



Monday 25th April 2016

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Up here, despite a new Arctic blast, it is intermittently sunny and finally looking like spring. It is looking here how it looked down there a few months ago.

Did you see the Angela Ripon programme 'How to Stay Young'. Their findings were remarkable – that eating meat, animal 'protein', stimulates a hormone which actually speeds up the ageing process and that the optimum diet is vegan. The less meat and dairy one eats, generally the longer one will live – a good extra ten years. Did you see the 100yr old heart surgeon who was performing heart surgery up to the age of 95 and reckoned he could still do it with no problems. A vegan for 50 years, he only looked about 60. So much for the argument that as omnivores we are 'meant' to eat meat. Surely 'omnivore' means that as an 'intelligent' species, honed for survival, in a famine situation, we can eat anything, but it doesn't mean that we should. The findings suggest that we really shouldn't. Well the WHO did put a health warning on it didn't they but it was muted out and quashed – too much vested interest. It's the last taboo. So here's a lovely squash cobbler:

Squash, Butterbean and Mushroom Cobbler

400g squash	4 tbsp vegetable oil
1 medium onion, chopped	20g root ginger, grated
3 large cloves garlic, peeled and grated	3 tomatoes, quartered (or equivalent tinned)
¾ tsp turmeric	½ - 1 tsp chilli powder
2 tsp ground coriander	½ tsp garam masala
salt and black pepper to taste	200g mushrooms, thickly sliced
400g tin butterbeans, drained and rinsed	100g finely chopped greens
6 tbsp double cream (optional)	50ml milk
1 tbsp tomato puree (optional)	
For Cobbler Topping:	
175g self-raising flour	1/3 tsp salt
70g butter cut in small pieces	2 free-range eggs, beaten
55-65ml milk	sea salt flakes

Preheat oven to 200/ 400F/ Gas 6. Place the squash, skin on, in a roasting tin and cook until soft, around 30 minutes. Remove any fibres and seeds and cut into 2.5cm cubes. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large saucepan until hot. Add the onion and cook until colouring at the edges. Add the ginger and garlic and cook until the garlic just starts to colour. Add the tomatoes, spices and seasoning and cook down until the sauce has thickened. Add the mushrooms and cover and cook for another 3 minutes. Pour in 200ml of water and add the beans, squash and spinach and return to the boil. Cook for 3 minutes then add the cream and milk, to taste, and adjust seasoning. Stir in the tomato puree then spoon into a large pie dish. Then make the cobbler topping. Place the flour and salt in a large bowl, add the butter and rub between your fingers to get a sandy texture. Make a well in the middle and add half the egg and most of the milk and bring together with a fork to form a soft dough. Turn onto a floured surface and lightly bring together. Pat out until it is about 1cm thick and right diameter for the tin and place over the cobbler filling. Brush with remaining egg, sprinkle over some sea-salt and bake on middle shelf until the pastry is a deep, golden brown, some 25 minutes.

Split Pea and Courgette Soupsouth

175g yellow split peas	1 medium onion, finely chopped
1 tsp sunflower oil	2 medium courgettes, finely diced
900ml vegetable stock	½ tsp ground turmeric
salt and freshly ground black pepper	crusty bread, to serve

Place the split peas in a bowl, cover with cold water and leave to soak for several hours or overnight. Rinse and drain again. Cook the onion in the oil in a covered pan until soft. Reserve a handful of diced courgettes to use later. Add the remaining courgettes to the pan. Cook for 2-3 minutes. Add the stock and turmeric and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer for 30-40 minutes and season. When the soup is almost ready, boil the reserved diced courgettes in water for one minute. Drain and add to the soup. Serve with crusty bread.

Lemon Courgette Cake

200g courgettes, grated	150g castor sugar
1 free-range egg	125ml vegetable oil
½ tsp salt	½ tsp bicarbonate of soda
¼ tsp ground cinnamon	2 tsp lemon zest

Preheat the oven to 160C/ Gas 3. Grease a loaf tin. In a bowl, beat together the courgette, sugar, egg and oil. In a separate bowl sift together the flour, salt, bicarbonate of soda and baking powder and stir in the cinnamon and lemon zest. Add the flour mixture into the courgette mix just until blended. Pour the batter into the prepared tin. Bake for 45 minutes in the oven until a knife inserted in the centre comes out clean. Remove from the heat and cool for about 10 minutes before turning onto a wire rack.

My prayers were answered last week as Richmond was visited by two days of Mediterranean weather. My French friends brought it with them when they came and they took it away again when they left. The little girls got up early. I would come down at 6.30am to find them both downstairs in their pyjamas already snipping away making paper stars and hearts, plaiting wool, making collages, focused and completely self-contained. They'd spent a couple of days in London before coming up here and went to the Tate Modern, the National Portrait Gallery, Somerset House and the British Museum, they showed me their two new colouring-in books – Kandinsky and Roy Lichtenstein – blimey !. A circus, a Punch and Judy show – what had I been thinking of – they like nothing more than studying a Rembrandt. I tried to discreetly slip the TV on with the volume down when noone was looking – a bit of Masterchef and the EU Referendum. We had a nice picnic up on the moors and went to our one and only visitor attraction The Forbidden Garden in Wensleydale. A garden where walls suddenly shower you with water as you make your way up the yellow brick road, creepy Romans who chant in Latin as you pass, dungeons with ravens that spit at you, labyrinths, herb gardens and groaning caves. It was fantastic.

Kind wishes,

Isobel