

A cooking class makes a great holiday gift -- here's how to find right one



Top 10 Trending Articles



JOSH REYNOLDS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Instructor Shruti Mehta helps Kim Winniker of Brookline as he makes sweet potato bharta during a class on Indian vegetarian cooking.

By Ann Trieger Kurland | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT DECEMBER 06, 2016

“Tonight we go to India,” says instructor Shruti Mehta as she displays the ingredients for a class on vegetarian cooking. Her aim is to demystify a seemingly complicated cuisine for the 13 participants who are gathered around an island in a Newton home. On the counter is a tin spice box with powders and roasted seeds so aromatic the students have already been transported before the cooking even begins.

People seek out cooking instruction for various reasons — to learn new recipes, hone skills, or master a technique. And there are plenty of experienced cooks and chefs in the area who offer lessons. Some, like Mehta, run private classes in students' homes (\$40 per person, minimum six people, \$250 for a private lesson, including ingredients, www.shrutimehta.com). A cooking class is a fun way for friends to get together and learn something new, and it makes a novel holiday gift.

Mehta guides students through the recipes — aloo chaat, a mixed dal, sweet potato bharta, and green pulao rice with chutney and vegetables. Potatoes and legumes become a canvas for spices. “My spice box is also my medicine box,” says Mehta, who grew up in Bombay, now called Mumbai. She's taught Indian vegetarian cooking for 25 years at Boston, Brookline, Needham, and Cambridge adult education centers. When the cooking is finished, the class turns into a dinner party.

Plan a menu with Didi Emmons and she'll also help you host a cooking-class dinner party at home. Author of three cookbooks, caterer, personal chef, and teacher, she arrives with groceries and will rove through your fridge and pantry to work with ingredients at hand (\$375 plus food costs for parties of 6-10). Emmons founded the nonprofit Haley House Bakery Cafe in Roxbury and ran a program there teaching teens, which is one of her passions. She runs in-home classes for ages 10 to 16, teaching knife skills and French, Italian, or Southeast Asian cooking. A series of four classes culminates in a "Chopped"-like competition, mimicking the Food Network show (\$50 each per class for a minimum of eight students, www.didiemmons.com).

At the Cambodian and French restaurant Elephant Walk in Cambridge, Saturday-morning classes with chef and author Longteine "Nyep" De Monteiro include foods of Cambodian's coastal regions, or traditional dishes from the country's Angkor period. Classes in braising and French bistro fare are led by owner and chef Gérard Lopez, originally from France. Students work on recipes during the three-hour classes to make a four-course lunch and then sit down to eat (\$76 per class, www.elephantwalk.com).

Peek into Sofra Bakery & Cafe on some Monday nights after the place closes and you'll find the cozy space turned into a demo kitchen with ingredients spread out on the long marble counter. Owners Ana Sortun, the executive chef, and Maura Kilpatrick, the pastry chef, run demonstration classes using recipes from "Soframiz," their new Middle Eastern cookbook. Classes include a tasting of each recipe and wine pairing (\$85 or \$135 each class, www.sofrabakery.com).

For a true farm-to-fork experience, take a hands-on class at the Cooking School at Saltbox Farm in Concord. The well-equipped kitchen is in an old-world cottage. During growing season, students collect fresh ingredients from the herb and vegetable garden before they cook. Classes include American regional cooking, vegetarian cooking, and brunch. Limited to 10, the classes sell out early (\$90 for most classes, www.saltboxfarmconcord.com).

At the Kitchen at Boston Public Market, learn pasta-making or how to create Spanish tapas with local seafood and produce, meats, and artisanal products. (Classes are programmed by The Trustees, a land conservation and historic preservation nonprofit, \$84 each for Trustee members, \$60 for nonmembers, www.bostonpublicmarket.org/kitchen). After class, you can peruse the market for ingredients to take home and replicate the recipes you just learned.

Ann Triegeer Kurland can be reached at anntriegeer@gmail.com.