

# Foreign Aid

*Philadelphia's small ethnic markets provide a wealth of exotic ingredients for a world of cuisines.*

By Barbara Ann Rosenberg

**S**o you haven't tried that interesting-sounding soup recipe in the Thai cookbook your mother-in-law gave you because your Acme doesn't stock lemon grass? Or you're tired of schlepping to New York for queso blanco for your Puerto Rican feasts? Cooks of the world, take heart—and start shopping for those unique ethnic ingredients right here in Philadelphia. Thanks to an influx of immigrants from around the world, we've become truly an international city, and these days you can find a wide variety of culinary exotica in a number of local stores. Everything from durian, that foul-smelling but delicious fruit so revered in Southeast Asia, to besan flour (made from ground chickpeas) for making those irresistible Indian appetizers, vegetable pakoras, to lemon grass, the quintessential flavoring ingredient for Thai food, is readily available. You just have to know where to look.

The first step is to find the areas where the new immigrants to Philadelphia have settled. The Great Northeast is home to a large Russian population. Thailand and India are well-represented in West Philadelphia. South Philly, long synonymous with Italians, now has a sizable Vietnamese colony, while Puerto Rican and Spanish enclaves dot North Philadelphia. No matter which of these ethnic cuisines you're into, here's what's available where:

## RUSSIAN

Where you find Russians, you find caviar—black and red, fresh and in the jar, of various grades and sizes, domestic and



imported. And you'll also find salmon, eel, sable, sturgeon and lots of fish you've never heard of, smoked the way they do it in the mother country, a little more intense, sometimes a bit saltier, and all sliced across the whole fish instead of lengthwise. Look for rich and sour Ryazhenka yogurt, made from milk that has been slowly baked in an oven, so that each portion is topped with a dark, thick milk skin, or the mountain yogurt in quarts, thinner in texture, more intense in flavor. Russian yogurt is much more delicious than the bland American brands. So is Rus-

sian bread, heavy, dark and flavorful, perfect with borscht or to spread with one of the jams and preserves—quince, black cherry, lingonberry, plum and currant—imported from Russia, Poland, Yugoslavia and Germany. Tea, of course, in gaily decorated tin boxes, cocoa, and all manner of canned goods, mostly Russian in origin, fill the shelves of such Russian emporiums as the **International Mini Market**, 10187 Verree Road, just off Bustleton Ave. (698-1666). There must be more food in this store than in all of Leningrad. In addition to the staples mentioned

above, there's homemade Ukrainian sausage in long, thin coils, meant to be eaten hot with boiled potatoes and pickled cabbage. Palmeni is a sort of Ukrainian ravioli stuffed with meat or cheese that is boiled and eaten with sour cream or butter and a sprinkle of vinegar. There is a large assortment of heavily smoked meats (mostly pork), a rich homemade liverwurst, and European-style salamis. The folks who own this place also run the Hunter Restaurant next door, where you can sample some of these ingredients in authentically prepared and garnished dishes. **Natasha Delicatessen and Health Products**, 11903 Bustleton Ave. (969-0808), is chockablock with vitamins, minerals, health foods and a huge assortment of candies from all over the Western world. The meat, fish, yogurt and caviar share space with a variety of Russian mineral waters ostensibly beneficial to your health. There must be something to it considering how long those Russian peasants allegedly live. More convenient to Center City denizens are the delicacies available at **The NewMarket Grocer**, The Market at NewMarket, 2nd and Lombard Sts. (629-9210). The folks who own this little corner of the huge, new Society Hill market are from Kiev. Plans call for adding more Russian supplies to their current stock of caviar and assorted preserves.

## INDIAN

The Indian community in Philadelphia hails from Punjab, Gujarat and Bengal. Their stores are filled with the pickles and chutneys that accom-



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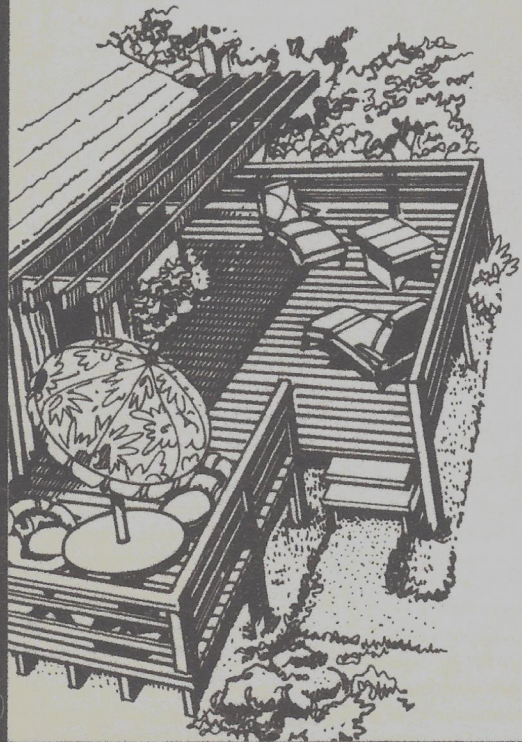
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## DINING IN

pany their food: lime, mango, chili, ginger and date. These stores also stock a myriad of spices: coriander, fresh and dried; cinnamon, whole and ground; cumin, black and regular; cardamon, whole and shelled; chilies, dried, fresh and powdered; fenu-greek; asafetida; kulanjee. These and others are used in various combinations to season curries and other delectable dishes from the various regions. You can find several flavors of pappadums, the positively addictive bread that triples in size when lowered into oil hot enough to fry it, and dal (lentils) of many colors and shapes. Unsweetened desiccated coconut is available as well as fresh, for those people ambitious enough to peel and grate their own. And tamarind, dried or in paste form, provides a unique Indian tartness.

**M & M Grocery**, 124 S. 41st St. (222-1842), is the smallest of the Indian stores, with the Indian foods mixed in with the ordinary foodstuffs used by the University City folks. Special to this place, however, are the vegetable samosas (fried triangular dumplings stuffed with potatoes, peas and spices) made fresh daily by the wife of the owner. They sell out quickly, so it's a good idea to call to check on availability, especially if you want to buy in quantity for hors d'oeuvres. **House of Spices India**, next door at 4104 Walnut St. (222-1111), is larger and devoted exclusively to Indian edibles and utensils, as well as an assortment of saris and a line of discount electrical appliances. A branch of a New York store, House of Spices has its own label, Laxmi, named for a Hindu goddess. While the owners are from Gujarat, they pride themselves on a geographically wide assortment of Indian groceries, including specialties from Pakistan. In addition to an array of nuts, in and out of the shell (including shelled pistachios), there are packaged Indian snack foods, mostly resembling spicy cereal combinations. And on weekends, homemade samosas, golden and flaky, sell out early. There is another **House of Spices** (no connection with the former) at 4605 N. 6th St. (455-6870). The 6th Street store is strictly serve-yourself, although you can find help if you persist. Spices come in large packages at considerable savings. Before you get carried away, keep in mind that spices lose their zest when stored longer than a year. Here you'll find a huge selection of Indian sweets and frozen desserts like exotic mango ice cream, and a dessert made of condensed milk, known as kulfi.

### THAI, KAMPUCHEAN AND VIETNAMESE

While these countries are right next door to one another, the food preparation in each is quite different. But their cuisines