



Monday 10th May 2021

Dear Customer,

It's Saturday morning and it's tipping it down. It was rain, now it's sleet. I am writing this early as my laptop has been flashing like a strobe all week. I have to sneak on for quick emails between long periods of the spinning wheel. Built-in obsolescence kicking in. So we now have our long-awaited green list. It's very small even before the necessary equivalence, which strikes off Australia, New Zealand, Brunei and Singapore. Portugal is full-up. The Sandwich Islands ? Risk the grey area of the orange list ? Or just carry on carrying on here again. I hope we have a nice English summer at least. It's not looking promising.

Here are some tasty recipes you could try this week:

Spring Greens Risotto

| | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 tbsp olive oil | 1 small onion, chopped |
| 150g risotto rice | 1 clove garlic, chopped |
| ½ lemon, zest and juice | 500ml vegetable stock |
| 250g spring greens, shredded | |

Heat the oil in a medium frying pan and fry the onion for 3-4 minutes. Add the rice, garlic and lemon zest and cook for 1 minute. Gradually add the stock, cover and simmer gently until the liquid is absorbed and the rice is tender (about 15-20 minutes), then stir in the lemon juice. Meanwhile, cook the spring greens in boiling water for 4 minutes, drain well and mix into the rice.

Aubergine and Tomato Gnocchi

| | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| aubergine, cut into 3cm cubes | 1½ tbsp olive oil |
| 250g cherry tomatoes, halved | 2 cloves garlic, sliced |
| 300g fresh gnocchi | fresh basil, leaves only, torn |

Preheat the oven to 200°C / Gas 6. Toss the aubergine with olive oil and spread out on a large baking tray. Roast for 20 minutes, turning halfway, then stir in the tomatoes and garlic and roast for a further 10 minutes. Five minutes after you put the tomatoes in, bring a large pan of water to the boil. Add the gnocchi and simmer for 2-3 minutes. Drain and stir into the baking tray coating in the cooking juices. Return to the oven for a final 3 minutes, then serve scattered with basil leaves.

Aubergine Caponata with Cannellini Beans

| | |
|---|--|
| 1 tbsp olive oil | 1 aubergine, roughly chopped |
| ½ tsp dried oregano | small red onion, finely sliced |
| 1 garlic clove, finely sliced | flat leaf parsley, leaves roughly chopped, stalks finely chopped |
| 1 tbsp capers, rinsed and drained | 30g pitted green olives, ½ chopped and ½ left whole |
| 1½ tbsp balsamic vinegar, plus extra to taste | 200g tomatoes, roughly chopped |
| 250g tin cannellini beans, drained and rinsed | 20g pine nuts, lightly toasted |

Heat the oil over a high heat in a large pan. Add the aubergine, oregano and a pinch of salt. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until golden. Lower the heat and add the onion. Cook for a few minutes, until starting to soften, then add the garlic and parsley stalks and cook for 1 minute. Add the capers, olives and vinegar. Cook for 2 minutes, until the vinegar has evaporated, then add the tomatoes and cannellini beans. Simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 15 minutes, or until all the vegetables are tender. Season and add more vinegar to taste. Scatter with the pine nuts and chopped parsley leaves to serve.

Pear and Fennel Salad

| | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 40g pecans | 2 ripe pears |
| 1 fennel bulb, trimmed | 3 tbsp lemon juice |
| 1 tsp fennel seeds | pinch chilli flakes |
| 2 tsp mild honey | 3 tbsp extra virgin olive oil |
| salad leaves | |

Preheat the oven to 200°C / Gas 6. Toast the pecans on a baking tray for 5 minutes. Cool, then roughly chop. With a vegetable peeler, shave the pears and fennel into paper-thin slices and toss with 1 tbsp lemon juice. Chop and reserve any fennel tops. Put the fennel seeds in a frying pan and toast for 1-2 minutes on a medium heat. Lightly crush with the base of a sturdy jar, then add the chilli flakes, honey, oil and remaining 2 tbsp lemon juice. Season and whisk, then add 1 tbsp water and whisk again. Combine the pear and fennel slices with the dressing and the salad leaves. Serve scattered with the pecans and fennel tops.

The results are still coming in from 'super-Thursday'. Labour has been minced, particularly so in Hartlepool of course. It doesn't surprise me. Despite what one might have gleaned from the media, they love Boris up here, he's their man. We are on the edge of the red wall in the Vale of Rishi Sunak, and for the first time, people here feel relevant, like they count. Hartlepool felt left out of the hoo-ha when the red wall turned blue in 2019 - they weren't going to miss out this time - they were going to join the revolution.

With part of the Treasury moving up to Darlington, and Teeside becoming a free port, heaps of investment at the ready, they are walking the walk. Ben Houchen came back as Mayor with a humongous majority. They love him because he gave them back their airport. All vaccinated, all ready to rock'n'roll off on the planes to nowhere. Anyway. I'm staying out of it. Very hard to see a way back for Labour with this configuration though.

Right / Left feels so last century. It's just life, and don't we all want, more or less, the same thing: to feel safe: to feel equal: a dynamic, vibrant economy; the freedoms to enjoy our lives, be who we want to be; a decent standard of living; a society rich in culture; a generous welfare state that looks after those in need; a greener, kinder and more sustainable planet. I feel sure there's a formula that could deliver this, an equation, a mathematical one, the ultimate model.

Yet more comments on my clothes came this week. A woman I see either dog-walking or swimming down the river (her, not me) and who I bumped into on the racecourse, she hadn't seen me in a while. She said I was wearing the same clothes as the last time she saw me. "Exactly the same clothes ?" I said. She said "yes, exactly the same". Why does anyone notice, why does anyone care. I had yet again to explain that I have multiple near identical outfits, because it makes life easier. Maybe one day I'll wear something else.

I hope you have a good week,

Isobel