



Photo shows William and Jessica Wong of Sydney, Australia, making confit cod on flatbread at a Catalonia-style cooking class in Barcelona, Spain.



Chef Rosa Camprodon shows tourist Carlos Rajo how to make Catalonia-style paella in Barcelona, Spain.



Chef Rosa Camprodon instructing tourists from California and Singapore in Catalonia-style cooking in Barcelona, Spain.— AP photos



Photo shows tourist Carlos Rajo stirring rice for a Catalonia-style paella in Barcelona, Spain.



Photo shows software engineer Abhishek Parmar and his 9-year-old son, Arjun, making Catalonia-style tomato bread in a cooking class in Barcelona, Spain.

What color is paella? The answer, from a Barcelona chef

Of course we are familiar with the Spanish rice dish paella, we say. It is the color of a Mediterranean sunrise, a coral red or saffron yellow. Chef Rosa Camprodon shakes her head. Or maybe that's a shudder. She is our instructor at a Barcelona cooking school that caters to tourists, and she is teaching us to make paella Catalonia-style: a rich coppery brown.

Camprodon tosses finely diced onion into a pan of hot olive oil and has one student stir it. Add the tomato, and stir. Never let it sit on the flame, she says. Never let it burn. Add rice and stir 15 minutes in all, or until the mixture is a deep brown, ready for other ingredients. "There are as many paellas as there are cooks," Camprodon says. "But paella is not red or yellow. It is brown. The darkness depends on how long you caramelize the onions in their own natural sugar."

Chefs are nothing if not opinionated about food. And food, like art or history, is a great gateway into a new place. So on our first trip to Barcelona, my husband and I signed up for a half-day class with the Cook and Taste school. But before we tackled the paella, we spent a few hours on the history, gathering food for thought on a group walking tour about the Spanish Civil War. Our guide, Nick Lloyd, met us in the morning near La Rambla and La Boqueria market as tourists and foodies began to pour in. But he took us back to a time when the city was draped in red and black flags, with workers armed for battle. Here in the 1930s, he explained, followers of "Karl Marx, Adam Smith and the anarchists" joined forces in a revolutionary government in Catalonia, to fight against the fascists led by Gen. Francisco Franco - before turning on each other.

Lloyd pointed out a building once occupied by anarchists, across the plaza from another occupied by communists, and down La Rambla to the hotel where George Orwell stayed when he joined other volunteers who came to Spain from around the world to fight Franco. Lloyd recited passages from Orwell's "Homage to Catalonia" by heart, and explained that the war was a prelude to World War II. Franco crushed Barcelona's revolutionary government when his forces took the city in 1939, and he ruled the country with an iron fist until his death in 1975. It took decades for Barcelona to recover, but today the city is a bustling cosmopolitan center, known not so much for its bloody past and revolutionary struggles as for, among other things, Gaudi, soccer and of course, food.

The city's cuisine gained international fame in part thanks to the innovative chef Ferran Adria.

His El Bulli restaurant closed in 2011 but his influence remains. And maybe that's why we even thought to take a cooking class. The menu at Cook and Taste was gazpacho, roasted vegetables and cod over flatbread, seafood paella and, for dessert, crema Catalana. Our diverse group of 12 from the US, Singapore and Australia had much to learn and eat in four hours: The ham must be room temperature so the fat melts over the meat to bring out the flavor. The cockles for the paella should be cleaned in cold water with salt "so it feels like home," Camprodon said. The mussels, well, "they are very sociable, you know," so you must remove the thin beard-like membrane they use to cling to each other and to rocks. We prepared dessert first so it would have time to chill. One group whisked egg yolks and milk infused with lemon peel and cinnamon. The scented mixture was poured into terracotta dishes and refrigerated.

Another group diced and blended gazpacho, using the traditional tomato, cucumber, green pepper and garlic along with unusual ingredients: watermelon and beets. Camprodon prepared flatbread dough ahead, so it could rise before baking. We roasted eggplant, onions and red pepper, peeled the peppers and cut the vegetables into strips before boiling the cod in hot olive oil with garlic and cayenne. The bread was cut into squares and layered with vegetables and fish.

Finally, the paella. "This is a social event. We make it on Sundays with kids everywhere and sometime people fight, 'No, I make the best paella, I do it better...'" but there is plenty for everyone to do. This is hard work," Camprodon explained. We took turns stirring onions, added vegetables, rice and a saffron-garlic paste, then spread it evenly in a pan. "No empty spaces, please," Camprodon said. She added plenty of salt but not as much as locals seem to like. Cockles, mussels and shrimp were laid on top, then fish stock was poured into the pan and brought to a boil. "Another rule of paella: Never, ever stir after the stock has been added," she said. "Ideally, the rice is a little al dente." We ate gazpacho and flatbread as the paella cooked. At last, it was ready, as delicious as it looked. We savored the flavors but left room for the finale: our Catalan dessert, topped by sugar caramelized with a kitchen blow torch. We left sated, educated and ready for a siesta. — AP



A Catalonia-style seafood paella that is being prepared by tourists at cooking class offered by cooking school Cook and Taste in Barcelona, Spain.



