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Healthy Living in Santa Cruz County



WINTER EDITION *Healthy Eating*

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Turn over a New Leaf: Learn about cooking and nutrition



BY TARA
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If you're a Santa Cruz County local with any interest in cooking or nutrition, you should know about the substantial workshop program at New Leaf's Westside location. Just a quick glance at February's online calendar, for example, shows classes including Cioppino and Ecuadorian Chocolate Making (cooking choices) and Achieving Sound Sleep and Demystifying Omegas (wellness/nutrition choices). Visit newleaf.com/events.

Madia Jamgochian (IG @ madiazoe) has been organizing the Community Classroom workshops and events at New Leaf Community Markets' Westside Santa Cruz branch since 2014. In addition to serving as Community Classroom Coordinator, Jamgochian—a self-taught chef—leads cooking classes and nutrition discussions. She graduated from Bauman College of Holistic Nutrition in 2013 after completing her BA in Environmental Studies and Exercise Sports Science at UCSB.

When Jamgochian started at

New Leaf, the store offered about one or two classes per week. "In the beginning, it was very difficult to get people to sign up for classes," she says. "Now, most of our classes sell out, especially in the New Year when people are becoming re-motivated to focus on their health." During the busiest times of the year, they offer as many as six classes per week. "It's really exciting to see people in the community discovering and utilizing the classroom, and the reach extends beyond the Westside. We have people come from Half Moon Bay, San Jose, and Monterey," she adds. "People have told me there's nothing like it where they live, and that makes them willing to travel the distance."

Recently, some of New Leaf's most popular cooking classes were ones from chef Eric Adema, (including Dim Sum) and from Eriko Yokoyama and Masumi Diaz (including miso-making). "People like to learn new cooking techniques and also about foods from other countries," says Jamgochian. "We have offered these instructors' classes numerous times."

Eric Adema has been teaching at New Leaf for about five months, and all of his workshops have sold out. He first learned his passion for food while cooking his great

grandmother's recipes with his mother as a kid. His later experience includes working as a chef and

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Madia Jamgochian and Magali Brecke co-teach a New Leaf anti-inflammatory series twice a year. Photo credit Dan Coyro - Santa Cruz Sentinel

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Chef Eric Adema. Photo credit Madia Jamgochian

restaurant consultant, and he currently runs his own business, Plus 1 Catering. Adema is in the process of helping open a Half Moon Bay seafood restaurant called Pillar Point Fish House. "I am working with the American Abalone Farm and it's a really exciting project." Because opening a new restaurant is challenging, Adema won't be teaching any classes in February but he's already got a Dim Sum workshop scheduled for March 6. His January classes included Japanese Comfort Food, and in the past he has led workshops in Pasta Making, and Five Preparations of Abalone.

"I hope to do lots more classes in the future, but Dim Sum has been really popular so we've been keeping it in the rotation," says Adema. "I have been thinking about doing a class on different curries and probably one on different noodle bowls like Udon, Ramen, and Soba. Interactive classes always seem to be the most successful. It's lots of fun for people to get their hands dirty and

to make things they never thought they could."

Adema thinks the Asian cooking classes are popular because many of the ingredients and techniques are unfamiliar to most people. "I love Italian food and we do a great Pasta Class, but most people have seen flour, garlic, tomatoes, etc.," he says. "With Asian classes, there is a lot more opportunity to create an exciting experience by including unique yet accessible ingredients like fresh bamboo shoots, sweet soy sauce, sambal oelek, banana leaves, etc. Plus, if done right, Asian food is usually fast, fresh and healthy with crunchy vegetables and you can teach people totally new things like making dumplings by hand. Any time students come in without any prior knowledge of a type of cuisine, and by the end of the class they feel comfortable enough with it to experiment at home, as an instructor it's hard not to get enjoyment from that!"

As a guest instructor, Adema appreciates the "amazing ingredients" New Leaf carries. "It is any chef's dream to shop in a market like this," he shares. "I usually arrive extra early for my classes just to wander around the produce section and discover what new seasonal items have arrived since the last time I was there. I could spend 20 minutes with the selection of mushrooms alone. A few months back I was making abalone ceviche and saw some great looking rhubarb that I just had to use, so I incorporated it into the recipe and it was amazing! A month later, I was making the same ceviche, and there was no

more rhubarb, but there was persimmon—which was also really good. To me, food is only as good as the ingredients."

