

Spice up your life with a little help from APL

If you have any trouble sleeping, do you reach for a cup of warm milk?

It might seem a bit old fashioned these days, but it doesn't have to be boring. In fact, a spoonful of honey, a drop or two of vanilla, and a pinch of cinnamon can transform a time-tested remedy into something much more.

This was one of several ways participants explored in the Spice Club, a new initiative launched Tuesday by the Aurora Public Library (APL) to spark culinary creativity, get mouths watering, and spur discussion.

Cinnamon was the club's inaugural spice and organizers have some cunning ideas for cumin for when the club reconvenes in March.

‘We know Aurora loves to cook,’ says Kathryn Stark, Information & Programming Specialist for the APL. ‘Our cookbook collection goes out a lot and we recently subscribed to a database called A-Z World Food, which has thousands of recipes and information about ingredients from all over the world. Combined, we were able to pull together some ideas of different ingredients we could give out to the community and the smallest, most compact one is spice. We thought it would be a great way to provide some ideas and recipes for the community and have some fun ? because everyone likes eating!?’

Each month, the Spice Club will select five recipes that will be included with each spice kit.

By selecting cinnamon for the first go-round, they wanted a spice that people were familiar with that could be used in different ways. Cinnamon doesn't always have to feature in sweet treats. They included recipes on how it could be incorporated into soups, stews, and even pasta dishes.

‘In March, it is going to be cumin, another divisive spice ? either people like it or they don't, so this will be an interesting one!’ says Ms. Stark with a chuckle. ‘We wanted to have something that would include very basic recipes obviously highlighting the spice in particular where it is a featured ingredient. We reached out to the Aurora Museum & Archives as well and they came up with a recipe that is over 100 years old. If anyone is a fan of The Great British or Great Canadian Baking Shows, it is a bit of a technical challenge because with a historic recipe you don't get a lot of detail ? it is sort of, ‘add ingredients together and bake in an oven’ with no temperature or time given.’

Ms. Stark said she tried the recipe out herself before putting it in the kit and although the results weren't exactly as she expected, it did turn out and that was a good thing. Even better: unlike the technical challenges on the Baking Show, the Spice Club is a judgement-free zone!

‘The Spice Club is for everyone,’ she says. ‘I think everyone has a memory of a favourite recipe that is connected to them and usually, especially with baking and cooking, there is usually a spice in one of those recipes that usually comes to mind. We're hoping that even if people don't cook, they can come and share their stories about the smell of baking, the smell of something cooking in their kitchen and share it with us.’

‘People are welcome to share their own recipes, as well. Even if they don't use the spice in the recipes they are provided, they are welcome to cook, bake and share whatever it is they decided to make from the spice, whether it is a family recipe or something new they are trying for the first time.’

And, as this is the Library, there is a book component as well.

As much as possible, organizers plan to include with each session a reading list of fiction and non-fiction, each related to the month's spice, that can be enjoyed at your leisure.

To register for the Spice Club and to reserve your kit, visit www.eventbrite.ca/e/spice-club-tickets-207520518457.

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