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Paella in the Park

By Susie Iventosch



3rd and 4th from left: Tom and Carol Sueoka Photo
Andy Scheck

"The large grills are better for making paella, because you don't have to continually rotate the pan to ensure even cooking," he said. This is quite a cooking adventure and a bit of an undertaking, all inspired by a common interest in the Food Network.

"My husband and I were talking with our daughter and son-in-law about what to do on July 4th this past year," Carol said. "Somehow the conversation came around to the discovery that the kids and I had each recently seen the same episode of 'Bobby Flay's Throwdown' on the Food Network. This show featured an interesting chef from nearby Occidental who prepares authentic paella for large groups on different beaches in Northern California.

"The recipe looked delicious and our son-in-law, Brad Hoover, who had lived in Spain for some time after high school, has a passion for things from Spain, so we decided to try making it for our July 4 celebration."

Carol says the colors are spectacular at each stage of the preparation, with the addition of saffron, the special puffy paella rice, peppers, pink shrimp and clams.

"There is nothing like standing around in a beautiful setting with close friends and family and preparing a beautiful-looking, aromatic, delicious dish together," she said. "We are so fortunate to have beautiful parks like the Lafayette Reservoir and the Moraga Commons in our backyard to enjoy."

Cooking in the park is not just for summer, as the crisp fall days lend themselves so nicely to being outdoors enjoying the cooler air and the lovely fall colors. Try your hand at entertaining in the park and let me know how it goes! I'll be waiting for your wonderful recipes to share with our readers.

Moraga Commons Park
Moraga Rd & St Mary's Rd
Moraga, CA 94556
(925) 376-2520

Paella pans are sold in a variety of sizes at Sur La Table in Walnut Creek. They range in size from 15 to 22 inches in diameter and come in several different materials and price points.

Sur La Table
1211 Broadway Plaza
Walnut Creek, CA 94596-5112
(925) 210-0103

Or a large-sized frying pan can also be used and Across the Way carries a great assortment of these.

Across The Way
1409 Moraga Way, Moraga
(925) 376-3600

Paella is one of those dishes that has no exact formula, but instead is an evolving recipe - one that changes according to the cook's whims and the availability of ingredients. And, making paella is as much an event as a meal!

Commonly cooked over an open fire, paella is considered a delicacy, made with short-grain rice and vegetables, seasoned with saffron and most often including chicken, sausage and shell fish. But, originally, paella was a common meal for field laborers and since shell fish sightings are rare in the fields, it was usually made with chicken, rabbit, duck or snails.

To make paella, one needs a very large pan, some good friends, a large fire pit, barbecue grill or stove top and some time to kill. It is a great reason to gather family and friends to spend a day in the park. Carol and Tom Sueoka of Orinda recently embarked on making paella for big family gatherings in the park and enjoyed good old-fashioned fun with their family and friends while doing so. They've celebrated "paella" style at the Lafayette reservoir and more recently the Moraga Commons Park.

Tom said they really like the Commons because it also offers Bocce ball, frisbee golf and a skate park for the kids. But, there are only two grills large enough to accommodate a large paella pan, so he suggests arriving early to reserve one of them.



Photo Susie Iventosch

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