minutes. Turn the tin round so it bakes evenly and bake for a further 15-20 minutes. It should feel springy. Allow to cool in the tin before removing.

I was pleased to receive an email last week saying I had been voted a finalist for an award which I'm not allowed to mention yet. Yes, the Outstanding Moron of the Year, the Outstanding Misguided Optimist of the Year, the Outstanding Farm Shop Flop Award, oh.....and the Lifetime Lack of Achievement Award.

They came the other day to film a little clip for the glitzy award ceremony later in October. I took the film guys straight over the fence into the field next to my house and two hundred Shetland sheep came stampeding towards us. The guys looked scared but then the Shetlands do have massive horns so it's not surprising. I had to keep an eye on Caitlin who was eyeing them up, sussing them out - she has a real anger problem at the moment. The sheep were all over them, smelling them, putting their heads in their camera bags. I got miked up and the 'director' got out his clip board to prompt me with questions. However, I didn't wait for any prompts, switched into Countryfile presenter mode and launched, gesticulating, into "Well, here we are in the Yorkshire Dales....." They stared at me in horror, I could hear them thinking 'Is she for real? What's she playing at?' They filmed it anyway and went off – job done in about 10 minutes.

It's Sunday afternoon and I have spent most of the day gardening. I filled my own green bin and then created big heaps of prunings and weeds on the lawn pending working out how to get rid of them. At about 1pm I had to make a judgement call. Were the owners of the house next door going to come up from Manchester where they live to do their garden. I decided they weren't so went round and pulled their two green bins into my garden and filled them up. I used every implement I could lay my hands on to push and compact it all in. I got lacerated and whipped by the brambles as I tried to force them down and they'd spring back in my face. I then dragged the bins back round and put them on their drive for tomorrow's collection. Then I went off to see the sheep.

An hour later I arrived back, and my heart sank when I saw my neighbours' car in their drive. They were both in the garden, gardening. It was obviously me as there was a trail of buddleia leaves across my lawn and on the pavement where I had attacked it from both sides, my buddleia was poking out from their bins and my garden had obviously just had a serious hacking. I rushed round and apologised, took a rubble bag with me. He said the bin men wouldn't take them as the lids wouldn't close and so he half emptied their bins into my bag leaving them enough room for their own 'work'.

Kind wishes,

Isobel