

Local Indian cooking classes feature the magic of spices



Ayesha D'Mello creates culinary delights in her kitchen.

BY LINDA RODRIGUEZ BERNFELD

Made with variety of spices, Indian food is adventurous and delicious, and it can be good for you, at least the way Ayesha D'Mello cooks.

D'Mello shares the secret to quick, easy Indian cooking with weekend cooking classes. Each class includes six to eight dishes and ends with a feast. As a bonus, those attending receive copies of the featured recipes.

Classes are conducted at her Kendall home on Saturdays and Sundays.

"I started with one menu and now I have nine menus," D'Mello said. "One is a meat menu and one is a vegetarian one. I rolled out a vegan one."

Her classes are so successful that she is sold out a month or two in advance. Her success is primarily through word of mouth.

"It's wonderful to see what customers take away from it," she said.

The classes not only include how to cook the recipes, she also clues the participants in on the health benefits of the spices she uses.

"We talk about turmeric...it's a root. There are two kinds of root. The red color is what most Hindu women will wear on their forehead and in their hair," she said. "The yellow is edible. If you have arthritis, it's a natural anti-inflammatory."

D'Mello said turmeric powder is used for cuts. It also has other qualities.

"Turmeric is in the ginger family," she said. "It helps you reduce weight."

In the classes, D'Mello talks about well-balanced diets and the advantages of the spices.

"I talk about the natural medicinal benefits to these spices," she said. "Because food plays a role in our lives. When you get grouchy and grumpy, you haven't had good diet."

She said there are six basic tastes: sweet, salty, sour, pungent, bitter and astringent.

"Sometimes you crave sweet; it's energiz-

ing and satisfying when you eat something sweet," she said. "Salty will cure stiffness. Salty will increase your water intake and sour will increase your appetite. It also helps with digestion. Pungent helps to increase blood circulation. Bitter is a blood purifier. Stringent will help your digestion and is a blood purifier."

The classes are limited to eight or nine participants.

The cost is \$75 per class.

"What that gives you is a three-hour class," she said. "The first two hours is cooking. I give you a copy of the recipes. They are absolutely easy to follow, fool-proof."

The last hour is a sit down meal.

"This is a fine meal with fine china, like you are sitting in a restaurant," D'Mello said. "And conversation."

Indian food is very regional. She said cooks utilize most of the local produce and whatever is available to make up the meals. In the cooler northern climate, the foods are richer, with heavy cream. In the southern part, the dishes have more rice and coconut. Rice is a staple because of the paddy fields.

D'Mello's background is in accounting and computer science. She has a computer science degree and an MBA from Texas. After moving to Miami seven years ago, she reluctantly quit work to stay home with the kids.

Her culinary career took off after she was featured in a newspaper story. People began asking about her "restaurant" and whether it offered classes.

She started the classes because she wanted to educate people about Indian culture.

"I grew up with a cook in my house, but I was always intrigued by the spices," she said. "What I did discover was my passion to teach others to cook."

For more information on Ayesha's Kitchen, go online to <www.ayeshaskitchen.com>.

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