

Nothing cooking

Raw food movement goes beyond the bland

BY SOPHIA CHANG

sophia.chang@newsday.com

The ice cream maker purring quietly on the kitchen table was the center of attention at Alex Pissalidis' potluck supper on a recent summer Saturday.

Pissalidis and several friends peered into the machine to examine the result, made from a milk of pureed almond, honey and coconut oil, soaked dates, and rose petals from the front yard of his Baldwin home.

Ice cream, prepared the raw food way.

"This is the first time I've

ever made it," Pissalidis, 45, said as he handed out dollops of the mauve ice cream to the curious crowd. Bay Shore resident Malgosia Ambroziak, 35, popped the spoon in her mouth and her eyes widened.

"It's very good," she squealed of the coarse, granita-textured and lightly perfumed treat.

Going gourmet

No longer just a fringe vegan diet featuring bland preparations of vegetables, fruits and nuts, the raw food movement has gone gourmet, tapping the same creativity that's revitalized mainstream cuisine. In preparation and presentation, raw food has evolved from its humble wheatgrass beginnings.

While the menu for raw food eaters might have expanded over the years, the fundamental idea remains the same, said Pissalidis.

"When you think about it, it's not the evolution of raw, it's the de-evolution of raw," he said. "We were born to eat this way. We're the only life



form on this planet that heats their food. We're only now starting to walk forward in the way we should eat."

The challenge lies in the preparation — raw food mandates not cooking food above a certain temperature, usually 118 degrees Fahrenheit, because advocates say higher heat destroys essential enzymes and renders the food nutritionally deficient. Nutritionists, however, say there's no scientific proof that raw food is better than traditionally cooked food, and warn of

the safety risks such as bacterial contamination as well.

But from the posh Manhattan restaurant Pure Food and Wine, to local health store Exotic Superfoods in Fresh Meadows, to Pissalidis' monthly potluck supper, raw foodies — or "living foods lifestyleists," as some call themselves — are transforming the diet from variations of vegan staples such as fruit smoothies to more elaborate options like pizza and ravioli.

Their hope is that eating a raw diet will soon be as accessible and exciting as eating organically — once a difficult and expensive option — is now.

Advocates point to the founding of a Boston alternative health retreat in the 1950s, and the wheatgrass juice served there, as the birth of the modern raw food movement.

How many raw foodies there are now is impossible to determine, but a classic raw food book written by Victoria Boutenko and called "Green for Life" has sold at



NEWSDAY PHOTOS / ROBERT MECEA

Christine Gauthier unwraps a pizza she made for Alex Pissalidis' raw-food potluck in Baldwin. From ravioli to pizza, these vegetarians are savoring a new approach to old standbys.

COOKING WITHOUT HEAT: A RECIPE



At Pure Food and Wine restaurant in Manhattan, chef Neal Harden garnishes beet ravioli with microgreens.

Gourmet raw cuisine has texture, flavor and eye-appeal, raw foodies say, just no dairy or meat products and no cooking above 118 degrees. Turn to page G6 for a ravioli recipe that substitutes thinly sliced beets for pasta and ground cashew nuts for cheese.



David Dreyfus makes zucchini pasta with a spiral slicer. Right, Sharon Sherr tries Luna Nori crackers with a special sauce.