

# GREEK INSPIRATION

It's fresh, simple and healthy. What's not to like about Greek cuisine?

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Say something's Greek to you and people understand it's incomprehensible.

But Chef George Kyrtatas worked hard to make sure that's not true of

the recipes in his cookbook, *My Big Fat Greek Feast*.

"I made the recipes very simple by taking the technical culinary terms out. Anyone, even if they've never cooked, could pick up my book and make a wonderful dish," said Kyrtatas. He is executive chef and co-owner of Hathaway's Restaurant in Cinnaminson, N.J., a family-style diner with a Mediterranean flair.

Kyrtatas was 6 years old when his parents, both Greek, bought the diner, and he says he literally grew up there.

"Before the restaurant, my mom cooked a lot of Greek foods at home. But afterwards, we were always at the restaurant," he said.

Because of that, Kyrtatas started his culinary career early.

"I was about 8 when I told my father — he was the chef and ran the kitchen — that I was bored. He handed me a peeler and a bunch of potatoes. By age 10, I was actually cooking," he said.

At home, only Greek was spoken, so Kyrtatas grew up with a strong sense of Greek culture, history, religion and especially the cuisine.

"They're all very important to me," he said.

The recipes in *My Big Fat Greek Feast* are drawn from traditional Greek dishes and Kyrtatas' own creative ideas. Some recipes are everyday dishes.

Others, like his recipe for roast leg of lamb and Margiritsa, a Greek Easter soup, are festive dishes sure to

be served in many Greek households on April 27 after Greek Orthodox Easter services.

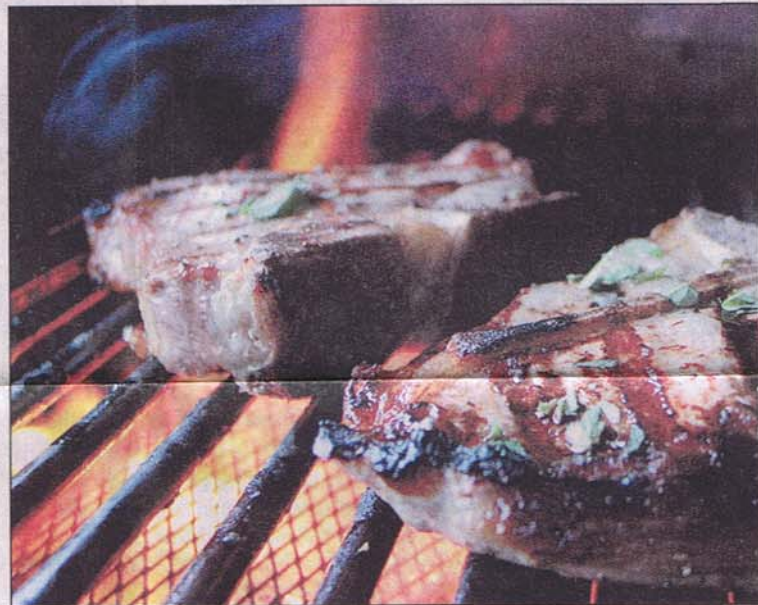
In Greece, Easter is the most important holiday, bigger even than Christmas, he said.

Members of the Greek Orthodox religion traditionally fast for the 40 days before Easter — no dairy, eggs or meat, nothing that's been processed or living at any time,

Kyrtatas said.

Services are usually held late at night on Saturday. Just before midnight all the lights in the church are switched off. The priest comes out bearing a lighted candle, which he uses to light one of the candles held by congregation members. One by one, congregation members light their candles from their neighbors' until, at midnight, the church glows with candlelight.

"The priest declares Christ has risen and we all go home. That's when the Easter feast begins," Kyrtatas said.



Provided photos

From top to bottom, Fennel, Feta and Kalamata Olive Salad, Grilled Veal Chops with Oregano and Lemon, and Dolmades (Stuffed Grape Leaves) are some simple Greek dishes you can make at home. See recipes, Page D2.

