



Monday 3rd May 2021

Dear Customer,

It's May already. How the weeks shoot by. Weather has been so-so - sunny on and off but with cold air that gets you in the back of the neck if you haven't got a scarf on.

Here are some tasty recipes you could try this week:

Lemony French Beans

bag of French beans
1 tsp olive oil
1 lemon
salt and freshly ground black pepper

Zest the lemon into a bowl using a fine grater. Cut the lemon in half and squeeze in the juice from one half. Add in the olive oil and season with sea salt and black pepper. Mix well. Put a pan of salted water on to boil and cook the beans until tender. Drain, then tip the beans into the bowl with the dressing. Toss together, and squeeze over some remaining lemon juice to taste.

Roasted Cauliflower and Dhal Pilaff

1 cauliflower, cut into small florets
½ tsp ground turmeric or curry powder
zest and juice 1 lemon
2 onions, chopped
150g red split lentils
300g long grain rice
3 carrots, diced
1 tsp cumin seeds
2 tbsp sunflower oil
2 tbsp curry paste
1.2 litres hot vegetable stock
coriander leaves, to serve

Preheat the oven to 200°C/ Gas 6. Place the cauliflower, carrots, turmeric (or curry powder), cumin seeds, lemon juice and 1 tbsp of the sunflower oil in a large bowl and gently toss together. Spread out on a large baking sheet and roast for 25–30 minutes until tender and golden brown. Meanwhile, heat the remaining oil in a large saucepan and cook the onion for 5 minutes until softened. Stir in the curry paste, lentils and stock, bring to the boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Stir in the rice, cover and cook for a further 10–12 minutes until the rice and lentils are tender and the liquid has been absorbed. Spoon the dhal pilaff into bowls and top with the roasted vegetables. Scatter over the coriander leaves to serve.

Sicilian Cauliflower with Pine Nuts, Capers and Sultanas

1 cauliflower
75ml olive oil
3 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
25g pine nuts, lightly toasted
1 lemon, halved
190ml vegetable stock
25g sultanas
3 tbsp capers
20g flat-leaf parsley

Preheat the oven to 200°C/ Gas 6. Cut the cauliflower into thick slices (about 2cm). Layer it in a small roasting tin, including any smaller florets. Pour the stock over and drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the oil. Cover the tin with foil and roast in the oven for 35-40 minutes until tender. Remove the foil after the first 20 minutes. Meanwhile, soak the sultanas in a little boiling water for 5 minutes until soft, then drain and set aside. Warm the remaining olive oil in a small pan with the garlic slices, remove from the heat and leave to infuse for 5 minutes. Remove the garlic from the olive oil and discard, then stir in the capers, pine nuts, sultanas and parsley. Remove the cauliflower from the oven and, using a slotted spoon, transfer to a serving dish. Discard the stock. Drizzle the dressing over, season, then squeeze over lemon juice to taste.

The morning after last week's letter, the grey and white tabby went past the window again with another rabbit in its mouth. I now feel compelled to patrol the warren. I go out there first thing, the cat is always there. I try and get Lainey to chase it away but she ignores the cat and chases the rabbits. I found it hidden in the branches of a fallen-down tree. It looked at me with fear. I felt terrible it's a lovely cat. I posted on the local Facebook forum and suggested people put double bells on their cats' collars to at least give the wildlife half a chance. It was met with a 90-comment 'that's nature', 'it's about survival' – yes, survival of cats with big bellies full of Whiskas; 'it's ok if they take rabbits as they are an invasive species'. There were accusations of me having a go at cats and their owners. I love cats, that's not the point. I was told that collars were dangerous for cats even quick release ones. And then, it turned into a wildlife gore fest with accounts of full-sized rabbits being dragged through bathroom windows, pheasants through cat flaps, live field mice and moles dropped on living room floors then flushed down the toilet, bats, frogs, rats. I left with a parting comment about 'the casual disregard for the lives of other creatures and that I was with David Attenborough, that we are the invasive species'.

My early evening walk with Lainey is usually round Westfields, down through another field onto a grassy track by some allotments and back up through the cemetery. I'm so familiar with the graveyard, I notice anyone new on the block, any fresh mounds. And I've lived here long enough to recognise names - 'God, I didn't know she'd died'. There's always a little blue car parked at the top of the cemetery. I always take a route to avoid it.

I decided to meet it head on this time. "Someone was loved" I said. The owner of the car, an elderly lady, was standing by a grave. "I hope dogs will run across my grave" I said as in my peripheral Lainey was running about weaving in and out of the tombstones, "I do too" she said. Phew. She got Lainey a biscuit out of her car, then Lainey jumped inside it for a rummage. I introduced myself. She said she was thinking of getting a rescue dog. It was her parents buried there – mother just 44 and father 90 – both long gone. I told her they couldn't be in a more beautiful spot. She said she comes every day to spend an hour to break the day up and that she was trying to decide what to have for tea – a sandwich or some soup. I asked if she made the soup – no it was tinned. 'Nothing on TV tonight is there', I said. "No, nothing, just repeats". "Yeah it's rubbish". There's something odd about the pandemic-effect, it seems easier to chat with passing strangers and fellow dog-walkers than to see or converse with ones' own friends or family. I keep thinking about trying to meet up with a friend, then don't. Though I did see my brother a few weeks ago, the back of his head on Obitum at my aunt's funeral in Shropshire. During the first lockdown I just wanted to go, leave, go anywhere. Now I have no inclination whatsoever.

As you can see, no news. Just ordinary life here in the new normal, the twilight zone, where the earth meets the sky.....



Hope you have a good week,

Isobel