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## Future Top Chefs Focus on the Food

By Susie Iventosch



Paris Thomas Photo Christina Shook

What could be more fun than a cooking party for a birthday celebration? Not much, according to 11-year old Paris Thomas of Moraga, who loves anything to do with food. She is a big fan of The Next Food Network Star, wants to be a food critic when she grows up, and maybe own a restaurant, too!

"It's really fun, because you don't usually go to a cooking party," Paris pointed out. "It's normally a 'Pump it Up' party or a swim party, but I went to a pasta party for my friend Sabrina's birthday, and it was really fun. So, I wanted to do the same kind of thing for mine."

Her mom, Sydney Chaney-Thomas, said that after Paris attended the pasta party, she came home and wanted to make pasta ... lots of pasta!

"We made pasta all the time," she said. "We hung the pasta to dry on the drying rack in my laundry room and one day we came back to discover that our dog had eaten all of the low-hanging fettuccine right off the rack!"

Since Paris' family loves sushi, she decided upon an Asiatic Party when it came time for her birthday party. They made California rolls, Vietnamese spring rolls and even sushi candy-an Asian version of Rice Krispie treats.

"My friends all really loved it, even though many of them came into the party saying they didn't like sushi. We made California rolls with fake crab, and my friend Lizzy made hers with just cucumber and rice, and she loved it."

Chaney-Thomas said it is really interesting to watch the kids cook.

"The kids are so focused and take cooking much more seriously than you might think," she noted. "They actually like the food more, because they are invested in it, and they know exactly what is in each dish."

Paris said the dishes are all really easy to make.

"You just add rice noodles, rice paper, chicken and mango for the spring rolls. We had a lot of fun and everyone started throwing the noodles at each other."

I have to agree with Paris about the easy part. Of course, that is after the chicken is cooked. I took my own spring roll party to my friend's house and our "twenty-something" sons set up an assembly line of their own. Oddly enough, they did not throw noodles, which kind of surprised me, but, they, too, had a great time making the spring rolls.

Elaine Smit, owner of Chow Bella, offers a variety of cooking party themes. In addition to the Asiatic theme, she offers the following: Ooh La La, a Parisian bistro menu; Hula Party, aloha meatballs, Maui rice and Hawaiian wedding cake; Pizza Party; Gardening Party, featuring chicken pot pies made in terracotta flower pots; and the Chow Bella Classic Pasta Party. She normally holds the parties at the Founders Grove in Lafayette because the commercial kitchen has a lot of space and the gardens make a lovely spot for a party.

"I love working with kids, because when they get together and start cooking it's magical," she said. "They have a lot of fun and can't believe how good the food tastes, or that they actually made it themselves!"

Paris said that next year, she wants to have a pancake party, including Swedish pancakes, regular pancakes, chocolate chip pancakes and crepes.

"I love pancakes and they are my favorite thing to make," she said. "One time I found a recipe for pancakes, but didn't have all of the ingredients, so I switched some of the ingredients and my mom said they were the best!"

For Chow Bella's fall cooking class schedule and more about the kids' cooking party offerings, please visit: [www.chowbella.net](http://www.chowbella.net) and [www.chowbellakids.net](http://www.chowbellakids.net), or call (925) 878-9932.

Cost for kids cooking parties: \$400 for ten children, which includes the ingredients and all of the recipes and instruction. For an additional \$100, Smit includes party favors and cupcake decorating.

## Sushi Candy



Photo Christina Shook

#### Ingredients

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 4 cups miniature marshmallows
- 6 cups crispy rice cereal
- 20 gummy worms
- 2 boxes green-colored Fruit Roll-Ups
- 30 fish-shaped gummy candies