He has really enjoyed working with his students. "Coming from New England, it is such a treat to be around folks from the Santa Cruz area who are laid back and just want to relax and have fun. We really get a great mix of people too. So far, it's been mostly adults, but

fun. It has become like a private dinner party with friends."

The most important thing Adema wants people to take away from his classes is confidence in their own abilities by learning techniques, rather than recipes. "People often show up with a pen and paper ready to take lots of notes, but I urge them to embrace the process more than the result," he says. "When we're making



Seaweed salad from Cooking with Wild Seaweeds. Photo credit Madia Jamgochian

I'd love to do a kids' class someday. We've had some couples on dates, mother/daughter combos, old friends out for some fun, and some people who fly solo," he says. "What's great is that everyone starts working together and chatting with their neighbors. Often people banter across the room and we always have lots of fun. Usually people stay after the class and we keep cooking, eating and having

dumplings, it doesn't really matter if we use ground pork, or chicken or shrimp or veggies, what's important is to learn the folding techniques and how to use the bamboo steamer properly. You could make the best shu mai in the world, but if you don't line your steamer with a banana leaf, they will stick and rip apart. No amount of note-taking

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will teach you how to tell when a dough has been kneaded long enough. You have to get your hands dirty and learn by doing, not watching. So much more memory is attached to actually going through the technique, rather than just watching someone else do it. We live in the age of YouTube where you can watch people do anything, but you can't ask that person questions and have them give you specific instructions. That's why hands-on, live classes are so much better."

Adema emphasizes the importance of accepting that it's ok to make mistakes. "I burn things all the time, but I don't (usually)

get upset. I learn that I need to lower the oven temp or cook time or maybe I just need to watch that item more closely."

If you're hesitant to look into classes because you fear that they might be expensive, the prices will pleasantly surprise you.

"Because our main goal is to connect with the community and teach people something new, our cooking classes are very inexpensive," says Jamgochian. Plus, they have lots of free lectures and discussions. These include a Tuesday Nutrition series that Jamgochian leads, and classes about balancing hormones taught by Erin Fisher.

Jamgochian loves her job because she enjoys teaching people about things that will help them improve their wellbeing. "It makes me happy to know I may have made a difference in improving someone's health," she says. "I get to be creative and make up new recipes to share with my class, which is always a plus."

The Tuesday Nutrition series, which consists of wellness classes held most Tuesdays from 1-2 p.m., started as an offering tailored to seniors. People of all ages would come to the classes, and Jamgochian decided to open it up to everyone. "I originally thought the time slot would be good for retired folk, but turns out lots of people can make that class



Madia Jamgochian prepping at one of her classes. Photo contributed

time in Santa Cruz. Now I have a number of nutrition classes I offer on repeat: Achieving Sound Sleep,

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Kick the Sugar, and Intro to Anti-inflammatory Eating—to name a few of the more popular ones.”

One individual who has benefited greatly from these classes is Monika Thomas, who attended many Tuesday events from May through November 2018. “The classes with Madia were life changing,” says Thomas, who is in her 50s. In addition to the themes



Kimchi from a class with chefs Eriko and Masumi. Photo credit Madia Jamgochian

Jamgochian mentioned above, Thomas attended free classes on proteins, healthy fats, smart carbs, and eating healthy during the holidays—the latter included samples such as cranberry lemon tart with gingerbread crust and parsnip cauliflower mash with butter, green onion and bacon. She also took part in a fee-based four-evening anti-inflammatory class held in October 2018.

For several months, Thomas has been on a grain-free diet and eaten hardly any sugars, “just the occasional maple syrup, or fruit such as berries,” says Thomas. “I consider it a Paleo / Keto approach.” She has learned to calculate the grams of protein she needs and is using healthy fats (such as ghee). She discovered grain-free chips, tortillas, and pancake mixes that taste good and “digest wonderfully.” She also re-introduced meats into her diet; “...however, they are only grass-fed and grass-finished.” She learned the difference between those, too.



