



Monday 15th February 2016

Dear Customer,

It's Monday morning, we had snow overnight and are glistening in the sunshine. What a difference the light makes. I came down with a tooth abscess last week and felt like I was dying, so run down from a lack of sun. Thoughts turned to sunbeds. I'd never thought of them as a source of vitamin D, I just associated them with skin cancer so got onto the internet to do a bit of research. Sunbeds, like the sun, produce the UVA and UVB rays which stimulate our production of vitamin D. I read an article by a cancer specialist at Barts hospital saying that in studies in Sweden, there were more cases of melanoma in the people who didn't use sunbeds in the winter than those who did. We have been 'educated' or 'brainwashed' to be so fearful of the sun... and sunbeds. Vitamin D deficiency is now linked to heart disease, nearly all cancers, osteoporosis, depression, Alzheimer's and general immune system issues. We store vitamin D in our fat, ideally we get enough of it in the summer to see us through the winter but as we age our bodies become less efficient at producing it and in any case, up here, we can barely see the sun all summer. There is vitamin D in oily fish and eggs, and some foods are fortified foods with it, but consensus seems to be that it is very hard to derive enough from diet alone. I wish I had read this in the autumn and had started having sessions from back then before I got this run down. I am not advising anyone else to do the same but I am getting straight on the phone to book a sunbed, as out of context as I will feel walking round with a tanned glow. Here are some little recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Zesty Broccoli and Courgette Pasta

2 courgettes, trimmed

450g spaghetti

25g walnut pieces, chopped

pinch dried chilli flakes

4 tbsp grated Parmesan (optional)

200g broccoli

6 tbsp olive oil

zest of 1 lemon

salt and black pepper

Coarsely grate the courgettes then place them in a clean dry towel and squeeze dry. Meanwhile, wash the broccoli and prepare by trimming the base of the spear. Chop in diagonal slices, about 3cm long with leaves. Heat the oil in a large frying pan, add the courgettes and fry for 7 minutes on a medium heat. Stir occasionally. Add in the broccoli, chilli flakes, walnuts and lemon zest and continue to cook for a further 3 minutes. Season with salt. Cook the spaghetti 'al dente' according to packet instructions then drain. Add the spaghetti to the frying pan and toss together and a medium heat for 30 seconds. Serve immediately with the grated Parmesan, if using.

Courgettes with Orange, Pine Nuts and Herbs

1 onion, peeled and finely chopped

90g breadcrumbs

2 tbsp pine nuts

2 tbsp chopped parsley

juice of 1 orange

3or 4 courgettes

120ml olive oil

12 pitted green olives, roughly chopped

2 tbsp currants

1 tbsp small capers

salt and freshly ground black pepper

Fry the onion in oil until soft, then stir in the breadcrumbs and then all the other ingredients except the courgettes. Season and set aside to cool. With a vegetable peeler, peel off alternate strips from the courgette skin so the look stripy. Blanch the whole in boiling water for 2 minutes. Drain and cool under running cold water. Halve the courgettes lengthways, brush with a little olive oil and season with salt. Heat the oven to 200C /400F /Gas 6. Press the stuffing on top of each courgette half and bake for 20 minutes until charring and tender.

Carrots and Lentils Turkish Mezze

2 medium onions, thinly sliced

1 tbsp tomato paste

100g green lentils, soaked for 30 minutes in cold water

250g natural yoghurt

1 tbsp fresh dill, to garnish

3 tbsp olive oil

500g carrots, peeled and sliced into thin discs

sea salt and black pepper

1 garlic clove, crushed

Put the onions and oil in a saucepan, place over a medium-high heat and fry, stirring occasionally, until the onions are golden. Stir in the tomato paste, add the carrots, stir for a minute or so, then take off the heat and set aside. Drain and rinse the lentils, put them in a saucepan with half a litre of water and bring to the boil over a medium-high heat. Reduce to low, cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Add the lentils and their cooking water to the carrot and onion mix, season to taste, cover and simmer for another 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove the lid, raise the heat slightly and boil gently for 2-3 minutes, until the excess liquid is completely absorbed. Cover with a kitchen towel and leave to cool. Mix the yoghurt with the crushed garlic, add salt to taste and set aside. Transfer the carrots and lentils to a shallow dish. Spread the seasoned yoghurt over the top without covering the vegetables completely, garnish with dill and serve.

I heard back from the publishers. Having apologised both before and after the submission of the synopsis, I had at least displayed sound judgement. I was right, it wasn't very good. For a start it was clear that I didn't know anything about the book I was proposing to write, except it was going to be funny. Anyway, I have had some good advice, it has focused the mind and I am redoing it. I haven't been given the boot just yet.

I'll tell them that I feel sure I will sell a few copies to my dear Farmarounders because I will drive them so mad going on about it for the next year they'll think 'right, where is it ! Let's have a look at this piece of rubbish' and would happily pay £6.99 to rip it up and set fire to it. If you put up with me that long I reckon you will deserve a free copy to cathartically ritually sacrifice. Ideally I'd like to go away somewhere for a few months to write it. I wondered if there were any retreats, a place where writers wandered silently round in slippers like zombies, engrossed in their plots with a pencil behind the ear..... but were fed lovely food. I could find writing retreats but they all seemed to be places hosting creative writing courses and I don't want to be interfered with.

Hope this finds you well,

Isobel