

Pasta & Possibilities

Manhattan House Chef Diana Stavaridis teaches kids about fresh food – and how to cook it

Diana Stavaridis, head chef at Manhattan House restaurant in Manhattan Beach, started cooking with her grandfather when she was a child but didn't have the chance to imagine cooking as a profession until years later. Now she works with GrowingGreat, a community garden program that helps local elementary students grow school gardens, then brings fourth and fifth graders into the restaurant to cook with Stavaridis. The goal is to help kids connect with fresh food, and also to show them the world of professional cooking.

About 30-40 kids are part of the program, and groups of 12-18 work with Stavaridis to conceptualize and cook a recipe start to finish. Each group's recipe goes on the Manhattan House menu for a month, and the students get to cook and serve it to their families.

Last spring, students from Robinson Elementary School were asking for ravioli. "Kids love cheese, and ravioli are like little cheese sandwiches," says Stavaridis. She shares the recipe they created, which involves making homemade pasta – a challenge. "I just say practice, practice, practice," she says. "Don't be daunted if the first two times fail."

Stavaridis recommends the pasta-making attachment for the Kitchenaid stand mixer if you have one, and says Atlas is a trusted brand of hand-crank pasta maker.

When the program resumes this fall, Stavaridis says recipes will likely feature lots of tomatoes (which the students planted in the school garden) paired with homemade soft cheese. Students have also been asking for a chance to make sausage.

– Christina Elston



Head Chef Diana Stavaridis of Manhattan House cooks with students from Robinson Elementary School in Manhattan Beach.

PHOTOS COURTESY GROWINGGREAT

Agnolotti Pasta with Garden Swiss Chard



Pasta Dough

400 grams (3 ½ cups) all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon kosher salt
4 whole organic eggs

Filling

8 ounces ricotta cheese (strained overnight)
4 ounces mascarpone cheese
4 ounces parmesan cheese, grated
1 large stalk of Swiss chard, diced into small pieces and sautéed in olive oil for 2-3 minutes (until tender), then cooled
Zest of two lemons
sea salt

Mascarpone cheese sauce

1 chopped shallot
1 teaspoon extra virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon white wine
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 tablespoon mascarpone cheese
1 tablespoon chopped herbs, such as chervil, chive and basil
Juice of one lemon
Grated parmesan for garnishing
Sea salt to taste

Combine the flour and 1 teaspoon salt. Add the eggs and mix to form the pasta dough.



Wrap it in plastic and let it rest for one hour at room temperature.

Thoroughly combine the cooled Swiss chard with the 4 ounces mascarpone cheese, ricotta and parmesan cheeses and lemon zest to make the filling. Season with salt to taste. Load this mixture into a piping bag or a plastic bag with the tip of the corner cut off.

Roll out the pasta dough into sheets, and feed through a pasta maker set to level 5.

Lay each sheet on a board sprinkled with flour and cut them into rectangular pieces 12 inches long and 4 inches wide. Sprinkle flour lightly on each piece after you cut it, and stack the sheets on top of each other.

Pull one piece of pasta off the top of the stack. Pipe a straight line of ricotta chard filling lengthwise on the pasta, leaving enough pasta at the top to fold over the filling.

Fold the pasta top over the filling. Press firmly to seal. You can moisten the tip of your finger and run it along the seam if it doesn't want to stick together.

Use the tips of your fingers to pinch the tube of pasta into equal-sized sections, creating a

seal between pockets of filling. Use a wheeled pasta cutter or knife to separate the pressed sections. You should be left with small, individual pockets of filled pasta.

Place the finished pasta pockets in a tray of semolina or regular flour and freeze if not using immediately.

To cook the pasta, boil 6 quarts of salted water per pound of pasta. Use a slotted spoon to drop the pasta pockets into the water. Cook for about 1-2 minutes or until pasta is cooked through. (Frozen pasta will cook in just 45 seconds.) Remove from water and set to the side, reserving a little of the cooking water.

To make the sauce, sauté the chopped shallot pieces in olive oil in a large sauté pan until tender, then add white wine and reduce. Add some of the remaining pasta water (as needed) with the butter and 1 tablespoon of mascarpone cheese, until all of this mixture is thoroughly blended. Add the cooked pasta to this sauce mixture. Remove the pasta/sauce mixture from the heat and toss to coat. Season with lemon juice and salt. Garnish with grated parmesan and herb blend. Serve hot. ♦

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