Chefs Eriko Yokoyama and Masumi Diaz. Photo contributed



Ian and Madia harvesting for wild seaweed class. Photo credit Dan Coyro, Santa Cruz Sentinel

“The nutrition classes were combined with delicious recipes and samples that Madia would cook for us,” says Thomas. One sample from Smart Carbs was beet stacks with goat cheese. “I also attended a good class on seaweeds,” she adds. (Jamgochian regularly co-teaches the popular Cooking with Wild Seaweeds class with Ian O’Hollaren).

“I cannot be more grateful for the changes I was able to implement due to the expertise, knowledge and demonstrations that Madia provided for us,” says Thomas. “Most of the classes are free, except the four-week series on anti-inflammatory science and foods (well worth it, as you can cure autoimmune diseases through the intake of correct foods). Overall, I am spending more on healthy and organic foods and meats, and am grateful that I am investing in myself that way.”

The four-week series Thomas refers to is called “Anti-Inflammatory Integrative Wellness Series,” which Jamgochian teaches with co-instructor Magali Brecke every February and October. The next one is on four consecutive Wednesday nights, February 6-27.

“I was lucky enough to be scouted by Madia for teaching at The Classroom almost three years ago,” says Brecke, an anti-inflammatory chef and co-founder/nutritional director of Kitchen Witch Bone Broth. “Together, we have taught our popular Anti Inflammatory series twice per year, taking a whole month to dive deep with our students, many of who are dealing with chronic illness.” Brecke also teaches a class on The Ketogenic Diet, and a workshop on making high-quality bone broth at home. Later in 2019, she plans to expand her offerings.

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“The AI series is so valuable, says Brecke. “Most crucial for me is that we meet once per week, for four weeks. This allows students to make change in their real lives, with full support from both Madia and I, and their fellow students, when we gather together. Shifting your mindset about health and wellness is challenging, staying on course is made so much easier with support.” She finds it very rewarding to watch people feel markedly better over such a short period of time, while they make friends along the way.

“The nature of our classes lends itself to a diverse group- we get all walks of life, at all stages in the world of wellness,” she adds. “We have been lucky to have folks who are ready to share their troubles and victories, expanding and inspiring their classmates. From MS to Ulcerative Colitis, from cancer to cancer recovery, we see it all. It is an honor to guide people into a more sustainable, vibrant way of being, wherever they are.” Wondering about what to expect? Past highlights, Brecke says, include individuals’ learning things like “Have questions about how to use turmeric? Coconut butter? Which kombucha is the best? We got you. We promise to show you how to make the shift to AI smooth and so very yummy.” Also, each class ends with a meal.

“We are famous for feeding students the most delicious meals after a lecture; this is my joy,” she adds.

Eriko Yokoyama and Masumi Diaz are popular guest instructors. They have been teaching at New

Leaf since October 2017, and also create a fresh, probiotic miso dressing through their business Hakouya (sold at farmers’ markets and select retailers). Their classes have included Miso, Amazake (sweet, non-alcoholic drink made with cooked rice or cooked oatmeal, and rice Koji), Salt Koji (fermented mixture of Koji, salt and water – can be used as a substitute seasoning for salt), Water Kefir (these grains can be used to make probiotic soda), and Kimchi.

They grew up in Japan and moved to the U.S. about 30 years ago. Yokoyama’s background includes studying French cooking at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and owning a restaurant for 13 years. Yokoyama and Diaz met in 2003 through a mutual friend, and soon started making miso and fermented foods together.

Yokoyama and Diaz love to shop at New Leaf and respect the company as a “great, health-conscious store that has been important for our local community for a long time.” They truly enjoy teaching at New Leaf. “As a classroom coordinator, Madia is very helpful and makes our classes easy and fun. They are hands-on workshops, along with some lectures.” Kids are welcome at class “as long as they are able to be in a one and a half hour class with their parents,” says Yokoyama. “Miso-making is an especially fun one for children” (the next miso workshop is Jan. 30).

“We feel that since we began teaching at New Leaf, people start recognizing us more and more.

