



Monday 23rd May 2022

Dear Customer,

It's Monday morning, never the easiest time to write a letter with the start of the working week and the emails and problem emails clattering in. Sunshine and showers here, pleasantly mild.

Globe artichokes are in some of the bags this week. To prepare, using a sharp knife, cut the top third off the artichoke to expose the heart. Rinse thoroughly, pulling leaves apart to ensure no grit is lodged between them. Slice a lemon in half. Rub the cut surfaces of the artichokes with the lemon pieces to prevent them from turning brown. Bring a pan of water to the boil. Place a steamer basket or colander on top and arrange the artichokes inside, with their stalk ends facing up. Cook for about 30-40 minutes. To test if an artichoke is cooked, hold it in a clean tea towel and pull at a leaf and, if ready, it should come away easily. When cooked, remove the artichokes from the steamer. To eat, pull off each leaf, dip it in some seasoned butter or margarine, or even a Hollandaise, and draw it between your teeth to remove the flesh. Work your way through all the leaves until you arrive at the meaty heart, scraping off the fibrous, hairy part first. It's so worth it.

Here is one tasty recipe you could try this week:

Broccoli and Potato Bake with Peanut Sauce

450g new potatoes, sliced

½ small onion, finely chopped

8 tbsp crunchy peanut butter

2 tsp sugar

200g broccoli, chopped

2 tsp melted margarine

1 tbsp olive oil

400 ml coconut milk

1 tbsp soy sauce

½ tsp dried red chilli flakes

60g peanuts

salt and pepper

Preheat the oven to 190°C/375°F/Gas 5. Bring a large saucepan of lightly salted water to the boil. Add the potatoes, bring back to the boil and cook for 8-10 minutes, or until slightly softened. Drain and set aside. Heat the oil in a saucepan over a medium heat. Fry the onion for 2 minutes, then stir in the coconut milk, peanut butter, soy sauce, sugar and chilli flakes. Bring to the boil and stir well to ensure the ingredients are combined. Reduce the heat and simmer for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, place the broccoli in a steamer and lightly steam for 4-5 minutes, or until just tender. Stir the broccoli and peanuts into the sauce, season to taste and transfer to a wide, square baking dish. Cover the mixture with the cooked potato slices, dot with the melted margarine and season with pepper. Bake in the preheated oven for 20-25 minutes, or until the potatoes are golden. Leave to cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Anyway, snatching a moment of reflection on what's really bugging me, I need to write this quick then get the hell out the house. The second builder whose work 'I politely, by text, no longer require', is turning up to pick up his cement mixer and shovel. The small area around my pond which I am still trying to herringbone remains unfinished 7 weeks on. My beautiful, golden-toned, faux reclaimed bricks are smothered in concrete: my pleas to use the protective dust sheets, ignored: their insistence to exercise the right to walk concrete dust all over the laid bricks, exercised: concrete dust successfully setting inside the brick crevices after a light shower; suggestions to use a spirit level, ignored. 'This is my job. It's what I do, I use my eyes'. I spent yesterday in a futile attempt to scrub the cement off the bricks, got pressure-washer man to come yet again. All in vain. Then covered everything in dust sheets. Over the weekend I had sent the builder photos of concrete spillages and told him politely it was me and not him, and that really, I needed a restoration-type of person who would mask off each brick and use a spoon for the cement. Anyway, he didn't take it well. He will surely arrive soon, so I am going. Will get back onto this on my return.

It's two hours later and just as I was about to leave the van pulled up with him and his apprentice in. I initially hid, but then went out to face his wrath. It didn't go well. He slated the original builder, said I need an archaeologist with a little brush. I agreed and apologised. He said I had given him an impossible job and was glad to be off it. And with that, cement mixer loaded, they were gone.

Gone, leaving me feeling guilty. But why should I feel guilty. But I do. Initially thinking I could maybe let him just finish it and then deal with the aftermath, afterwards, I spent hours on Friday night on the internet looking for eco alternatives to brick acid, his solution, until I told him that was impossible, and when he assured me he would sponge it off as he went.....but didn't. Muriatic acid, 'brick acid': a hideous, toxic 'cleaning fluid' loved by builders and poured into the environment dissolving everything in its path including froglets and dogs' paws after which it seeps into the water systems and the soils. But that's what they do. I know it's easy for me to criticise. Me, who doesn't possess one solitary practical skill, or any other skill. But you know.....!

Other than that, no news. On the way back from Snape, where I managed to find some sandstone slabs from the same quarry as the ones the first builder smashed to pieces when he lost control of the mini digger, I stopped off to give Lainey a walk. It was gone 4pm but I managed to persuade them at Thorpe Perrow arboretum to let me in even though they were closing soon. I started off having a lovely wander: the sun filtering through the lilac trees; the walkway over the stunning Bog Garden. It was heavenly, until I realised I was lost. I didn't know where I'd wandered and where the entry / exit was. Panic started to set in. I needed to get out. I walked faster and faster. There were no signs, no one to ask, nothing. Normally you'd go in at the right time, and with a map. I had flashbacks of getting lost in my bikini on a wooded mountain in Majorca when the hotel had to call the emergency services. Then eventually, thank the Lord, I caught a glimpse of what looked like a vehicle, and there he was, the gardener. I wanted to ask him to take me out on his quad bike. 'You follow the path (the one I was on) you just keep following it round, then eventually on the right you'll see a gate, that is the gate to the car park'. I made him tell me six times. I did as he said. I saw the gate. I saw my car.

Hope you have a lovely Jubilee weekend whatever you get up to,

Kind wishes,

Isobel