

Celebrating Asian Heritage

Lesson 3: Foods



Chinese food is among the most well known type of Asian food across America. Chinese food came first to California with Chinese immigrants in the mid-1800s, but didn't become popular until about the 1920s. There are now about 40,000 Chinese restaurants across the U.S. – more than three times the number of McDonald's restaurants! But, there is much more to Asian cuisine than Chinese food.

Traditional Asian foods fall into three culinary categories: southwest, southeast and northeast. Persian-Arabian foods make up the southwest group. Traditional southwest Asian foods are from countries like India, and include nan (a type of bread), kebabs and strong spices like cloves. Since many people do not eat beef for religious reasons, vegetarian dishes and mutton (sheep) are southwest Asian staples.

Southeast foods, found in and around Thailand, are traditionally cooked lightly such as by boiling or steaming, or even eaten raw. Foods are flavored with savory ingredients like citrus, lemongrass, coconut

milk and basil. Northeast foods are primarily from China, Japan and the Koreans. These cuisines tend to have more oils, such as deep-fried Japanese tempura. However, there are plenty of grilled and raw northeastern foods, including sushi. All three types of cuisines rely heavily on rice, ginger and garlic.

In addition, there are distinctly Asian cooking tools and utensils. These are the wok, used for making stir-fry dishes; cleaver, used for chopping and slicing; and chopsticks. There are several theories as to why chopsticks were invented. One is that the nonviolent teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius associated knives with war and therefore discouraged them. Another theory is that because Asian cuisine is historically based on locally grown vegetables and little meat, chopsticks were sufficient. Also, Asians sometimes held communal meals with each dish served straight from one bowl, and chopsticks were thought to keep some people from eating much more than others.



Taro



Burdock Flowers

Sample of Asian Foods

Mangosteen

Dragon Fruit

Cassava



ACTIVITY: Continue to build on the information you are learning about the Asian country you selected in the first Celebrating Asian Heritage lesson. What are the traditional foods of that country? How are they typically prepared? Are the foods used in any celebrations?

BONUS! Have you ever seen pictures of durian, a spiky Asian fruit? Did you know it is available in Oklahoma? Asian markets offer the opportunity to try new, unique foods. Visit <http://www.caonguyen.com> and click "Departments" to learn more about Asian fruits and produce that can be found here.

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