

Raw food leaves cooked cold

For most of us, eating uncooked food doesn't hold much appeal, but it is not as raw a deal as many expect

Jocelyn Newmarch

It was a cold, cold winter's day in Jozi when I went to my first raw-food event. It was so cold I put on the heater at 10am and tried to type with gloved hands. The prospect of a hearty green salad for lunch didn't really appeal.

Luckily, as I soon discovered at a media lunch — hosted by raw foodies Peter and Beryn Daniels at vegan restaurant Leafy Greens in Muldersdrift outside Jo'burg — just because you're eating raw food doesn't mean you have to forgo warmth. In winter one of the chief joys of food is being able to wrap your hands around a mug of soup, then sipping as your body slowly defrosts.

The Daniels have pioneered the raw-food movement in South Africa, which features a small but growing number of devotees. They say they're experiencing better health and more energy since they rejected the concept of cooking, which apparently breaks down enzymes and makes the food less nutritious.

Trained chefs Peter and Beryn are co-authors of the cookbook *Rawlicious: Recipes for Radiant Health* and conduct several workshops a year on raw food.

Though cooking is *verboden*, Peter, Beryn and Leafy Greens owner Antonia Luca were able to serve us vegan hot chocolate — raw cacao, vanilla, cashews and honey — and a warming red pepper and tomato soup with macadamia cream and a drizzle of olive oil. This is because raw foodists believe that water or food can be safely warmed to 47°C — so that it's finger hot — but not higher without destroying nutritious enzymes in food.

It's easy to be put off by the "raw-food" label, but many cultures' cuisines include raw elements. Salads, sushi and even steak tartare — minced raw steak with onions — are commonplace. Biltong is just dehydrated raw meat. But the raw-food movement is mainly vegan.

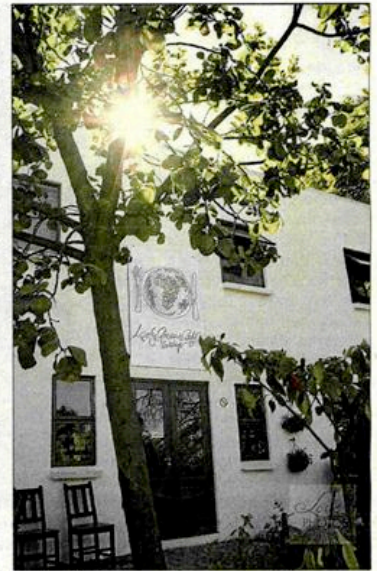
The Daniels and other raw foodists say they feel healthier, have more energy and need less sleep because they have rejected processed foods, cooked foods, animal products, refined sugar, wheat and caffeine.

"When I was younger my skin used to be really bad and I had eczema as a child. When I did my first detox I had a massive outbreak of eczema, but since then it hasn't come back," said Beryn.

Peter said he was "pre-diabetic" and suffered from hypoglycaemia before switching to raw food.

More controversially, according to Harvard anthropologist Richard Wrangham, half of all women following a raw food diet no longer menstruate because of undernourishment. Wrangham's theory is that cooking allowed modern humans to evolve, as cooked food is more easily digestible and contains more nutrition than raw food.

Sceptical website *BeyondVegetarianism.com* suggests that although a mainly raw-food diet can offer substantial health benefits — increased fibre, less cholesterol and saturated fat — a 100% raw diet is not healthy in the long term, because it does not offer enough calories and can impair



In the raw: Peter and Beryn Daniels (left), owners of SuperFoods in Cape Town, who 'cooked' up a delicious lunch at the vegan restaurant Leafy Greens (above right) in Muldersdrift near Johannesburg. Photo: David Harrison

healthy bowel functioning.

At the lunch we sat around a long table and fired questions at Peter and Beryn, all the while drinking vegetable juice and nibbling on spinach crisps.

Isn't it elitist to talk about the benefits of organic raw food when 14-million South Africans are food insecure?

"Half of what we eat comes from our own garden. Food security starts and stops with what you grow," said Peter, adding that everyone can grow sprouts in their kitchen, even without access to land for a garden.

Groceries for two people following a raw-food diet can cost less than R1000 a month, he said.

What do they eat when they go

out? Usually a salad or a vegetarian meal, but they don't eat out that often.

Do you ever get food cravings? "I craved eggs about two years ago, so I ate a few eggs, but it hasn't come back," Peter said. Food cravings are often about craving a specific ingredient — such as omega-3 oils in fish — rather than about the food item itself, he said.

"You have to honour your body. I was always hungry and would eat everyone's leftovers. Now that I eat raw food I'm eating less," he said, explaining that the high mineral content in raw foods satisfies hunger.

So what did we eat?

To start: red pepper and tomato soup with macadamia cream and a

drizzle of olive oil. To follow: the best hummus I've had, from sprouted chickpeas, a spinach and feta quiche with a dehydrated buckwheat crust, a big salad, dehydrated onion cracker-bread and basil pesto-stuffed tomatoes. We also had glasses of "green juice" — a variety of salad leaves liquidised with apple — and some raw hot chocolate, made from cashews, honey, raw cacao and vanilla.

The food was so good I went back to Leafy Greens a week later, this time with husband and in-laws in tow. It was the restaurant's first birthday and the complimentary glühwein was a nice touch. I tucked into a plate heaped high with beetroot crackers, zucchini hummus, curried coleslaw and an avocado-and-

citrus salad, followed by a raw vegan chocolate chilli cheesecake.

Nutritional claims be damned: the food is wildly original and damnably delicious. And reasonable too: lunch for four, including wine, came to R380.

Leafy Greens is the first restaurant in South Africa to serve mainly raw food and offers an 80% raw-food buffet on weekends, supplied by an organic farm on the premises. There is a health shop on the premises open from Wednesday to Sunday and the restaurant hosts raw-food workshops during the week.

Leafy Greens Cafe, Plot 328 Rocky Ridge Road, Muldersdrift, Gauteng, Cell: 0878056221