

Washington Jewish Week

Cooking camp is a tasty way to spend the summer

AUGUST 22, 2018 BY [DAN SCHERE](#) — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)





CAMPERS IN NATASHA NADEL'S COOKING CAMP MADE VEGETARIAN CHILI, GUACAMOLE AND CORNBREAD MUFFINS FOR LUNCH. PHOTOS BY DAN SCHERE

At lunch time, the sound of sizzling and the light aroma of oil traveled through the kitchen in Natasha Nadel's Potomac home. Ten children stood around her as she showed them how to fry bananas and how they compare to plantains.

"Plantains are like bananas, but they're bigger and really thick," Nadel explained. "If you wait until the peel is black, then they're really sweet, and you can fry plantains. They do it all over South America."

Nadel's kitchen is the hub of the weeklong cooking day camp that she offers children ages 6 to 12. Nadel, a journalist and cookbook author who teaches cooking and nutrition at Melvin J. Berman Hebrew Academy, wants to show her campers how to cook meals that are tasty and healthy.

She has offered the camp the past two summers and her philosophy on cooking is simple: "There's always a way to get what you want without it being 100 percent junk food," she said.



YO CHEVED WALLS SAUTÉS BANANAS.

The children make breakfast, lunch and dessert each day, taking breaks in between to do art activities and go outside. All meals are either vegetarian or vegan.

A recent lunch session featured vegetable chili, with sides of guacamole and sweet potato chips, cornbread muffins and the fried bananas.

Nadel's camp is informal. "There's not any pressure," she said. "They don't have to be someone that they're not. And they feel proud of themselves for trying new foods."

Ten-year-old Alexa Freeman said she used to have an aversion to chili because it was too spicy. But another camper told her the chili they were making was on the mild side. Upon tasting it, Alexa had a new appreciation for chili.

"I think I'll try [making] that tonight," she said.

Alexa said she was fond of the smoothies and seven-layer salad they had made during the first two days. The weeklong camp has been a culinary discovery for her.

"I've been working on tasting new things, and if I don't like it I don't have to have it," she said.

Avishai Peretz, 7, had made strawberry shortcake pancakes that morning. He said he liked the sweet foods they have cooked the best and was excited about trying the recipes at home.

"We're going to get a cookbook with the stuff we made [at the end of camp]," he said.

Nadel's daughter Avital, 10, said that between the camp and helping her mother cook meals for their family, she feels more confident in the kitchen, especially with one particular skill.

"I've learned how to cut things right," she said.

Nathaniel Strauch, 11, has become a frequent participant in Nadel's kitchen, having signed up for three separate weeklong camp sessions. Nathaniel often watches acclaimed chef Gordon Ramsay's



NATASHA NADEL PICKS TOMATOES IN HER GARDEN WITH CAMPER NATHANIEL STRAUCH AS AVISHAI AND SIMA PERETZ WATCH.

“MasterChef” reality show, and said he has tried his hand at making number of new foods for his family.

“A couple days ago I made split pea soup,” he said.

Nathaniel added that he also really enjoyed making lasagna in camp last year. It contained a meat substitute “but tasted like real meat.”

Nadel told the kids that the next day’s lunch would feature a vegetarian taco bar, with her own twist on a meat substitute.

“I actually use walnuts with taco seasoning and jackfruit,” she said. “It’s really good stuff.”

Just before the campers finished preparing lunch, they walked out to Nadel’s backyard garden, where

they picked cilantro and tomatoes to add to the guacamole. She explained to them that cilantro is a love-it-or-hate-it plant, depending on one’s genes.

“Some really like it, but for others it can taste like soap,” she explained.

It turned out that the cilantro agreed with everyone and they ate most of the guacamole in about 10 minutes.

Nadel, who wrote a cookbook called “Healthy Family, Healthy You,” said her goal is a satisfied group of children who have eaten healthy and learned that cooking healthy can be fun.

“It’s all about them discovering how delicious fruits and vegetables are.”

dschere@midatlanticmedia.com



NATASHA NADEL, CENTER, DEMONSTRATES HOW TO CUT A PEPPER FOR A SALAD FOR CHRISTOPHER OSBORN, LEFT, AND SARAH CHARAPP.