When you think of vegan food, do you think of gourmet salads, or boring dishes?

Chantale Roy, a gourmet cuisine chef instructor in UBC’s continuing studies program who teaches courses such as “Raw Vegan Food” and “Gourmet Vegetarian Cuisine,” is on a mission to change preconceptions about vegan food. Eager to create dishes as tasty as they are healthy, Roy inspires students to prepare meals that are more gourmet than mushy, brown or bland.

Offering 10 different programs each semester, Roy’s classes are often busy with ravenous meat
eaters, devoted vegans and pregnant moms, all of whom are curious about the benefits of vegetarianism and veganism. Despite this variety, there is one characteristic all her students share.

“What I like about my courses is the openness of people,” Roy said. “When they sign up for one of those classes that is not conventional cooking, they are already open-minded.”

Students are as passionate about the course as the instructor herself. Judy Chorney, a student currently taking Roy’s gourmet vegetarian cuisine course, was eager to expand her repertoire by learning about vegan food.

“Most importantly, I found through taking Chantale’s course that you learn a lot about the nutritional values about foods and how important it is to have raw food, for instance, in your diet,” said Chorney.

Educating students about wholesome foods is important to Roy, who studied at the Living Light Culinary Arts Institute with a focus on raw vegan foods.

“We go raw or vegan mainly because we want to be healthy, for ethical reasons or spiritual reasons, but I really focus on nutrition. It’s not a nutrition course, but there’s a big part of it. As soon as people ask me questions on that, I just give as much as I can,” said Roy.

In fact, it’s her openness to sharing knowledge and recipes that has inspired Roy to teach culinary arts courses at UBC and also write a number of books. After experiencing a disappointing hardship in one of the businesses she partnered up with, which stole 27 products and 70 recipes she had created, Roy has adopted an alternative approach.

“What I’ve learned from that is that I don’t want to protect my recipes anymore. I want to create more and share it and reach as many people as possible,” said Roy.

Roy’s numerous books, published in both French and English, were inspired by her upbringing in Quebec. She invents dishes that can be simply recreated at home for breakfast, lunch or dinner with an added touch of sophistication.

“I grew up on a farm, so I was very close to nature and the produce. After that, I had my own farm for 15 years and I was doing community support in agriculture and permaculture and I was very in love with my veggies. When my sons wanted to eat something, I wanted to create it in a healthy way, so they inspired me a lot, too,” said Roy.
And it seems Roy may have just unearthed the secret on how to jazz up vegetables so they can make the leap from bland to exquisite. Clara Soyris, also taking Roy’s gourmet vegetarian cuisine course, is not a self-confessed vegetarian. Nonetheless, she was surprised by how delightful vegetables could taste.

“Vegetables aren’t my favourite food, but Chantale accommodates them in a way that you love it. We see that she’s talented, but we can do the same at home, so we feel great,” said Soyris.

Affordability and effortlessness are factors Roy has in mind when teaching students her recipes. Providing a list of ingredients and suppliers allows students to comfortably reenact meals at home for family and friends.

“What I was most impressed about was her passion about cooking healthy,” said Jonathan Lau, another student. “It really shows through her cooking, her mannerisms, through the way she conducts information. It doesn’t really matter what kind of course she’s running — I sign up and it’s because she’s teaching it.”

For more information about Chantale Roy and UBC Continuing Studies, visit the program’s website (http://cstudies.ubc.ca/index.html).