



Garam masala (above) is a spice-blend staple of Indian cuisine.



Bam! Sizzle! Pao!

Classes that cook.

by Jayne Haugen Olson • photography by Hilary N. Bullock

Today's TV chefs have become household names. It's great to watch them in action, slamming ingredients together, bantering with the audience, hands and knives moving at lightning speed. But something is missing. Cooking is about aroma, your mouth watering as you sense every ingredient. Viewers may fill in from memory what doesn't radiate through the screen—but it's not the same as being there.

But you can be there if you take advantage of the fabulous courses available at many local cooking schools, taught by talented instructors who are fast becoming our own celebrity chefs.

We recently attended a cooking class at Cooks of Crocus Hill in Edina. Cooks has been offering classes for more than twenty-five years on St. Paul's Grand Avenue and only a few years ago added the west metro location. Our class was led by Raghavan Iyer, cofounder of the Asian Culinary Arts Institutes and author of two books, *Betty Crocker's Indian Home Cooking* and *The Turmeric Trail: Recipes and Memories from an Indian Childhood*. Well known and respected in his field, Iyer is a perfect example of what students can expect from local schools.

About twenty of us joined Iyer on his whirlwind tour of Indian food, a cuisine that has not only gained ground on the local restaurant scene but is being tackled in more and more home kitchens as well. Our classmates included Iyer's former students, some of whom he had taught in their own homes, as well as Indian food newbies who wanted to broaden their culinary horizons. A group of doctors who had recently been to India and wanted to reconnect with the flavors of the country's cuisine also joined us.

PROGRAMMING

So let's start with the basics. Who coordinates the classes? Depends on the venue. The top schools have full-time directors who work with local chefs to select topics and develop courses that cover everything from soup to, well, nuts. When cuisine trends—such as the sushi wave—emerge, directors scramble to add classes. They've also been beefing up classroom space to accommodate our growing yen for cooking and entertaining at home.



Our Cooks of Crocus Hill classmates. Our modus operandi: Listen first; sample—grilled corn with lime—later.

(Cooks opened in Edina; Kitchen Window recently expanded its Uptown space; and Williams-Sonoma launches a new program this month.) Competition is fierce, with cooking schools hoping to lure big name chefs, cookbook authors, and guest chefs from around the country to their high-quality demo kitchens.

Chefs are busy running their own kitchens, and don't have many nights available to teach, so it's a big coup for a cooking school to land the Marcus Samuelssons of the town. Their classes fill up fast.

CLASS ACTION

Fall class schedules are out—but hurry, classes fill up fast.

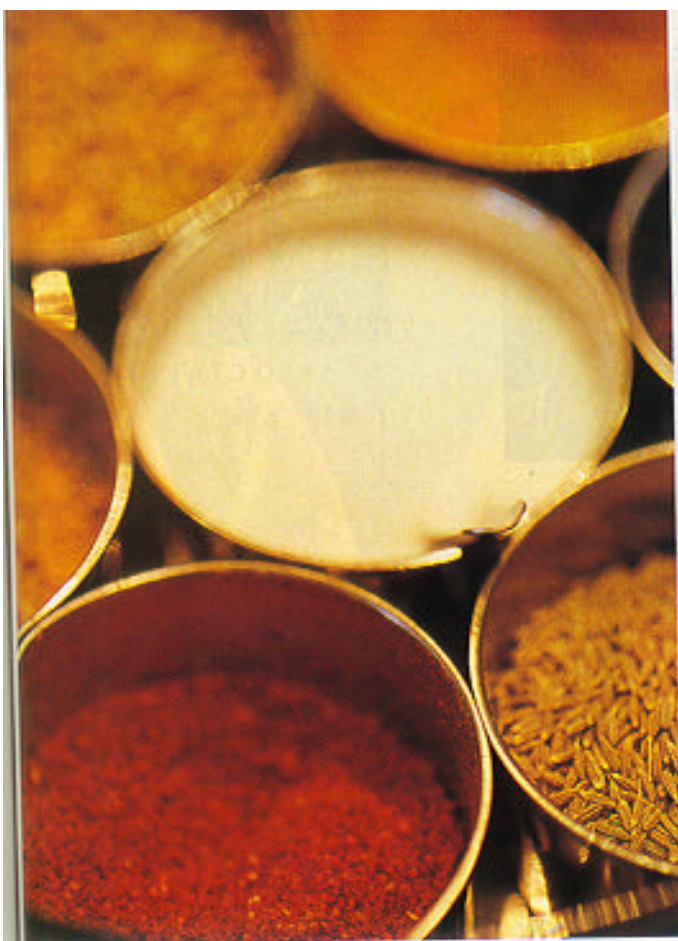
Asian Culinary Arts Institutes

Year-round classes and local market tours.
Mpls.; 612-813-1757, asianculinaryarts.com

Cooks of Crocus Hill

Year-round at both locations; fall classes begin in September. St. Paul; 651-228-1333. Edina; 952-285-1903, cooksforcrocushill.com

—Compiled by Megan Wiley



Chef Iyer (below) recalls stories from his native India and brings a personal connection to the foods he prepares during his three-hour course.



confidence in the kitchen. Since prep is such an integral part of cooking, courses on basic knife skills are also popular (the local Wüsthof Trident representative teaches at Cooks and The Chef's Gallery; Kitchen Window offers its own course).

DEMONSTRATION VS. PARTICIPATION

Courses are either demonstration or participation classes. A majority are demonstration, and, as is the case with TV cooking shows, you watch and listen as the chef and staff do all the work. Most schools also offer participation courses that allow you to roll up your sleeves and lend the chef a hand in the preparation, cooking, baking—and clean up. Also popular are classes held in restaurants or those that venture out on field trips to local ethnic mar-



kets. Kitchen Window's Carl's Magic Bus Tour of Ethnic Markets, The Chef's Gallery's Market Tour, and Asian Culinary Arts' India Culinary Tour are some examples. No matter what kind of class you choose, expect to pay in the \$35 to \$85 range at most schools.

Fall is a great time to take classes in preparation for our seasons of soups and stews, baking, and holiday entertaining. Start gathering class schedules now so you can sign up for the class of your choice the minute registration opens. ■