It’s been so exciting. People take a class, stop by the farmers’ market to see us, take more classes, and become repeat customers for our dressing, etc. It’s been such a joy for us!”

Both women had health problems when they followed ‘Western’ diets. They call themselves ‘true witnesses’ of how important it is to add probiotic foods and drinks to our everyday diets. Many Japanese foods are probiotic. “We love to share our experiences and things that we have learned over the last 15 years with people who are interested in this. When we hear positive feedback from attendees, this is such a great reward.”

They are very passionate when discussing Koji, a “...key ingredient, which is a kind of fungus as a starter of fermentation for many probiotic food and drinks. When we found and learned about Koji by a book written by a third generation of the Koji maker in the Southern part of Japan, we were fascinated about how powerful the microorganism is. That’s why we’d like to introduce its merits to as many as possible so they start to incorporate it into their diet to improve dietary life. Koji officially became a national fungus in Japan in 2006.”

Their goal is to educate people who either have health problems,

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or want to maintain good health, about how eating probiotic foods and drinks can help the body while tasting delicious.

Certified Nutrition Consultant Erin Fisher regularly teaches several hormone-balancing classes including Hormones, Mood and Food which discusses—among other things—foods that can support women's monthly hormone mood swings. Other classes have included How to Eat Like A Woman and Stress and Your Hormones. Fisher, a Bauman College of Holistic Nutrition graduate, has taught at New Leaf for nearly a year. She has extensive training and is currently studying Integrative and Functional Medicine for Women to further her expertise on women's health. It is her goal to help empower women throughout their cycles.

"Nutrition and food are the KEY ingredients for women to feeling good in their bodies, all month long and throughout their life stages," says Fisher. Often, when they walk into a doctor's office, women are not given much information on specific foods and nutrients that

actually work for women's bodies. "Unfortunately, birth control pills seem to be the only answer they get, and this is causing more harm than good. Food is medicine and can heal many hormonal imbalances, such as PMS."

Fisher loves living in a community where we "not only can shop for local and seasonal food at New Leaf, but we also have a place to learn beyond what is on the shelves to learn more about ways we can support our body to feel vital. New Leaf supports customers to embrace this larger picture of health. I don't know many grocery stores that offer free classes for women to learn more about their hormones!"

Fisher wants women to drop the outdated model that "hormones make us crazy and our period is just this 'thing' happening to us." Her classes support women to switch from this paradigm to one that "empowers women to feel vital in their bodies and minds."

As far as future plans for the Community Classroom, Jamgochian plans to "keep the

momentum going, and continue recruiting new and talented instructors that bring exciting topics to the classroom." She looks forward to cooking instructor Laura Casasayas teaching her first New Leaf workshops in February: Catalan cuisine and kids' cooking. "Also, I have recently increased the number of classes I myself teach due to high demand," says Jamgochian.

Indeed, Forrest Gonsiewski, Senior Director of New Leaf Community Markets, has high praise for Jamgochian: "Healthy eating, nutrition and the discovery of new foods crosses all boundaries; young, old, ethnic background... food touches every community," he says. "Where better to learn about it than a 'Community Classroom,' which includes offerings from a dynamic and innovative teacher like Madia Jamgochian, who is firmly imbedded in the community and has a passion to share what she knows about healthy foods and healthy eating."

Separately from New Leaf, Jamgochian runs her own business, My Healing Habits, offering one-on-one consultations to help

individuals find optimal health through guided nutrition, with an emphasis on a whole-foods and anti-inflammatory diet.

No matter your skill level or interest, with its huge variety of offerings, New Leaf probably has a class to whet your appetite. And if one of your 2019 resolutions is improving your cooking skills, the Community Classroom is a friendly, convenient environment worth checking out.

"Like anything else, cooking takes practice. Remember, at some point even the best chef didn't know how to cook a single thing. If you really embrace the techniques, meticulously cut your vegetables, slowly simmer your sauces, smell, feel, taste your ingredients, cooking can be a relaxing, meditation-like Zen state filled with all sorts of sensory simulations," says Adema.

New Leaf Community Markets, 1101 Fair Ave. Santa Cruz, 831-426-1306, newleaf.com/events



All four photos by Madia Jamgochian