



Monday 30th October 2023

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well, in this our increasingly disturbing world as humanity heads off into an uncharted future, propelled by hate and maniacal world leaders. Everywhere we look we see the battle between good and evil, between right and wrong. Maybe it's always been there – latent and simmering – we'd just been living through a lull. But now the lid's come off, completely, laid it all bare before us. Rishi Sunak is now the last remaining optimist on planet earth as he swoops and dives, carefree above us. It will all be alright in the end. Except we know it won't, nothing will be, we have passed the tipping point.

But for the time being life goes on for most of us and it shouldn't stop us from snatching some happiness and enjoyment wherever we can get it. It's grey and foggy outside but it's just accentuating the glorious autumn colours. And here are a few tasty recipes you could try this week:

Moroccan Sweet Potato, Lentil and Chard Stew

1 small onion, sliced	fresh coriander, finely chopped
½ tin chickpeas	50g red lentils
1 tsp ground coriander	1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground ginger	½ tsp smoked paprika
1 x 400g tin chopped tomatoes	450g sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1cm dice
1 garlic clove, chopped	1 lemon
20g toasted and chopped almonds	200g chard, roughly shredded

Fry the onion in some oil in a pan for 5 mins. Coarsely chop the chickpeas. Add the chickpeas, lentils and all the spices to the pan. Cook for 2 mins. Add the tomatoes. Refill the tin with water and add that too. Season and simmer for 20 mins, until the lentils are soft then add the sweet potatoes and garlic. Finely zest the lemon. Mix the zest with the almonds and a pinch of salt. Stir in the chard until wilted and tender. Ladle into bowls and garnish with the fresh coriander and nut mix. Serve with wedges of lemon.

Potato, Aubergine and Cheese Gratin

250g aubergine, cut into cubes	250g potatoes, peeled and diced
1 onion, sliced	1-2 garlic cloves, crushed
knob of butter or margarine	1 tbsp oil
200g chopped tomatoes	150ml veg stock
1 heaped tsp dried mixed herbs	2 tbsp breadcrumbs
1 tbsp cheese, grated	salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 200°C / Gas 6. In a pan of boiling water, cook the potatoes for 5 minutes. Drain and reserve. Heat the oil and butter / margarine and add the onion. Fry gently until soft. Add the garlic, then the aubergine and fry until tender. Add the potatoes to the aubergine. Season with salt and pepper. Add the tomatoes and stock, simmer for 10 minutes. Place the mixture in a gratin or baking dish. Sprinkle over the breadcrumbs and cheese and bake in the oven for 15 minutes until the topping is golden.

Orange Drizzle Cake

200g butter / margarine, softened	275 g caster sugar, plus extra to decorate
4 Hen Nation eggs, lightly beaten	200g self-raising flour
finely grated zest 2 oranges and juice 3 oranges, keep separate	

Preheat oven to 180°C / Gas 4. Grease and line a 900g loaf tin with baking parchment. In a large bowl beat the butter / margarine and 200g caster sugar until pale and fluffy. Gradually add the eggs, beating well. Fold in the flour, 2 tbsp orange juice and most of the orange zest (reserve the rest for the drizzle). Scrape batter into prepared tin and bake for 55min-1hr or until a skewer inserted comes out clean. Meanwhile, make the syrup. Gently heat the remaining caster sugar, orange zest and juice in a small pan, stirring, until the sugar

dissolves. Increase heat to high and bubble for 1min. As soon as the loaf comes out of the oven, poke holes into the top using a skewer and drizzle over half the syrup. Leave to soak for 10min then spoon over remaining syrup. Cool completely in the tin set on a wire rack, then turn out and dust with a little caster sugar.

I just leapt up and ran. Lainey who was sitting next to me, freaked out, ran with me, thought we were running from a hornet or there was a cat in the garden stalking the birds. I was actually running for the cutlery drawer as I just dropped a whole biscuit in my fresh cup of tea. I caught it just in time. Speed was of the essence.

Anyway. My preoccupation continues to be my home décor. Maybe it's the relief having an empty attic, everything safely stored in the unit rather than weighing down over my head. I feel liberated and can slowly go through it a box at a time, over the coming months and years and decide what to do with it.

But as I'd suspected, things have been slowly making their way back into the house. A mid-century Ercol chair that I remember being in my brother's bedroom when we were little, is back. They go for £700 now on Ebay ! The upholsterer has been to collect it to do new cushions. An art deco mirror, a flowerhead with big emerald-green mirror petals, a present from my mum, is back, lying on the floor waiting to see if there's a suitable spot on a wall. None found yet. I don't want to over-do it.

A chrome floor lamp with three bendy prongs which I bought in the early 90's is back. I loved that lamp but the guinea pigs chewed through the cable, it went into the attic and the glass shades got smashed. I've spent many an evening trawling the internet to try and find replacement shades. Then last week I found some that I thought might fit. My original ones were blue, these were white opaque glass with some etched criss-cross lines. I didn't particularly like them but thought I'd give anything a go to get my lamp back. They arrived in a big box with lots of stuffing, inside which was another big box with more stuffing, inside which were three little boxes, and each shade was wrapped in bubble wrap. He was taking no chances. I carefully unwrapped the first two, still didn't particularly like them. I put them on the lamp and suddenly I loved them. I was so happy, they looked absolutely fantastic. I took the third one, got the scissors to cut through the tape, then heard a crunch. While cutting through tape, I'd also cut through the very thin, fragile glass. It came out the bubble wrap in pieces. I was completely devastated. I'm still not over it. I'm absolutely gutted.

I hope you have a good week.....kindest wishes.....Isobel