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Local Chef Inspires Healthy and Economical Cooking...in a Flash

By Madeleine Charney
Granby

Leslie Cerier knows a bargain when she sees one. Growing up in Queens, New York, she and her mother prowled the local bazaars for all manner of household items from clothes to comestibles. She believes that eating whole foods is a bargain itself. "Eating well comes back many, many times in good health!" she stated enthusiastically. Organic, seasonal, and local foods needn't cost more. The first step, she advises, is joining a local Community Supported Agriculture farm. Shopping at farmers markets and roadside farm stands is another way to keep food bills within reasonable limits.

Leslie also posits that preparing healthful meals can be quicker and more efficient than people may realize. Take for example her recent class entitled "Vegetarian Express: Great Meals for the Time Pressed." Taught in her state-of-the-art, gourmet home kitchen in Shutesbury, Mass., Leslie demonstrates how to cook a variety of whole grains in 20 minutes. Add seasonal vegetables and "fast-track" proteins such as nuts, seeds, lentils, tofu, or seitan and voila—dinner is served!

Each class opens with participants sharing their specific preferences, food sensitivities, and allergies. This allows Leslie to adapt the recipes as the class progresses. She is able to accommodate needs such as vegetarian or vegan; low fat; high fiber; celiac; omitting wheat, sugar, or dairy; cancer prevention and healing; immune system boosting; and women's health issues. "Adaptability," she explains, "turns the light bulb on for people." She continues, "Cooking is all about flexibility and always has been." In addition, an increasing number of children are attending her classes with parents who would like to pass on wise eating habits to the younger generation.

Students will be introduced to "powerhouse" foods loaded with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants—ancient super foods such as goji berries and maca root as well as teff, a tiny grain from Ethiopia, which can replace eggs in baking. Leslie



Leslie Cerier, Shutesbury cookbook author

shows how to mix and match familiar and new ingredients for infinite variations of flavor, texture, color, and complimentary combinations. Her recipes often put a nouveau spin on traditional dishes and some of these tempting specialties are found right on her website. Try for example her Lasagna with Chevre, Arugula and Crimini Mushrooms or her Potato Olive Knishes. "Eating Your Way to Stronger Bones" is another class focusing on integrating adequate calcium in our diet. Beans, leafy greens, soy, and sea vegetables are the highlights here. But Leslie takes it a step further by "cutting through calcium confusion," teaching about which foods may also inhibit calcium uptake or actually steal this important mineral from our teeth and bones.

Cookbooks comprise another facet of Leslie's talented offerings. Her latest one is called *Going Wild in the Kitchen: The Fresh and Sassy Tastes of Vegetarian Cooking*, which includes more than 150 recipes peppered with unique ingredients such as edible flowers, wild mushrooms, berries, herbs and artisanal cheeses. Adding, changing, or substituting ingredients is the order of the day in this innovative yet accessible guide to whole food cookery.

For those still feeling a bit shaky about rethinking their way of eating and cooking, Leslie will visit you in your own home for a kitchen makeover. Besides helping you get organized and select efficient cooking

tools, she can guide you in a decision-making process: which foods to keep, which to discard, and helping you rethink your food shopping habits to incorporate more whole foods into your pantry. She is also available for catering, public speaking, and cooking demonstrations.

Leslie experiences food as prevention, medicine, nourishment, but mostly as pleasure. When you meet her you will find a woman aglow with vitality and energy. For healthy, affordable, timesaving, earth-friendly, and good-for-the-soul food, I'll have what she's having! For more information, visit Leslie's website: www.lesliecierer.com

A recipe from Ms. Cerier's cookbook

Potato-Olive Knishes

The easiest way to make knishes. Use egg roll wrappers. This recipe's mashed potato filling is flavored with black olives, scallions, and olive oil. Delicious!

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the mashed potatoes with 1/2 cup of the oil, the olives, scallions, and sea salt. Adjust the seasonings, if desired.
3. Place an egg roll wrapper diagonally on a large cutting board or plate, so it appears diamond-shaped. Place 2 tablespoons of the potato mixture in the center. Fold the top and bottom corners over the filling to meet in the middle, then fold the right and left corners to meet in the middle. Pick up the knish and place it in the palm of both hands as if it were a ball and gently squeeze to make it round in shape. Repeat with the remaining ingredients.
4. Arrange the knishes on an unoled baking sheet, and brush the tops with the remaining oil. Bake 15 to 20 minutes, or until golden brown.
5. Arrange the knishes on a platter and serve plain or with your favorite dipping sauce. Mustard Sauce with Maple Syrup and Miso (page 76) is recommended.

Yield: 14 knishes

6 cups mashed potatoes
1/2 cup plus 2 tablespoons
extra virgin olive oil
1/2 cup pitted kalamata olives
1 cup coarsely chopped scallions
3/4 teaspoon sea salt, or to taste
14 egg roll wrappers (6-inch squares)