



Monday 5th February 2024

Dear Customer,

It's Monday morning. It's dark and the wind is getting up. There are seagulls circling over Westfields - a sure sign of a storm on the way as we are quite a distance from the sea. On the plus side, there are snowdrops everywhere. And for the first time ever, there are yellow aconites on the grass verge opposite my house. There are tons further down the road, so last year, at dusk when no one was watching, I went down with my trowel and moved some up here. They survived and are a joy to behold in the February gloom. They should start spreading here nicely now. And I have daffodils in bud in the microclimate of my raised bed.

Here are a few recipes you could try this week:

Romanesco Cauliflower and Kale Curry

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| 1 tbsp olive oil | 1 onion, thinly sliced |
| 2 garlic cloves, crushed | 3cm piece ginger, peeled and grated |
| 2 tbsp medium tikka curry powder | 2 tbsp tomato purée |
| 1 Romanesco cauliflower, chopped into florets | 200g kale, leaves stripped and shredded |
| 400g tin chopped tomatoes | 1 vegetable stock cube, made up to 200ml |
| 240g long-grain rice | |

Heat the olive oil in a large, deep saucepan over a medium heat and add the onion, garlic and ginger. Cook for 5 mins, until the onion is starting to soften, then add the tikka powder and tomato purée and cook for a further 1 min. Add the Romanesco, kale, chopped tomatoes and vegetable stock to the pan and increase the heat to high. Cover with a lid, bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium and simmer for 10 minutes until all is tender. Serve with rice.

Spicy Romanesco Cauliflower

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| 50g fresh breadcrumbs | 75ml olive oil |
| 600g Romanesco cauliflower, trimmed | 1 tbsp capers |
| 6 garlic cloves, chopped | ½ tsp fennel seeds |
| pinch dried chilli flakes | 1 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped |
| 4 tbsp black olives, chopped | salt and pepper |

Preheat oven to 200°C / Gas 6. Soak the capers in cold water for 20 mins, then squeeze dry and roughly chop then set aside. Toss the breadcrumbs in 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and spread them out on a baking tray. Bake in the oven for about 5 minutes, until golden. Remove and set aside. Break the Romanesco into separate small florets. Warm about 2 tablespoons of the olive oil in a wide, shallow pan over a medium heat, add the Romanesco and stir well. Leave to cook for about 10 minutes, until the edges start browning slightly, then season to taste and stir gently. Add the capers, then cover and cook for about 5 minutes, until the Romanesco is tender. Drizzle over the remaining olive oil and scatter with the garlic, fennel seeds and chilli flakes. Toss to mix in. Cook for 2 more minutes, then add the parsley and olives. Sprinkle with the toasted breadcrumbs and serve.

Kale, Parsnip and Bean Soup

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| 3 tbsp olive oil | 3 carrots, peeled and diced |
| 3 parsnips, peeled and diced | 1½ x 400g tins cannellini beans, rinsed and drained |
| 1 large onion, diced | 2 tsp finely chopped rosemary leaves |
| 3 garlic cloves, crushed | 1.5-2 litres hot vegetable stock, hot |
| 220g kale, de-stalked and chopped | |

Place a large saucepan on a low heat, add the oil, then the carrots, parsnips, celery, onion, rosemary and garlic. Season and stir well. Cover the pan with a lid and leave the vegetables to sweat for 15 minutes, stirring every 5 minutes or so. Stir in 1.5 litres of hot stock and bring to the boil, then leave to cook for 10-15 minutes, or until all the vegetables are tender. Transfer the soup to a blender and blend to a smooth consistency, adding extra stock to thin it down if required. Return to the pan if necessary. Stir in the kale and beans and cook for 3-4 minutes until the leaves have wilted and the beans are heated through. Taste for seasoning.

Well, the European Green Deal it seems was too ambitious for the French farmers to stomach and it's set to be watered down now. I understand their angst trying to farm in a rapidly changing climate, but continuing to drench their crops and soils in agrochemicals and disregard nature isn't the solution. The French farmers have done a great disservice to the whole of Europe.....and the world. The targets should remain, and France be fined for not achieving them, they shouldn't drag the 1.634 million square miles of the 27 EU countries down with them. In the EU, 500,000 tons of these chemicals are used each year, the same as in 1990. No improvement at all despite the nature crisis.

Britain any better ? Of course not, we are worse. The UK has not banned 36 harmful pesticides that have been proscribed for use in the EU including thiamethoxam, a neonicotinoid, that is highly toxic to bees. Well you knowthe pandemic.....the war in Ukraine. The government can talk a good talk on the environment and restoring nature, but the reality is the same as the hunting ban - unenforced, a smokescreen.

A man got stung in the neck by an Asian hornet when he was walking down Quaker Lane the other day on his way to Lidl. It was probably the first one to appear in Yorkshire. My blood ran cold as I know for sure they will end up nesting in my garden. I think it was an Asian hornet that stung me when I was fast asleep in bed on holiday in Laugharne in Wales. The property had a dense tropical garden – a welcoming place for creatures blowing in on the wind from around the globe. It got me on the back of my leg and I couldn't walk for the rest of the holiday.

And I will never forget the feeling of persecution when on New Years Day a few years ago, I was up on the moors in an area where the military occasionally train, and in a small wood was a toilet cabin, which I popped into. Half an hour later an excruciating pain shot up my leg. When I got home I took my wellingtons off and a hornet dropped out my trousers. The only person in the whole world to have a hornet down their trousers that New Years Day. I feel sure that if the Asian hornets are coming, they are coming for me. I might need to keep a little bottle of thiamethoxam in the shed.

I hope you have a good week.....Kind regards, Isobel