

Monday 8th November 2021

Dear Customer,

It's a blustery Sunday morning with trees creaking and bending, leaves and twigs flying down the street. It feels dramatic and normal. However, one look at the BBC forecast, and it looks eerie. 'Light cloud with a gentle breeze' for the coming week. A ghostly 'light cloud'. Mild. Calm. Too calm. Pinned to the armchair, pumped with adrenalin, waiting for the next catastrophic news, the next surge of anger and disbelief. How on earth do we cope with light cloud and a gentle breeze.

Stir-Fried Savoy Cabbage with Peanut Sauce

Sauce:

80ml coconut milk, unsweetened
1 tbsp soy sauce
¾ tsp light brown sugar

2 tbsp peanut butter, smooth or crunchy
2 tsp chilli / garlic paste

Stir-Fry:

1 Savoy cabbage
1 tbsp vegetable oil
1 tsp lime juice or lemon juice

2 carrots
steamed rice or rice noodles
2 tbsp roasted peanuts, chopped

For the sauce, whisk all the sauce ingredients together. For the stir-fry, quarter the cabbage lengthwise, then cut the core out of each piece. Cut the cabbage crosswise into 1-inch-wide pieces. Wash and dry the cabbage pieces. Peel the carrots and cut crosswise into ¼ -inch-thick rounds. Heat the oil in a wok or large frying pan over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add the carrots and half of the cabbage and cook, stirring occasionally, until starting to wilt. Continue adding the cabbage and cooking it down until all of it is added. Season with salt and cook until the cabbage is starting to wilt and exudes water. Reduce the heat to medium, add the sauce, and continue cooking, stirring, until the sauce thickens and the cabbage is crisp-tender, about 3 minutes. Add the lime or lemon juice, and stir. Top with the peanuts and serve over steamed rice or cooked rice noodles.

Savoy Cabbage Bake with Thyme and Hazelnut Crumb

60g margarine or organic butter
1 Savoy cabbage, shredded
50g hazelnuts, roughly chopped

2 onions, thinly sliced
100g day-old sourdough, rye or ciabatta bread
2 tsp fresh thyme leaves
150ml organic cream or non-dairy alternative

100g organic cheese or non-dairy alternative, grated
100ml strong vegetable stock (use ½ the amount of water suggested), warmed

Preheat the oven to 180°C / Gas 4. Melt 20g of the margarine or butter in a pan and fry the onion over a medium heat, stirring often, for 8-10 minutes, until soft and beginning to brown. Meanwhile, blanch the cabbage for 4 minutes. Drain, pat dry with kitchen paper, then spread out with the onion in a medium gratin dish. For the topping, melt the remaining 40g margarine / butter. Whizz the bread in a food processor to coarse crumbs. Combine with the chopped nuts, melted butter / margarine and thyme. Season and stir in the cheese. Add the cream to the warm stock; season and pour over the cabbage, then scatter with the nutty crumbs. Bake for 30-35 minutes until golden and bubbling.

Spaghetti with Purple Sprouting Broccoli and Tomato and Olive Sauce

1 tbsp olive oil
½ tsp crushed red chilli flakes
8 black olives
350g spaghetti
grated cheese, optional

2 cloves garlic
2 x 400g tins chopped tomatoes
1 tsp capers, drained
200g purple sprouting broccoli, cut into 3cm pieces

Heat the oil in a large pan over a medium heat. Add the garlic and chilli and cook for a minute or two until golden. Stir in the tomatoes, breaking them down into small pieces with the back of a spoon. Season well then reduce to heat and simmer gently for 10 minutes. Add the olives and capers for the final 2 minutes of cooking. Meanwhile cook the spaghetti to packet instructions and add the purple sprouting broccoli for the last 3 minutes of cooking. Drain the spaghetti and broccoli and tip into the pan of tomato sauce. Toss to coat and serve scattered with grated cheese if using.

I've been suffering on and off with pain in my lower back since I got back from Wales. I think I might have injured it in the summer moving heavy pots with trees in, round the garden. Lacking strength, I moved them with will power. Now the slightest thing triggers it. A few weeks ago it was kicking a small tennis ball round the Georgian racecourse for Lainey. I could barely walk for a week. It would take 5 minutes of psychological preparation to stand up or turn over in bed. The pain was excruciating, the fear, that it was permanent. The start of a bad back.

When I was feeling better I had another go at kicking the tennis ball, but moderated it, just 6 times. Next day, same thing, another 5 days of agony. I then met a friend for lunch a week ago. Lainey kept climbing onto the table and she's a big lump. I must have twisted my back repeatedly having to pull her off because the next day it started again and I'm only just feeling better. God, that constant pain makes you feel miserable. I'm frightened of doing anything now.

My neighbour said I should see a physio, it immediately brought to mind that man in York who went to see a chiropractor and she broke his back. He died. I did have a great chiro in London, she eventually moved to Sheffield and when I moved up here I bought a massage table and she carried on treating me. That was until the last time. I was on the table, and she asked me quizzically if I'd ever nearly drowned in childhood, she was picking something up. No I hadn't and I could do without anyone making me believe that I had or that there'd been some traumatic event I wasn't aware of. I'm sure my brain is a fertile place to have false memories implanted. It was all about my migraines back then. I tried acupuncture once. In Barnard Castle actually. I lay down and the woman stuck a needle into my big toe. I stopped it there and left.

Hope you have a good week,

Best wishes, Isobel