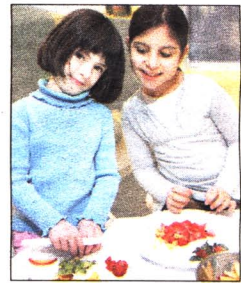


Kitchen Kids



Liz Sullivan

The best culinary classes for small fry

By CYNTHIA KILIAN

FOR a real bunch of cutups, look no further than the latest cooking classes for kids. Sessions for chefs as young as 2 have 'em wielding whisks before they can even read. This year's peewee kitchen tutorials go beyond Cookie Decorating 101 to explore tastes and cultures from around the globe, all the while focusing on

healthy eating habits. Not that budding Batalis will be hit over their tiny toques with lectures on eating right, instructors promise. "Cooking makes learning more interesting," says Cricket (yes, that's her real name) Azima. "So while making a recipe, I integrate the lessons with math, science, history, social studies and nutrition, of course."

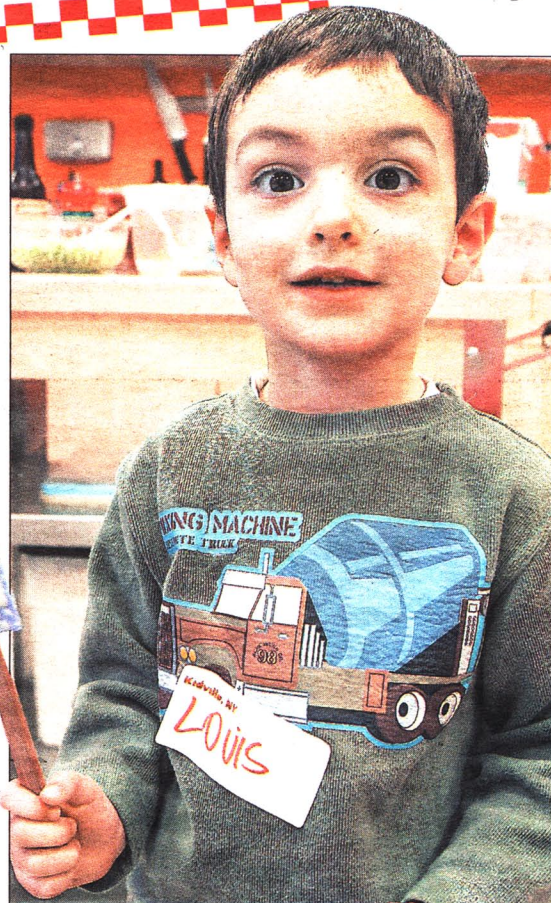
In Azima's sessions at KidFresh, a new learning center and store for healthy kids' meals on the Upper East Side, 3- to 5-year-olds talk about the number of different vegetables and colors in a dish. When dicing green peppers with plastic knives (after discussing safe handling), they'll learn what dice are — cubes — and how many sides are on them. "There's some basic math, and fine and gross motor skills development using their hands to measure and cut, pare and stir," says Azima, who's been teaching kids cooking for nine years.

Besides the science of why an apple turns brown after it's cut (and how to prevent it), young cooks-in-training whip up colorful couscous, "fruitidos" (fruit burritos) and "silly sushi" with carrots or mango. They also learn about healthful choices. "Dessert doesn't have to be just cookies," Azima says. (Enter those fruitidos.)

Parents are welcome to stay during the sessions, though their presence is not required. There are also special parent-child classes on Saturdays.

For safety's sake, young cooks don't man stoves. At Kidville on the Upper West and East sides, classes are team-taught by a teacher and a professional cook. The cook makes sure the batter students make for crepes gets cooked, not burned.

Executive chef Scott Barton makes the class as hands-on as



Rich Press

Chefs of the future: Louis Rusconi, 4, and, at top, Mattise Ellis and Nilou Mahboubian learn how to cut it at classes at Kidville and KidFresh.

possible, letting the younger kids roll out the pie dough he makes himself.

"Your child might make [a pie] that looks rather abstract, but it's still going to taste good," he says.

Kidville's Silver Spoons and Plastic Plates course globe-hops from France to Italy to Russia in three-course meals. Recent dishes included gnocchi, tiramisù, pirogi and borscht.

Kids are exposed to the ingredients, even if they aren't quite ready for the flavors.

"If we go to Mexico, I'll let

them smell a hot pepper," Barton says. But they don't have to eat it.

Indian food is introduced as "strong flavors," which he tones down for his audience. Indian paratha (flatbread with cauliflower) is a hit because "it's really making patty-cake."

And enjoying food — new food — is what these classes are all about.

"You might not make Chinese broccoli with garlic sauce for your kid at home," Barton says. "But if they had broccoli and it was fun, they may just consider it."

Full-course learning

Here are some of the best classes out there:

KidFresh: Eight-week sessions for kids ages 3 to 10 start Monday. It's \$300 for eight classes. Drop-ins are encouraged for single dates (\$40). At 1628 Second Ave., between 84th and 85th streets; (800) DO-KIDFRESH, kidfresh.com

Kidville: Kids can jump into the ongoing 17-week session (\$745), space permitting. Costs vary. Two locations: 163 E. 84th St., (212) 772-8435, and 466 Columbus Ave., (212) 362-7792; kidvilleny.com

Apple Seeds: COOKing monsters, classes in global cuisine for kids ages 2 to 5 (accompanied by a parent or caregiver), start March 12 and cost \$320 for eight weeks at this brand-new venue at 10 W. 25th St.; (347) 306-4114, appleseedsnyc.com

Mini Chef: Classes in treats like dim sum and "brioche animals" cost \$40 each at Paradou restaurant, 8 Little West 12th St.; (212) 727-2703 or visit minichefnyc.com

