



Chef Barbara Petit demonstrates how to prepare an appetizer made with locally grown ingredients during the Georgia Flavors cooking classes at The Cook's Warehouse in Decatur.



The curious (and the hungry) flock to cooking classes

By Gale Horton Gay
Photos by Gale Horton Gay

That end-of-the-day question—*What's for dinner?*—wasn't on the minds of the 14 women gathered in the back of The Cook's Warehouse on W. Ponce de Leon Avenue in Decatur a couple of weeks ago. They sipped wine, watched intently as a five-course meal was prepared, took notes and, at the end of the night, devoured the entire meal.

They came to the store that sells everything from pots and pans and kitchen gadgets to gourmet food, wines and cookbooks for a two-hour Tuesday class, Georgia Flavors, which promoted the benefits to health and palate of buying, cooking and eating locally grown food. The class is one in a series of three courses all focused on dishes using locally grown foods presented in collaboration with Emory University.

As chef **Barbara Petit** demonstrated how to chop, peel, mix and

then cook the dishes—aided by a team of five assistants, audience members (who paid \$50 for the privilege to watch her) sipped wine and noshed on sliced whole grain bread.

Petit begins by telling the class where the ingredients for the evening's dishes come from (eggs from Alabama and herbs from her garden), then explains the difference between sea salt and kosher salt and how to properly cut herbs. "This sage ... came right from my garden today," she points out while adding sage leaves to the pork chop dish.

She's a whirl of activity, stopping only to answer a question or dispense some helpful kitchen advice. "Always under-season, then you can add to it," advises Petit as she prepares deviled eggs.

In keeping with the informal nature of the class, observers shout questions and move about for more bread and wine.

In just about two hour's time, Petit works her way through preparation of an appetizer, salad, pork chops with

tomatoes and sage, fingerling potatoes with smoked paprika, eggplant with garlic, melon with pineapple and an apple cake with caramel sauce.

In addition to being a chef, Petit is president of Georgia Organics, an organization "working to integrate healthy, sustainable and locally grown food into the lives of Georgians."

One of Petit's assistants is **Bill Eley**, an Emory physician, who shares his passion for shortening the distance between farm and plate. "You have to cook with what's in season," says Eley. "It's wonderful to eat from what you grow. Anything you can grow tastes better."

The Cook's Warehouse offers several classes covering kitchen basics and knife skills as well as those that focus on cheesecake, pairing wine with the meal, fall fruits, Caribbean treats, Thai favorites and cupcakes. In fact, in October some 60 classes are available at the store's three metro Atlanta locations with 22 courses taking place in Decatur.

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Above: Chef Barbara Petit (center) arranges potatoes on a baking sheet during a cooking class at The Cook's Warehouse. Classes are informal and attendees sip wine and ask questions while the chef cooks.

Below: Emory physician Bill Eley is one of Petit's five assistants. Here in the back of the kitchen he helps with prep work.



Cooking

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The two remaining local foods classes in the series held in Decatur are:

- Local Foods with a Mediterranean Twist, 7-9 p.m., Oct. 13 with **Cathy Conway**
- Locally Grown, Greek Inspired, 7-9 p.m., Oct 27 with **Athena Penson**

Both classes are \$40 each with the proceeds benefiting Emory's farmers market. Staff, faculty and students at Emory receive a 15 percent discount.

Wendy Allen, director of The Cook's Warehouse cooking school, said she hopes that those attending the classes will leave better equipped to incorporate healthy eating into their daily lives.

"We hope explaining simple tech-

niques, using local ingredients and a little bit of knowledge will get them back into the kitchen and reclaiming that part of their lives," said Allen.

Other upcoming classes at The Cook's Warehouse in Decatur:

- Prime Vegetarian, 7 to 9 p.m., Oct. 11, \$45
- Fall pies- sweet & savory, 7-9 p.m., Oct. 15, \$45
- Come Over for Brunch (hands on), 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Oct. 18, \$65
- Thai Delights (hands on), 10:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Oct. 25, \$70

For more information on Cook's Warehouse classes, visit www.cookwarehouse.com or call (404) 377-4005.