

GET POTLUCKY WITH FICTION

By shivani kagti, Bangalore Mirror Bureau | Updated: Nov 20, 2016, 01.00 AM IST



The Goya Cookbook Club is on a mission to make 'fictitious' food real for those who crave it

If your ideal weekend involves a picnic at the park with a good book for company, food writers Aysha Tanya, 27, and Anisha Rachel Oommen, 30, have a proposition you just can't refuse. The enterprising founders of food media company, Goya Media, have recently launched The Goya Cookbook Club for people who love good food and books in equal measure. "It works like this: we pick a cookbook we want to try out – maybe something new, maybe a classic – and announce the details on the Goya Media Facebook page, and invite people to drop us a line if they'd like to sign up. We like to keep the lunches intimate so people can actually get to know one another a bit, so we limit it to the first 10 or 12 people that email us with confirmations," Oommen says. Once the group is formed, they discuss and figure out what everyone would like to cook, then everyone turns up with the promised food on the day of the event and settle down for an elaborate meal – given that there are close to a dozen dishes.

As with all good ideas, the concept for the cookbook club came about organically. "Aysha moved to Bengaluru quite recently, and it was her idea; she wanted to do a potluck meal with the girls, and thought it would be fun if we each cooked a dish out of one particular cookbook each time," Oommen adds. She goes on to say how it was also rooted in the need to reaffirm the importance of cookbooks in the digital age. "While yes, you could probably find every recipe ever written online, cookbooks play a much deeper role – they are a narrative of culture told through food." Things quickly evolved from here; and the Goya girls decided to make it an open, more inclusive club, to bring people together over a shared love of eating and cooking. "So we sent out a few emails, posted about it online, and opened it up to anyone who might be interested," adds Tanya, who is also the face of The Malabar Tea Room, a blog that chronicles the adventures of cooking in small-town Kerala.

Picnicking at the park

At their first such meeting at everyone's favourite picnic spot, Cubbon Park, on October 23, there were about 11 people. "We picked Madhur Jaffrey's *Flavours of India* to cook from. We thought it made sense to start with a culinary classic – a book that should be part of every serious Indian cook's collection," the writers explain. On the menu we had Goan-style lamb chilli-fry, Chettinad pepper chicken, Punjabi chaanp masala (lamb chops), Kerala-style nadan khozi or country chicken curry, and Bengali malai prawn curry. "There was cold ginger-lemon squash and coconut pancakes, and we camped out on a blanket in the dappled shade of the bamboo grove in the park. We talked about the book, what worked for us and what didn't, and which book we wanted to cook out of next time. It was altogether really lovely! We knew we were on to something special."

Next up: Potluck in pyjamas

While the plan is to follow a similar format in the future, and have potlucks and picnics in public spaces ("it's a great way to make the city feel like home, and is really the perfect way to meet new people – over food!") every six weeks, there will be variations. For instance, at the next meet-up lined up for early December, they are planning a midnight feast, à la Enid Blyton. Says Tanya, "Our guests will all be invited to cook a dish from one of the many midnight feasts that have made an appearance in Enid Blyton's books. As is usual, the first 10 to sign up will be invited to participate. Instead of a picnic in the park, this time it will be a Christmas pyjama party!" And given the limited openings, the ladies suggest that those interested sign up soon. Anyone who enjoys cooking is welcome to be a member and there's no registration fee involved.

LOOK! COOK AND BOOK

- *The Goya Media founders on their five favourite culinary reads from literature:*
- *Enid Blyton's collected works for introducing buttered scones, thick slices of ham and pots of treacle into our imaginations*
- *Ruth Reichl for describing food in words no one else ever dreamed of*
- *Nigella Lawson for making home cooking stylish again, and being unapologetic about loving to eat, and often in copious amounts*
- *Laurie Colwin for when you need a friend in the kitchen*
- *Roald Dahl for Charlie and the Chocolate Factory – food writing at its best – evocative, imaginative and playful*
- *Nigel Slater. Anything by Nigel Slater is readable, even the weather report*

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