#### Directions

1. Prepare a 12x17" baking sheet by lining it with waxed paper and spraying the paper with nonstick cooking spray.
2. Place 2 tablespoons of butter in a large microwave-safe bowl, and microwave until melted, about 45 seconds.
3. Add 2 cups of miniature marshmallows to the bowl, and microwave until the marshmallows are completely melted, about 1 minute, stirring every 30 seconds. Stir the mixture until it is completely smooth.
4. Add 3 cups of rice cereal and stir until completely coated. Immediately pour mixture out onto the prepared baking sheet. Spray your hands with nonstick cooking spray, and begin to press the candy into the sheet in a thin layer. Begin working from the edge of the shorter side of the sheet. The mixture will only cover approximately half of the baking sheet.
5. With the short side of the baking sheet nearest you, place several gummy worms end to end, an inch from the edge, creating a line all the way across. (They also have gummy snakes that run the entire length of the pan.) Place another line approximately 4 inches below, and repeat until you have several lines of worms stretching across the baking sheet.
6. Using the waxed paper to help you, roll the cereal mixture around the gummy worms, pressing firmly to make a tight roll. Take a large sharp knife and cut the log away from the rest of the mixture. Place it off to the side, and repeat the worms/rolling/cutting procedure for the remainder of the cereal.
7. Slice the logs into 1-inch rounds. Wrap each round in a strip of green-colored Fruit Roll-Ups.
8. To make the fish-topped "nigiri," repeat steps 1-4 to make the rice candy base, but do not press the rice mixture as thinly. It should be about 3/4 inch thick once pressed into the baking sheet.
9. Cut the candy into rectangles about 3/4 inch by 1.5 inches. Place a candy fish on top of each rectangle, and wrap a 1/2-inch strip of green Fruit Roll-Up around the entire package.
10. For a finishing touch, decorate your sushi platter to look more authentic. Suggestions include substituting chocolate sauce for soy sauce, green-tinted whipped cream (or melted white chocolate) for wasabi, and thinly sliced pink fish for pickled ginger.

## Vietnamese Spring Rolls with Chicken and Mango



Chow Bella Vietnamese spring rolls Photo Susie Iventosch

Makes 5 Rolls or 20 pieces

Ingredients

4 oz. cooked shredded chicken

1/2 Mango, peeled, pit removed, cut into 1/2 x 2 1/2

inch strips

5 leaves Boston Lettuce

2 scallions, white and green parts

1 ounce rice vermicelli noodles

5 8 1/2 inch round rice paper wrappers

1/2 cup tightly packed fresh cilantro leaves

1/2 cup tightly packed mint leaves

Citrus Dipping Sauce

1/3 cup fresh orange juice

1/3 cup fresh lime juice

1/4 cup low sodium soy sauce

1 teaspoon Chinese dark sesame oil (I used 1  
tablespoon of sesame oil and loved the enhanced flavor to  
the sauce)

1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

2 scallions, white and green parts, thinly sliced

Directions (will need adult help on assembly)

1. For the rolls, trim each scallion into two 5-inch lengths; slice lengthwise into very thin strips. Cover and bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the rice vermicelli, and cook until tender, 2-3 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold running water.

2. Fill a pan large enough to hold the rice paper with hot water. Dampen a kitchen towel with water; spread it out on a clean surface. Immerse 1 sheet of the rice paper in hot water until softened and flexible, about 1 minute. Transfer to the dampened towel and smooth out.

3. Assembling the rolls. Across the bottom third of the rice paper, place 2 pieces of lettuce, 4 cilantro leaves, 4 mint leaves, 2 tablespoons of the chicken, 2 pieces of mango (end to end), and 1/4 cup vermicelli. Cover with 4 strips of scallion, 4 cilantro leaves, and 4 mint leaves. Roll the rice paper into a cylinder, stopping halfway. Fold the left and right sides into the middle; finish rolling; Place roll on a baking sheet lined with plastic wrap; cover. Repeat the entire process, making 5 rolls. To serve, trim the ends with a sharp knife, and cut each roll into 4 pieces. Serve with the dipping sauce on the side.

4. For the dipping sauce, in a small bowl, whisk together the orange and lime juices, soy sauce, sesame oil, and pepper; add scallions. Serve.

Susie's comments: I suggest marinating the shredded chicken in a bit of the dipping sauce for an hour or so, before assembling spring rolls. The dipping sauce is delicious and would give the chicken more flavor in the rolls. Also, for a dinner sized serving, double the recipe for both the spring rolls and the sauce. These really were fun to make and festive, too. For younger children, you can have the ingredients all ready to go, before the party begins, but older kids can prep everything by themselves.



Photo Christina Shook

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