



Exploring 4-H at Home

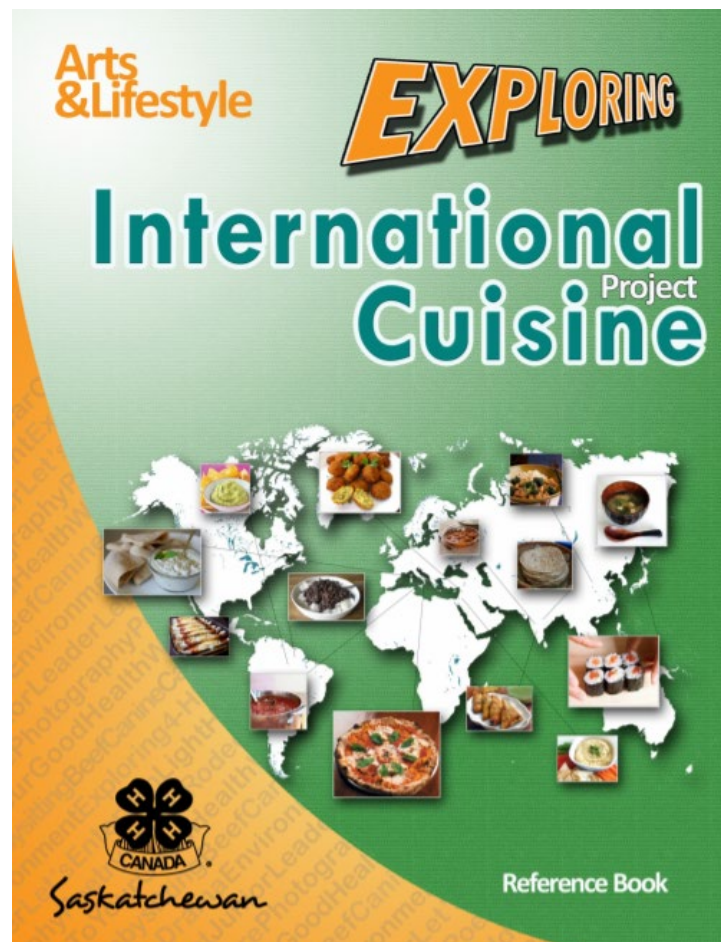


Sustainable Agriculture
and Food Security

Pillar: Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security

Project: Exploring International Cuisine

Activity: Amazingly Quick Miso Soup



Unit 1: The Basics of International Cuisine

Have you ever wondered where pizza was invented? Ever heard of curry? Ever walked down the “**international**” section of the grocery store and were curious about the products on the shelves? By the time you’ve completed this 4-H project, you’ll have all the answers and feel like a globetrotting food connoisseur.

Most people have a routine set of foods that they like to eat. They might be typically North American **dishes**, but if you have any ethnic blood in your family or know foreigners, you’ve likely been exposed to a far more diverse range of world **cuisine** (a fancy way of referring to all the various foods, dishes and **cooking** styles from a particular **culture**). Even if you feel like you don’t really know international cuisine, you’d be surprised to learn that many of the foods we eat every day and consider a part of the average Canadian **diet** actually have their roots in countries much farther away. For example, pasta is pretty common in Canada (I bet you love a big plate of spaghetti and meatballs.), but both of these are more **traditionally** associated with Italian cuisine. However, even Italians can’t claim they invented the noodle, which was likely a Chinese creation. Even this single example shows how the various cuisines of the world have borrowed from each other over time and have evolved through the years. What we call Canadian food didn’t actually exist as Canadian food 400 years ago. The First Nations People who originally inhabited the land ate primarily the plants and animals that they found in the wild. Tribes in different **regions** might eat fish, bison, caribou, seal, wild berries and seeds. The emphasis was on **nutritional** value, ease of procurement, storage and transportability. Prior to the arrival of Europeans, traditional dishes were basic and rich in calories. Dishes that we might associate with First Nations people, like bannock, were actually introduced by fur **traders** and share much of their make-up with the Scottish scone. We do owe a few of our most popular “Canadian” foods to First Nations People, like maple syrup.

