



Greekaliciously Good for You

“ Maria Benardis is cooking up a storm with her inventive take on a classic, but often misrepresented, cuisine. ”

Maria Benardis, founder of the Greekalicious cooking school tells FCI it is this ethos that Benardis wants to convey in her cooking classes.

Every ingredient is fresh and organic, not because it's in vogue but because on the Greek Island of Psara, where Benardis spent much of her adolescence, organic and food are synonymous.

Benardis has a true passion for Greek gastronomy. After all, gastronomy is a Greek word that signifies the relationship between the senses and food. Her passion was the impetus behind creating her unique cooking school, which aims at updating classic Greek cuisine and making it accessible to everyone.

However, passion was not the only driving force behind Benardis's decision to go Greek. In fact, for her, Greek food has often been misrepresented in Australia.

“I'd often see other cultures fake Greek dishes and claim them as their own,” she says. At Greekalicious participants are taught how to make classic dishes with a modern edge.

“There is an emphasis on innovation, but the classic Greek recipes are all still there,” she says.

“The beauty of Greek cuisine, of course, is its inherent simplicity. Much of the food prepared on the Greek mainland in ancient times was relatively simple and minimally spiced.”

This isn't a bad thing considering Benardis has adapted these flavours to modern times and stays true to her philosophy of fresh and organic ingredients, whenever possible. The food sings, and it is truly fresh.

Already Benardis's culinary school has some big fans, including Peter Everett, of Channel Ten's Ready Steady Cook.

“I think everyone should go and see Maria Benardis in action,” Everett says.

“Hearing Maria's take on the history of Greek food was very forthcoming and she answered all those questions that I was afraid to ask! The spiritual facts and mythology and the traditional food we have available to us in Australia is only a pinch of what real Greek cuisine is about.”

Everett is also impressed with what Benardis has accomplished in relation to her use of organic produce.

“I think more chefs are becoming conscious of the benefits of using organics – and indulging in Maria's modern style of Greek food is what eating is all about,” Everett tells FCI.

Even chefs of Greek heritage are waxing lyrical about Maria's innovative stance on Greek gastronomy.

“When you get chefs like [Maria Benardis], George Colombaris and David Tsirekas who are developing creative ways of expressing our food it can only add interest for other chefs to try cooking Greek food,” says George Diamond, proud Greek and chef of 360 Bar and Dining Room.

“Also our food is very healthy and light and this is popular with our customers, cooking mainly with olive oil, and doing very little with the main ingredient.”

It appears that Benardis has hit a winning formula, fresh, healthy and tasty three definite reasons to attend her classes.

“ IN Greece, when I want to eat fish, I just go and catch it! ”



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