



**Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2022**

Dear Customer,

And we're off again.....so straight in with some recipes for your pointy peppers:

**Roasted Romano Peppers with Puy Lentils**

2 Romano peppers	3 tbs olive oil
1 onion, finely diced	2 garlic cloves, finely sliced
3 thyme sprigs, leaves picked	1 tbsp capers, rinsed
4 sun-dried tomatoes, sliced	250g pack cooked Puy lentils
1 tbsp lemon juice	handful flat leaf parsley, chopped
30g pistachios, chopped	

*Preheat the oven to 200°C / Gas 6. Halve the peppers through the stalks, deseed and brush all over with 1 tbsp olive oil then season. Lay on a parchment-lined baking tray and roast for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, heat the remaining 2 tbsp oil in a large frying pan and fry the onion, garlic and thyme for 10 minutes, stirring regularly until soft and starting to turn golden. Tip in the capers and sun-dried tomatoes and stir for a minute, then add the lentils, turn up the heat and fry for another 5 minutes. Season and stir through the lemon juice, parsley and pistachios. Spoon the lentils into the peppers and return to the oven for 5 minutes.*

**Romano Pepper, Chickpea and Tomato Filo Parcels**

2 tbsp olive oil	2 medium onions, thinly sliced
2 Romano peppers, deseeded and sliced	200g cherry tomatoes on the vine, halved
400g can chickpeas, drained	2 tbsp chopped fresh oregano
270g pack 6 sheets filo pastry	

*Preheat the oven to 200°C/ Gas 6. Heat half the oil in a non-stick frying pan and cook the onions and peppers until soft and just turning brown. Add the tomatoes and chickpeas and cook for a further 2-3 minutes until the tomatoes are just softened. Add the oregano and season to taste. Open out the sheets of filo and cut in half down the middle. Divide into 6 double- thickness squares. Spoon the chickpea mixture into the centre of each then brush the edges with the remaining olive oil and bring together to form a parcel, squeezing together to seal the joins on the pastry. Arrange on an oiled baking sheet and bake in the oven for 12-15 minutes until the pastry is crisp and golden.*

I'd gone to bed early to avoid midnight but unable to sleep put the TV on to see the fireworks. Big Ben, back after a four-year absence, perfectly tuned to strike the fear of God into you. Tuned to get you in pit of the stomach. As it chimes, we are poised in time, between all that has gone and all that is to come. For those moments, we are levelled, mere mortals with an unknown fate.

Then 'whoomph'. The lazer / fireworks were, in true British style.....incoherent and quirky..... and 2021 is gone. 'No, hang on a minute'. Gone. Never to return. Inexorably forward we go.

The days are lengthening, already with half an hour more daylight than the shortest day. The snowdrops are starting to push up. It's Sunday morning and blustery, but it is so mild. There's some brightness in the sky. On Christmas morning as planned I opened up the big medley box of bulbs. I got the dibber out and planted up my raised bed. All the tulip bulbs were mouldy and the Russian snowdrop bulbs were missing. I've emailed Suttons and am waiting to hear back from them.

I'm not a fan of Christmas but I do like Christmas dinner. Constrained by my severe, self-imposed Covid restrictions, I did Christmas alone again. My friend and I did a deal - she would make the first Christmas dinner as a take-away and I would do one a few days later. So early afternoon I collected a massive dish of nut roast and vegetables done all sorts of ways, all covered in foil, and accompanied by a pot of red wine gravy. I heated half of it up and sat down in front of Mary Poppins. Perfect. The food was enough for two days. Then I made my Christmas dinner with my signature chestnut and cashew nut loaf en crouete and took half to her in foil with all the elements and a pot of onion gravy. We both made copious amounts and each lasted two days. So I had four huge Christmas dinners on the trot. I've still got a bad stomach.

Now I want the whole thing over with. I'm having an attack of clutterphobia. I've moved all the Christmas cards and crammed them onto one set of shelves out of sight. My tiny 1-ft Christmas tree which I bring out occasionally is round the corner, out of my line of vision.

It's not allowed to have its lights switched on and draw attention to itself. Christmas is the straw that broke the camel's back, as now I find my curtains overbearing, I've got too many paintings on the walls, I don't know the point of the big cushion on the floor.

Am I really not able to deconstruct it all until the 5<sup>th</sup> January. What would happen to me ? There are pecked at boxes of chocolates, tins of biscuits, half rolls of wrapping paper and all the usual Christmas stuff strewn about. I can't bear it. I want everything gone. Coats and scarves on the banister which don't fit on the coat hooks; sweaters too bulky to fit in my clothes drawers; crocs and wellingtons too muddy to wear, in a heap in the porch. Come the twelfth night, if it hasn't got a drawer, a shelf, a hook or a place in a cupboard it's going. A new year needs a clean start.

It was novel to have this whole week off. It's the first time we have ever stopped between Christmas and New Year. The weather was dark, wet, foggy and horrible – not great for enjoying the great outdoors. It reminded me of Christmases of old - eating constantly, watching terrible films and falling asleep on the sofa mid-afternoon. Maybe it serves as a rest. It definitely serves as a reminder of the attractiveness of normal daily life.

I hope you enjoyed your own festive period, rested and ready to take on 2022

..... ..Kindest wishes, Isobel