Think about the food that we grow here in Canada. In the west, they grow a lot of fruit; on the Prairies, they grow grains and pulse crops (lentils, beans, etc.); and out

east we get a lot of potatoes and dairy (among other things). These are the things that grow across Canada thanks to the **climate** and soil in the different regions. It's not surprising, then, that a lot of the dishes we eat contain these foods; they're right next door. And in fact, if you live in one of these regions, your family may even be helping produce them. But many of the foods that grow well in Canada don't grow well in other parts of the world. Other countries have different climates, soils and physical features (such as rivers or oceans), so different types of foods thrive there. For instance, you see a lot of fresh fish in the dishes of Japan and also the Caribbean. Although these two cuisines are very distinct, they are united by the fact that they've developed in island nations where fish is particularly **abundant**. Similarly, in coastal Canada, fish and other seafood is far more prevalent than in the Prairies. So it's not surprising that the cuisine of other countries is built around what is locally available and abundant in those areas. In fact, the types of foods that grow well and are easily available in any given region is one of the main factors that determines a culture's cuisine. Trade also plays an important role in determining what foods are available in any given time and place. We'll talk more about trade later in this section.

But there's more to international cuisine than just the types of foods that are locally available. Remember, someone has to cook this food and, as I'm sure you already know, the world is made up of an incredible amount of diverse cultures with even more diverse cooking traditions. Culture plays an important role in dictating a region's style of cooking. Religion also contributes a great deal to culture, and some religions have very specific guidelines for what should and should not be eaten. For instance, some Hindus don't eat beef because the cow is considered sacred. Some Muslims don't eat pork because, among other reasons, it's considered unclean. And some Jewish people don't eat shellfish or pork for the same reasons. If you're a strict Catholic, you probably eat fish on Fridays, which is another food-related religious tradition. So combinations of culture and local religions, which have been around for a long time, have helped to shape the types of dishes that are prepared in any given region.

5. Amazingly Quick Miso Soup

Time: About 10 minutes.

What you will learn: Miso Soup is incredibly popular in Japan and has actually been a favourite of both royalty and commoners. This light vegetarian soup has many different ingredients depending on where you are in the island nation, but here we will make a very simplified version. It is a very healthy soup and is often eaten at breakfast. Why not try starting your day off with a delicious bowl of miso soup? The most important ingredient in miso



soup is, of course, miso! You can find miso in the refrigerated section either in large grocery stores that have comprehensive international food offerings, in natural food stores or in East Asian markets. If you can't find it, feel free to ask a clerk. You should also be able to find nori seaweed at these stores. In this activity, you'll learn how to make a simple version of the soup using store bought ingredients.

What you need

- 4 cups water
- 1/3 cup miso
- 3 large green onions, chopped
- 1 tablespoon shredded nori
- ½ block extra firm tofu, cut into 1 inch cubes
- Dash soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon sesame oil

Instructions

1. In a large pot, bring the water to a slow simmer and add the nori. Allow the water to simmer for at least 5 to 6 minutes. The longer you simmer the seaweed, the less salty, fishy flavour it will have.

2. Reduce the heat to medium low and add the tofu and soy sauce. Continue to simmer for another 2 to 3 minutes.
3. Take the soup off the heat and stir in the miso. You don't ever want to boil the miso. Boiled miso loses a lot of its healthy properties and becomes gritty if it's overcooked. Be sure to stir the soup until all the miso has dissolved. Garnish with the green onions and enjoy.

Servings: 4

Discussion Questions

Was it difficult for you to find miso? Did you have to ask a clerk for help?

Was it difficult for you to find nori? Did you have to ask a clerk for help?

Miso soup is a quick, easy and nutritious soup to make. Do you think you'll make it again?

Soups are very popular in the cuisine of South Asia. What other South Asian soups have you tried?

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