

Dining On Asian Food

Asian food is every bit as diverse as it is delicious. I used to think that I knew Asian foods growing up. You see, we used to go out to Chinese and practically every weekend. They were a couple Chinese restaurants in the neighborhood, and they were perfect for us kids. They were greasy, flavorful, and we got a cookie at the end of every meal. What more could a child ask for?

What I didn't realize was how much better Asian food could be than what my experience of it was. A lot of Chinese cuisine in America is actually nothing like the traditional style. It is much too greasy, and dominated by a simple array of flavors that doesn't really capture the complexity of Asian cooking.

I wasn't really aware of any of this until I moved to San Francisco. If you can picture an Asian food Mecca, this is it! You can get Thai food, Vietnamese food, Japanese food, Chinese food - you name it. Although all of the Asian gourmet food there is tinged by local cuisine - traditional Asian cooking doesn't incorporate cilantro, for example - there still is quite a bit of authenticity to it.

In my opinion, the very best way to enjoy Asian food is to cook it yourself. You never really understand any kind of food until you cook it. I did not start cooking until I was 18. My mother always made meals growing up, and it never occurred to me to try it out. Once I did, I was blown away by how much fun it was. It had seemed like it would be a chore, but it was anything but. I can tinker with the heat, the ingredients, the proportions of different things, and any number of other factors. I can spend as much time experimenting as I want, and eventually cook up the perfect meal.

When I went to an Asian grocery store, I was overwhelmed by all the ingredients I saw there. At that point, I had been living in San Francisco for a year and a half, and I thought I had a pretty good idea of what Asian cuisine had to offer. I was surprised at the hundreds of different ingredients which I had never seen before. It turns out that traditional Asian foods incorporates a lot of things that just generally aren't fed to Westerners. Exploring these aspects of Asian cooking has been a joy for me.