

Monday 28th May 2012

Dear Customer,

Phew ! So hot, it's like Bombay in Richmond market place today. It's been a hot week hasn't it. We have spinach in the bags, broccoli and butternut squash. There are melons in all the fruit bags – they are coming out of their ears in Spain at the moment. The French peaches and apricots are just about starting and will follow soon as will English cherries and strawberries. Here are a few delicious recipes you could try with this week's bags:

Spinach and Butternut Squash Lasagne

30ml olive oil

1 medium onion, sliced

25g plain flour

225g spinach, chopped

1 level freshly grated nutmeg

50g Pecorino or Parmesan

butternut squash, peeled, deseeded and cubed

25g butter

600ml milk

250g tub ricotta

6 precooked lasagne sheets – around 100g

Preheat oven to 200C/180C fan/Gas 6. Put oil in a large roasting tin and add squash, onion and 1 tablespoon water. Toss everything together, season well and roast for 25 minutes, tossing halfway through. To make the white sauce, put the butter, milk and flour in a small pan and bring slowly to the boil, whisking constantly. Reduce heat to simmer and cook for 5 minutes or until the white sauce has thickened slightly. Take another pan and put 1 tablespoon water in it and heat, add the spinach, cover and cook until the leaves are just wilted. Add the ricotta and grated nutmeg to the white sauce and season well with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Mix thoroughly. Then layer the lasagne in a 3 pint dish starting with the squash and onion mixture, then spinach, then lasagne, then the cheese sauce, seasoning as you go. Sprinkle the grated cheese on top. Cook in the oven at the same temperature for 30-35 minutes or until the cheese is golden on top and the pasta is cooked.

Broccoli, Sultana and Chilli Penne

350g penne

2 tbsp olive oil

1 small onion, finely chopped

2 garlic cloves, sliced

25g sultanas

grated zest and juice of 1 lemon

50g ciabatta bread, roughly torn

20g Parmesan, finely grated

250g broccoli, in bite-sized chunks

½ chilli, deseeded and chopped

3 tbsp chopped fresh curly parsley

Cook the penne according to packet instructions to al dente. Meanwhile, preheat the grill to medium and line the grill pan with foil. Mix the torn bread with half the oil in a bowl and season with black pepper. Spread on grill pan and grill for 2-3 minutes, turning frequently, until crisp and golden. Cool slightly then whiz in blender to coarse crumbs then stir in the Parmesan. Heat the remaining oil in a large frying pan over a medium heat, add the onion and cook for 5 minutes until softened. Add the broccoli, garlic, chilli and sultanas and cook for 5 minutes stirring until broccoli is tender – add a splash of water to prevent it catching. Drain the pasta and add to the pan with the parsley and lemon zest and juice. Season, toss and serve scattered with the toasted Parmesan crumbs. Despite the odd combination of ingredients, this is a delicious Italian dish.

The opening line of my newsletter should have been “Dear Customer, I am surprised to be writing to you from a lovely apartment overlooking the harbour in Monaco and will be watching this afternoon's Formula One from a yacht.....tomorrow night I will be staying in the Hotel du Cap, Eden Roc on the Cap d'Antibes (if you don't know it, please google it – it's where I'd like to be on 5/7/2019, so I'm start saving now).....”. I had a very kind invitation from a friend and one I had to decline for one reason only Robbie.

Since I first spotted him last week, I now see him every day. Twice, running down the garden wall and dropping over into my neighbour's garage.....which I haven't told her yet. Once in the front garden trying by osmosis to get through the house brickwork, and another three times in my kitchen. When I can't see him, I can hear him in the walls. He put me in bed with a migraine, a 4-dayer obliterating any chance I had of going anywhere. Funny place though Monaco - a densely populated, ugly lump of concrete nestled between France and Italy with it's own Prince living in its own fairytale world where carriages are Ferraris, the Cinderellas are Russian supermodels. Everyone crammed in to avoid paying tax. It can't be nice, they might as well take their great wealth and sit in prison.

One afternoon I caught sight of him scurrying with some guinea pig food under the kitchen bar. I got everything out the broom cupboard – panels, tins of paint – I barricaded him in and put the trap, full of food, in with him. Later in the evening I heard the trap go. I was in my migraine so thought I would deal with him in the morning. As I fell asleep I was deciding where I would take him. I would drive to the furthest point up Swaledale to one of those stone barns. I I

imagined myself walking across the field to the barn – cage in one hand and a bag of guinea food in the other to keep him going – then the farmer would come tearing across the field in his 4 x 4 saying ‘.....what the hell do you think you’re doing.....’. He’d see the rat and the food and I’d have to explain I’d come to release my rat in his barn.

Next morning I came down, braced myself with a cup of tea and dismantled the barricade. The cage trap was empty, he’d long gone. Robbie thinks ‘I really, really love it here. Myfa’s lovely and the guinea pigs are lovely and there’s always a big bowl of food for us and all through the day she brings out a fresh quartered carrot or little slices of apple. I just couldn’t be happier’.

Everyone is telling me my only solution is to poison him or get proper traps or a cat (I’ve got fledglings sunbathing in the garden). I couldn’t kill him. So anyway, I’ve ordered another trap as the one I got was ridiculous and convoluted - more like a rat IQ test. This one is easy - see food, walk in, eat food, door drops down, off to barn. I’ve poured disinfectant under the kitchen bar to try and hygiene him out. I shall see what the week brings.

I hope you are enjoying the fantastic weather and have a lovely Jubilee weekend, whatever you are doing,

Kind wishes,

Isobel