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*Clover Connection*

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### **Insecta Fiesta Event Demonstrates how Insects can add Flavor, Nutrition to Recipes**

For the past couple of years, our AgriLife colleagues in San Antonio have been hosting a unique event to introduce people to the concept of insects being used as a food source. This event/concept was too intriguing not to share!

Attendees at the recent Insecta Fiesta event at the San Antonio Garden Center were treated to a unique culinary experience in the form of a four-course Indian/Latin fusion meal made with insects and insect-based ingredients.

“About 80 percent of all cultures in the world use insects in their diet, so it’s not that unusual,” said Molly Keck, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service entomologist, Bexar County. “But we’re not comfortable as yet with having insects as part of the American diet, so it’s going to take some getting used to.”

Keck said entomophagy, or the eating of insects, is likely to become even more acceptable globally as the world population grows and there is less food security.

Experts from AgriLife Extension and the agency’s Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, with direction and input from local chefs, planned, prepared and served the evening meal to more than 70 attendees. About 20 members of 4-H clubs from Bexar County, including the 4-H entomology special interest club, assisted with food preparation and service.

“The purpose of Insecta Fiesta is to provide an educational event in which the participants can learn how insects can be incorporated into food to add protein and flavor, and also to introduce people to the idea of eating insects,” Keck said. “We got the 4-H youth involved so they could get some practical experience that will count toward their scholarships and record books.”

The evening’s menu began with roasted tomatillo chickpea salsa spiced with local fire ants, along with an Indian-style hummus garnished with toasted mealworms and served with Chirps Chips – tortilla chips made with cricket flour. The second course was a tomato waxworm bisque garnished with cricket croutons.

The main course was chicken tandoori topped with curry-spiced crickets, served with a locally grown micro-greens, tomato and cucumber salad, sprinkled with roasted mealworms and topped with a cucumber yogurt dressing.

Dessert was a tuile tart with sweet potato mousse and Mexican-style chocolate ganache, sweetened with honey sourced from AgriLife Extension-supported beekeeping programs and served on a crepe-like pastry shell made with cricket flour.

“We tried to pair the innate flavor of the bug with the food it’s in,” explained Hitish Nathani of Bombay Salsa Company, one of the evening’s featured chefs. “For example, we used waxworms in the soup because they’re a fatty bug and give a rich taste like cream. We also used roasted mealworms in both the salad and hummus because they have a nutty taste that can balance out the flavors. We used cricket powder to make the chips, plus used whole crickets with curry flavor as an accompaniment to the tandoori chicken.”

Dave Terrazas, culinary and wellness program specialist at the San Antonio Botanical Garden, created the dessert. He noted this year’s Insecta Fiesta venue was on the grounds of the botanical garden, which features the Culinary Garden and CHEF — Culinary Health Education for Families — Teaching Kitchen to highlight health, wellness and environmental stewardship through hands-on gardening and cooking.

“We used a ratio of 20 percent cricket flour to 80 percent all-purpose flour and made crepes,” he said. “When we mixed it, on the nose it had a kind of cocoa-like quality and tasted more like whole-wheat flour. We enhanced that with an earthy pumpkin pie spice blend and topped that with a sweet potato mousse with pumpkin spices. That gave it an earthy flavor. Then we added whipped cream and a ganache we made in a Mexican style with cinnamon, chili, almond and vanilla to play up the earthiness of the cricket.”

Nicolas Diarte, 14, was one of the 4-H entomology team members who spoke to the attendees. “One of the most important things I had to tell them was that insects require a lot less water to produce than livestock and also take up a lot less space,” Diarte said. “I also told them insects may be the food of the future because of the growing world population and because we won’t be able to produce adequate food for the future using current farming practices.”

Judie Gustafson was one of the attendees at this year’s event.

“I really enjoyed the mealworm hummus and fire ant salsa,” Gustafson said. “I’ve been to countries where they use insects in their diet but never really tried them before. But once when I was young, my mother, who loved practical jokes, served me chocolate-covered ants on my oatmeal, so I guess you can say I’ve eaten insects before. Besides, eating insects is a lot better for you than eating potato chips.”

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