Photo shows sisters Andrea and Sandra Siow of Singapore and Carlos Rajo of the United States practicing their chopping techniques in Barcelona, Spain.

Summertime herbs make versatile herbed yogurt cheese

By Sara Moulton

If there's ever a time when you can have too much of a good thing, it might be right now, when fresh summertime herbs are beyond abundant. Happily, this recipe for Fresh Herbed Yogurt Cheese is just the ticket when you're looking to put a dent in the stockpile of herbs overflowing in your garden or taking up too much space in your refrigerator. It's a fresh cheese based on Greek yogurt, and it's very flexible regarding its herbal flavorings. I've chosen some of my favorites, including chives, parsley, thyme and tarragon. But if you have other herbs at hand - basil, cilantro, mint, oregano - go right ahead and swap them in for my mix.

Whichever herbs you use, be sure to chop them with a supersharp knife, and do so briefly and efficiently. Whacking away at herbs endlessly with a dull knife guarantees that you'll end up with a wet, gray mess. Making this cheese is simple, but you need to plan ahead because the yogurt takes 48 hours to drain. And although you're welcome to dig into it right after you've added the herbs, it tastes much better if you let it chill overnight. Plus, it's easier then to shape the cheese into a log or a round.

As an appetizer, this spread is delicious served on toasted French bread rounds or your favorite crackers. It's also great in place of mustard or mayonnaise on a summer sandwich of sliced turkey, smoked salmon, or roast beef - or on veggie sandwiches starring cucumbers or tomatoes. However you use this cheese, you'll be glad to have put the season's herbs to good use.

Fresh herbed yogurt cheese

Start to finish: 2 1/2 days plus 20 minutes (20 active)

17.6 ounce container (about 2 cups) Greek yogurt, full-fat or low-fat, your choice
3 tablespoons minced shallot
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley

1 tablespoon minced fresh chives
2 teaspoons minced fresh tarragon
1 1/2 teaspoons minced garlic
1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and black pepper
Toasted baguette slices or crackers

Line a large strainer with a triple layer of rinsed and squeezed cheesecloth and set the strainer over a larger bowl. Pile the yogurt into the strainer, spreading it out. Cover with plastic wrap, top with a plate and a weight such as a can of tomatoes and let the yogurt drain in the refrigerator for 48 hours.

Transfer the drained yogurt to a bowl and stir in the next 7 ingredients. Add salt and pepper to taste. If time permits, cover and chill the cheese for up to 8 hours (to develop the flavor). Shape the cheese into logs or rounds and serve with toasted baguette slices or crackers. Makes a little over 2 cups.

Nutrition information per 2-ounce serving: 76 calories; 43 calories from fat; 5 g fat (1 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 4 mg cholesterol; 56 mg sodium; 3 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 5 g protein. — AP



Taking green bean salad up a notch

By Katie Workman

Green beans can be - well, I'll say it, boring. They are one of the most accessible and affordable vegetables on the market, and one of the easiest to prepare, but too often they bring to mind the word "meh." But green beans can lend themselves to so many different kinds of preparations and seasonings that there are lots of reasons to make the effort to take them to another level. They can be roasted, steamed, boiled and sauteed, or served at room temperature in a salad, as in this recipe.

Here they are paired with bright, tangy clementine oranges and salty feta, then lifted up another notch with minced shallots and fresh thyme leaves. If you don't have coarse Dijon you can use regular, though I like the extra texture that the coarse variety gives to the dressing. The beans can be cooked and tossed with the dressing up to two days ahead, which lets them marinate a bit. Add the oranges and feta just before serving. All in all, a far cry from "meh."

Green bean salad with clementine oranges and feta

Start to finish: 20 minutes
Servings: 6

1 1/2 pounds green beans
3 clementines
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons rice vinegar
2 tablespoons minced shallots
1 tablespoon coarse Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 cup crumbled feta

Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil. Drop the beans into the water and let them cook for 3 minutes until they start to become tender. Drain the beans in a colander and run cold water over them to stop the cooking, cool them down and preserve the bright green color. Peel the clementines and cut each segment in half crosswise. Cut the cooled beans in half cross-wise.

In a small bowl or container, combine the olive oil, vinegar, shallots, mustard, thyme, salt and pepper. Whisk or shake to combine. Place the beans and orange segments in a large bowl and drizzle the dressing over them. Toss to combine thoroughly. Add 1/2 cup of the feta and toss again gently to combine, then sprinkle the rest of the feta on top. Serve at room temperature or chilled.

Nutrition information per serving: 166 calories; 93 calories from fat; 10 g fat (4 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 22 mg cholesterol; 337 mg sodium; 14 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 8 g sugar; 6 g protein. — AP

