

Get cheesy with vegan alternatives

The session was a prelude to the Conscious Market set to happen on January 26 and January 27 at the mall.



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The cheese-tasting session was a prelude to the Conscious Market set to happen on January 26 and 27 at Express Avenue hotel  S Hemanathan

By Vaishali Vijaykumar

Express News Service

CHENNAI: Who does not like cheese? A bunch of food enthusiasts, vegan lovers and bloggers had gathered for a seated cheese-tasting session at the Entree Restaurant of Express Avenue hotel on Wednesday. The session was a prelude to the Conscious Market set to happen on January 26 and January 27 at the mall.

We were welcomed by a sumptuous spread of a varieties of cheese at the centre of the hall, arranged with breads and natural fruits. However, one of the common questions that popped in everyone's mind was, 'how do you make cheese without milk?' To which, celebrity chef Neelima Sriram explained, "I've used substitutes like tofu, nuts, cashew pastes and nut-free alternatives like

carrot, pumpkin and potato to make cheese.”

Six varieties of cheese — pepper jack cheese with red bell pepper and green chillies, dried apricot cheese, boursin cheese with roast bell pepper, probiotic raw cheese with beetroot salad as a garnish, roasted garlic cheese, and feta cheese on a bruschetta with Greek salad — were presented to the invitees. Except feta, all the other cheese were oil-free. The cheese were all organic and made using plant-based ingredients. They were served with flavoured crackers. “The aim was to offer cruelty-free products in the market. Cheese is the most difficult yet addictive ingredient to find a replacement for. When you normally offer vegan cheese, people refuse to buy. So, we decided to have a tasting session for them to compare and decide. The challenge was matching up to the original flavour,” said Neelima.

As we took a bite of the cheese along with the complementary cracker, it burst into flavours in our mouth. The best part was that we did not require a palette cleanser. Every cheese stood out in terms of originality in taste and base.

Finding vegan alternatives was the real mystery box challenge for Neelima who was also a part of the MasterChef season four. “You need a source of inspiration to find substitutes. Like baking, in cheese-making also precision is required. I use all kinds of tools and measuring cups to get it accurate. These are healthy fats with moderation,” she explained. Neelima also prepares made-to-order cheese at the vegan store — Earth Story. The bottles are available in 75-150 gram with a shelf life of a week to ten days, and no preservatives are used. Considering cheese is irresistible and used every day, she believes that it’s tastier when it’s fresh.

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