

impact

University of Idaho Extension
programs that are making a
difference in Idaho.

Madison County residents discover the fun of international cooking

AT A GLANCE

Residents gained confidence and skills with hands-on international cooking classes, that helps them save money too.

Over the past two years, our office has received numerous requests from community members seeking cooking classes to learn how to prepare international dishes.

Television and the internet have greatly expanded access to international cuisine. Popular cooking shows, culinary competitions and social media platforms have brought global flavors into our homes. As a result, interest in cooking international dishes has grown significantly. People are increasingly curious about how to prepare meals they've seen online or tasted at a restaurant. They want to recreate these experiences with their families, enjoy new flavors and connect with different cultures. This is especially true in rural areas where access to global dining options and specialty cooking classes is limited.

Our Response

Due to the interest in learning how to cook international dishes, we began keeping track of the number of calls and asked the callers what types of dishes they wanted to learn how to cook. The most common answers were Asian, Indian and European.

In response, we designed and hosted a three-day hands-on international cooking school. To ensure authenticity and quality instruction, we partnered with



Making Naan bread to go with the chicken tikka masala. Photo by Lance Hansen

Making Naan bread to go with the chicken tikka masala. Photo by Lance Hansen.

Tiffany Nelson, a former intern and experienced culinary professional with a background in international cuisine. Together, we planned our menu and lessons, which highlighted dishes from France, India and Asia, utilizing cooking methods accessible to rural home kitchens, such as stovetop cooking, frying, oven baking and electric pressure cooking. The classes were held in November to increase participation. We limited enrollment to 10 participants to maintain a high-quality, hands-on experience. We wanted participants to have the confidence and skills to apply what they learned and replicate it at home.

Throughout the course, we emphasized practical skills and shared different cultural information about the dishes that were prepared. Each session included:

- Instruction on cooking techniques using commonly available tools in Idaho homes.
- Information and context for each dish.
- Nutrition information and kitchen safety practices, including safe food handling, knife skills and electric pressure cooker usage.
- Discussions on where to locally source ingredients in Rexburg and Idaho Falls.
- Tips on meal planning, budgeting and how to convert recipes into freezer meals.

Program Outcomes

The international cooking class was advertised for just two weeks and filled quickly, demonstrating strong local interest and demand for hands-on culinary experiences. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 50 years old. They represented a diverse mix of household types and cooking skill levels from beginners to experienced home cooks, including both single adults and married couples.

The participants completed a short evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the classes. Before the class, 60% of attendees reported they had never attempted cooking recipes from Asian, Indian or European cuisines. Additionally, 70% reported that they had never used spices commonly found in Asian or Indian dishes. After the three-day class series, 90% of participants reported feeling confident and ready to prepare recipes from Asia, India and Europe, and felt confident using international spices common in Asian and Indian dishes.

The impact went beyond skill-building. An overwhelming 90% of participants reported that they planned to apply what they learned about healthy eating and meal planning in their own homes. The program also emphasized affordability and accessibility, with discussions on meal planning, ingredient sourcing and the use of common household cooking methods. According to participants' responses, the estimated monthly savings from cooking at home versus dining out averaged \$140 per household.

Participants left equipped not only with recipes and practical skills but also with the confidence and resources to recreate international meals in their own kitchens. The collaborative structure of the classes fostered a strong sense of connection and belonging, which brings people together. By offering the classes in an approachable and supportive manner, the program brought variety and a unique, enjoyable experience to those who participated.

The Future

Due to the strong community interest and positive feedback from our international cooking class, we plan to expand our offerings in the coming years to include a wider variety of topics — from baking and BBQ to meal prep and seasonal cooking. These future classes will continue to offer hands-on experiences that foster kitchen confidence, promote healthy eating and bring people together through food.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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22-25-lhansen-international-cooking • 10/25