



Monday 28th March 2022

Dear Customer,

It's Sunday morning. In one hour, at 11.15am, I go onto petition duty until 2pm. There is a strict rota. Everyone who comes up this road, be it walkers or Amazon drivers, they are all fair game for a signature. Two weeks to go to oppose the new housing development. The weather remains warm and sunny but rain and snow on its way.

Here are a couple of tasty recipes you could try this week:

Cauliflower and Potato Curry

<i>2 tbsp sunflower oil</i>	<i>2 cloves garlic, finely chopped</i>
<i>1 medium onion, thinly sliced</i>	<i>1 tbsp chopped ginger</i>
<i>½ tsp ground turmeric</i>	<i>2 tsp ground coriander</i>
<i>1 tsp ground cumin</i>	<i>500g potatoes, chopped into pieces</i>
<i>2 tbsp tomato purée</i>	<i>150ml natural yogurt or non-dairy alternative</i>
<i>1 tsp garam masala</i>	<i>1 cauliflower, trimmed and cut into pieces</i>
<i>25g fresh coriander, finely chopped</i>	

Heat the oil in a large saucepan, add the garlic, and the onion and ginger. Cook gently for 3-4 minutes until softened, then add the spices and seasoning and cook for a minute. Add the potatoes and stir to coat in the spices. Stir in the tomato purée and 300ml cold water and bring to the boil. Cover the pan and simmer for 10 minutes until the potatoes are almost tender. Stir the yogurt and garam masala into the pan juices. Add the cauliflower to the pan (the liquid will not cover this, but it will cook in the steam), re-cover and simmer gently for 15-18 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the cauliflower tender. Serve scattered with the fresh coriander.

Butternut and Cauliflower Pilaf

<i>1 cauliflower, cut into small florets</i>	<i>1 butternut squash, diced</i>
<i>2 tbsp olive oil</i>	<i>1 onion, sliced</i>
<i>2 garlic cloves, chopped</i>	<i>200g brown basmati rice, rinsed</i>
<i>1 tbsp ras el hanout</i>	<i>400g tin chickpeas, drained and rinsed</i>
<i>2 tsp dukkah</i>	<i>handful fresh coriander</i>

Preheat the oven to 200°C/ Gas 6. Put the cauliflower, butternut squash and 1 tbsp of the oil on a baking tray and toss to coat. Cover with foil and roast for 20 minutes, then uncover and roast for a further 20 minutes until very tender and lightly browned. Meanwhile, heat the remaining 1 tbsp of oil in a saucepan, add the onion and garlic and cook for 5 minutes. Add the rice and ras el hanout and cook for another minute. Stir in 500ml hot water and bring to the boil. Cover and cook for 10 minutes, then add the chickpeas. Cover and cook for a further 10-15 minutes until the rice is tender and the water has been absorbed. Combine the rice and roasted vegetables and transfer to a serving platter. Scatter with the dukkah and coriander to serve. (to make your own dukka - spread 50g hazelnuts, 1bsp cumin seeds, 1 tbsp fennel, 1 tbsp coriander seeds and 2 tbs sesame seeds on a baking tray and cook for 10 minutes at 180C/ Gas 4 until toasted. Then tip into a blender and pulse a few times until combined but nuts still have some texture and crunch).

It must be 2 years since the petrol station at the bottom of the road burnt down. The site was left untouched and cordoned off until a couple of months ago when a new mini-Morrisons and fuel station started rising from the ashes. It was exciting to see work finally begin and wonder how it might reinvent itself under its new ownership. Maybe it would be an L-shape, or that the site lay-out would have been mixed up. But no, it's the exact, boring same as it was – an oblong building with the pumps in front. It sits between two terraces of small Georgian cottages, now joined together by a massive, overbearing stone clad entrance which is like a stone picture frame without a picture. It's the way here. If you've got a stone façade you can commit murder.

It's now week three of being news-free. If the war is ever over, and I hope to God it is, and I ever re-connect to the outside world, it will be like waking up from a coma. I won't recognise it. My diet was very news-based. I would almost use matchsticks to jam my eyes open late into the night to keep up with everything. However now, at around 8pm, I wonder if it's reasonable to go to bed. I go at 9pm, am dropping off by 9.30, and fast asleep by 10. I wake up before my neighbour now who always used to ask me if I'd seen the sunrise. I never had. The days are long, but they are good days as the weather is nice and I am no longer trying to work out how special forces can get into the Kremlin to do him in: or if his aides can; or his doctor. So many sleepless nights imagining what the nuclear weapons sites must look like and how they could be captured. The brain hopelessly engaging in a hopeless problem... and with no data, just imaginings.

I'm a bit upset as I put a lot of food and titbits out for the squirrels, the little birds and the wood pigeons. But the crows, for the first time, have cottoned on. The odd one used to come and eat something but now they guard my garden. They frighten off the wood pigeons and they chase the squirrels.

I hope you are having a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel