



Thai Cooking

with

Boosaba Nualhing

and

Don Skipworth



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Boosaba's Bio

For more than five centuries, the village of Pah Leurat has stood on the north bank of Thailand's mighty Nan River, about a day's journey upstream from the provincial capital of Uttaradit. Flanked by teak-forested hills, this fertile valley has been home to generations of rice farmers, many of whom still use water buffalo to plow their fields, just as their ancestors have done in that same place for hundreds of years. They grow coconuts, papayas, bananas and chile peppers in their gardens, build their homes of hand-sawn teak with grass-thatched roofs, and cook their meals on fires of homemade charcoal. Two decades ago, electric power reached the village, bringing running water, refrigerators and television, yet even today many of the roads remain unpaved and six-hundred families share just three telephones.

Late one night during the July monsoon, Boosaba Nualhing (*Boo-sah-bah Nuan-hing*) was born at her home in this village. She was the second child born to Sern and Son (pronounced *Sawn*). Boosaba's sister, Sanga, was eight years older and her brother, Sundit, was born four years later. Their father, Sern, was the highly respected village headman, while their mother, Son, no less admired, looked after the children, the house, and the farm.

Village life centers around the rice crop, the *wat* (Buddhist community temple), and the local public school. In this serene rural environment, self-sufficient, fun-loving families support one another in every activity from birth to death, planting to harvest, and discipline to celebration. Cultivating paddy rice involves heavy work in the hot sun against a series of immutable deadlines. Even so, Boosaba fondly recalls her whole neighborhood harvesting rice together, singing around the campfire, and sleeping in the straw among her happiest annual adventures.

Although she never owned a single store-bought toy, Boosaba cherishes childhood memories of constant warmth and companionship. She learned to swim and paddle a canoe, and helped look after gardens, chickens, buffalo and pigs. In the years before she started school, Boosaba also began learning to cook.

When she was six years old Boosaba entered first grade dressed in a blue skirt, white blouse, and black shoes. Each day began with the Thai national anthem followed by Buddhist prayers, and studies included Thai language, mathematics, social sciences, Buddhism and agriculture. In this same year, Boosaba's parents separated, bringing dramatic change to her life. Her father dismantled their handsome two-story house and rebuilt it nearly a mile away, leaving only a small shack for Boosaba and her mother, sister and brother. Although the children loved their father and visited him often, they lived with their mother and their life was far more difficult than before.

Cooking was a task which her father enjoyed more than her mother, so when he left home Boosaba—then only six years old—began to share the responsibility of cooking for the family. She learned by watching and helping her father, her sister and her neighbors, and by asking questions and experimenting.

Boosaba worked hard to help her mother, and her mother worked even harder to see her children through school. Following her sister's lead as a bright and dedicated student, Boosaba became one of the fortunate few in her class to continue her education beyond the sixth grade. The thirty-mile commute to junior



and senior high schools required both financial sacrifice and twelve-hour days away from home—in between daily farm chores, housework and homework. After finishing high school, Boosaba travelled 150 miles north to Chiangmai to stay with her sister who worked as a nurse at the McKean Leprosy Hospital. There, Boosaba enrolled in an accounting program and because of her determination and hard work completed a five-year course of study in just three years.

The joy of completing her course work was curtailed by the unexpected and tragic death of her sister. The loss of Sanga made Boosaba her mother's oldest child, a responsibility which, in Thai culture, involves nothing less than accountability for the well-being of one's parents and siblings. Boosaba assumed her new role bravely and without hesitation. For the next ten years she worked as an accountant and schoolteacher, saving enough money to build her mother a beautiful new house. While working, she continued her own education, ultimately completing a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Guidance.

At that same time, Mac Bakewell, a native Santa Barbaran, was living in Chiangmai studying Thai language, religion and culture. Mac and Boosaba met when she joined his small evening English class. A romance blossomed, and they were soon married. Following the birth of their daughter, Benyapa, the family moved from Chiangmai to Pah Leurat where they lived for two years until moving to Mac's home in Santa Barbara in 1995.

Boosaba's values vividly illustrate her Buddhist faith. Those values were passed on to her by the two people who influenced her most as she was growing up, her mother and her sister. Boosaba says, "They never looked down on others, and never envied anyone, and they both devoted themselves to caring for each other and for our family."

Boosaba's love for her family is primary, and she regards her mom as "the smartest and kindest person I know." Boosaba praises her mother for helping her develop self-confidence, and a deep caring for other people. She loves her daughter "Ben" because, "She's part of me. She's really intelligent and kind." Boosaba wants her daughter to have the benefits of an education in the USA, without forsaking any of her Thai roots, principles or ideals. Boosaba loves her cats, Snowball and Nomie, the orphan kitty she brought to Santa Barbara from Thailand. And she loves her husband, "because he's understanding, respects other cultures, loves my whole family, and *eats all my food.*"

Since 1995 Mac and Boosaba have operated a unique summer program called *INSIDE THAILAND*, which invites small groups of American teens to Pah Leurat to teach English to their Thai peers while immersed in the village culture. Boosaba becomes "house mom" to each group and enchants them all with her cooking. Boosaba loves to cook, and her multi-course Thai meals are always one of the most memorable features of the Inside Thailand experience.





About Thai Food

The Thai kingdom today is comprised of four geographically and ethnically distinct regions: northern, northeastern, central and southern. While Boosaba's home is in the north, she is adept at many styles and today's menu includes selections from northern, central and southern Thailand.

Internationally famous, Thai cuisine is essentially a marriage of centuries-old Eastern and Western influences harmoniously combined into something uniquely Thai. Traditional Thai cooking methods were stewing and grilling. Early Chinese influences saw the introduction of stir frying and deep-frying. Later culinary influences from the 17th century onwards included Portuguese, Dutch, French and Japanese. Chiles were introduced to Thai cooking during the late 1600s by Portuguese missionaries who had acquired a taste for them while serving in South America.

Thais are very adept at *Siam-ising* foreign cooking methods, and substituting ingredients. The *ghee* used in Indian cooking was replaced by coconut oil, and coconut milk substituted for other dairy products. Overpowering pure spices were toned down and enhanced by fresh herbs such as lemon grass and galanga. Over time, fewer spices were used in Thai curries while the use of fresh herbs increased. It is generally acknowledged that Thai curries burn intensely but briefly, whereas other curries, with untempered spices, burn for longer periods.

Eating & Ordering Thai Food

Instead of diverse dishes served as separate courses, a Thai meal is served all at once, permitting diners to enjoy complementary combinations of flavors. Menus are planned with consideration for a harmony of tastes and textures among the individual dishes throughout the entire meal. Soups are enjoyed concurrently with rice and other dishes, rather than separately, and spicy dishes are balanced by bland dishes to gently modulate the more intense flavors.

Thais eat with the spoon in their right hand and the fork in their left. Even single dish meals such as fried rice with pork, or steamed rice topped with roasted duck, are served in bite-sized slices obviating the need for a knife. The fork is used to push food onto the spoon, and the spoon is then used to convey food to the mouth. Chopsticks are used only for Chinese noodle dishes.

Thai dining is generally a communal affair, primarily because Thais are a convivial people, and also because the greater the number of diners the greater the variety of dishes to share. Generally speaking, two diners order three dishes in addition to their own individual plates of steamed rice, three diners four dishes, and so on. At the start of the meal, one person serves soup and rice to each diner; individuals then choose whatever they desire from shared entrées to add to their own rice. It is considered polite to take only a little of one curry at a time, consuming it before ladling another curry onto the rice.



The ideal Thai meal is a harmonious blend of the spicy, the subtle, the sweet and sour, and is meant to be equally satisfying to eye, nose and palate. Skillful blending of the five flavors—sweet, sour, salty, bitter, and hot—is the hallmark of Thai dishes. Examples of ingredients that generate these tastes can be summarized as follows:

- Sweet: sugar from sugar cane or the sugar palm tree, ripe pineapple
- Sour: lemon, lime, tamarind, unripe mango, unripe pineapple, vinegar, *ma-euk* (*Solanum ferox*—an eggplant having a furry fruit with a sour taste), *madan* (*Garcinia schomburgkiana*)
- Salty: salt, *nam plah* (Thai fish sauce, which is used in the same way as Chinese and Japanese use soy sauce)
- Bitter: *ma-ra* (bitter gourd or bitter cucumber)
- Hot: fresh or ground dried chile peppers, peppercorn (peppercorn provides a less intense heat than the chiles.)

Thai dishes may be categorized based on flavor into four groups:

- a. Non-spiced and mild in taste in the form of stir-fried, steamed, deep fried, grilled, or soup (*gaeng jeut*) dishes. These may be native Thai dishes or derivations from their Chinese equivalents.
- b. Chile paste dishes with or without coconut milk in the form of sauce dishes (*gaeng peht*) or stir fried. The amount of spices and degree of hotness can be modified to individual tastes.
- c. Vegetable salads or vegetable salads with meat. The dishes can be sweet, sour, or spicy-hot in taste.
- d. Fermented vegetables that are generally sour in taste.

A typical Thai meal might include a clear soup (perhaps bitter melons stuffed with minced pork), a steamed dish (mussels in curry sauce), a fried dish (fish with ginger), a hot salad (beef slices on a bed of lettuce, onions, chiles, mint and lemon juice) and a variety of sauces into which food is dipped. This would be followed by sweet desserts or fresh fruits such as mangoes, durian, jackfruit, papaya, grapes or melon.

The five recipes featured in today's lesson—spring rolls, lemon grass salad, hot and sour shrimp soup (*tom yum goong*), steamed Jasmine rice and Panaeng curry—comprise a complete and authentic Thai meal. The various textures and flavors balance and compliment each other for a memorable dining experience.



Thai Cooking Class Ingredients List

BAMBOO SHOOTS

A vegetable which is widely used in Thai cooking, canned bamboo shoots are to be found in most Asian food stores.

BASIL (*bai horapa*)

The variety which is most commonly used in Thai curries, this type of basil is similar to sweet basil, but it has a slight anise seed flavor and a reddish purple color. Ordinary sweet basil makes a good substitute.

CHILE

Thai chile peppers (*prik kee noo*). These are tiny red or green chiles used to add heat to the dish. Dried chiles are also used in cooking and are called *prik kee noo haeng*.

CILANTRO/CORIANDER (*pak chee*)

This herb is essential to Thai cooking and is also known as Chinese parsley. There is no substitute for its distinctive flavor and not only are the leaves used in many dishes but also the stems, roots, and seeds. All have a different flavor and use. The leaves, fresh or dried, are used to garnish many dishes, the roots add flavor to curry pastes, while the seeds are ground into powder. Cilantro leaves are called *bai pak chee* and the roots are *raak pak chee*.

COCONUT

COCONUT MILK: coconut milk can either be obtained by grating the coconut flesh, soaking it in boiling water and then squeezing out the liquid using a fine sieve, or by using cans of coconut milk from Asian food stores.

COCONUT CREAM: Coconut cream is the thick top layer which forms after making coconut milk. This is also available in Asian food stores and some supermarkets.

FISH SAUCE (*nam plah*)

A salty, pale brown liquid used widely in Thai cooking, this is made from anchovies fermented in jars and then the liquid is collected. It adds salt to many dishes and is essential for authentic Thai flavor. Also is available from Asian food stores.

GALANGAL (*kha*)

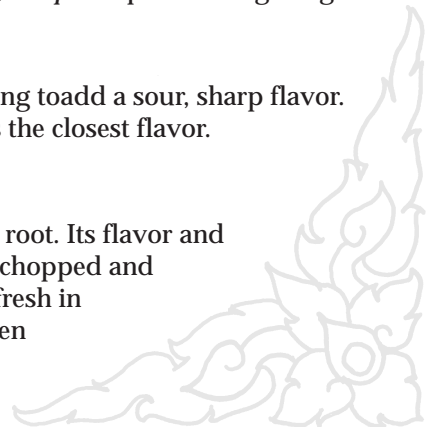
A relative of the ginger root, galangal is pale yellow and has a unique, delicate flavor. *Kha orn* is young galangal, *kha haeng* is dried galangal, *kha pon* is powdered galangal.

KAFFIR LIME (*ma-grood*)

This fruit and its leaves are widely used in Thai cooking to add a sour, sharp flavor. If unavailable, there is no real substitute but lemon is the closest flavor.

LEMON GRASS/CITRONELLA (*ta-krai*)

This tall plant resembles a grass with a small bulbous root. Its flavor and aroma are very lemony. The bulb and base leaves are chopped and pounded for use in a variety of dishes. It is available fresh in markets and Asian food stores and also comes in frozen and dried forms.



SHRIMP PASTE (*ga-pi*)

This can be bought in a jar from Asian food stores and has a pungent fish taste. Use in small quantities and keep refrigerated.

TAMARIND (*ma-kaam*)

Tamarind juice adds a sharp, sour flavor without the tartness of lemon. It comes from the tamarind tree, which has fine fern-like leaves. The fruit is eaten either green or ripe, and the brown pulp is used for cooking. Lemon or lime can act as a substitute, but the delicate flavor is lost.



Recommended Asian Markets

SANTA BARBARA

Indo-China Market

6831 Hollister Avenue
Goleta, CA 93117

Phone: (805) 968-3353

Oriental Market

420 South Fairview Avenue
Goleta, CA 93117

Phone: (805) 683-4417

LOS ANGELES

Bangluck Market

5170 Hollywood Boulevard
Hollywood, CA 90027

Phone: (323) 660-8000

Silom Market

5321 Hollywood Boulevard
Hollywood, CA 90027

Phone: (323) 993-9000



Thai Jasmine Rice

(*Khao Hom Mali or Kaho Suay*)

© 2003, Boosaba Nualhing

Rice is the staple diet of well over half of the world's people, and every rice-eating culture has its own unique and preferred genetic variety. In Thailand the word for rice is *kaho*, and all other food is *gup kaho*, or "with rice." Thai Jasmine rice is an aromatic, long-grain rice. This is a pure traditional variety with no genetic alteration. New crop Jasmine rice (less than one year old) is very soft and just a little sticky, so that it easily melts in your mouth. Aged crop Jasmine rice is chewy but not hard — simply fun to chew. I love rice, and I want everyone to share my enjoyment of it.

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 cups Jasmine rice
- 2 cups water

PREPARATION AND COOKING:

1. Rinse the rice thoroughly in cold water.
2. Place the rice in the a heavy saucepan and add the water to the rice
3. Cover the saucepan and heat to the boiling
4. Allow to boil on high heat for 1 minute.
5. Turn the heat down as low as possible and steam for 15 minutes.

Serves 4–6

A Thai cook will know from experience whether rice is young or old; young rice needs to be cooked in less water than old.



Spring Rolls

(*Po Pia Taud*)

© 2003, Boosaba Nualhing

Thai spring rolls are a perfect appetizer for any meal and they are also a favorite when entertaining. Thai spring rolls are delicate and compact compared to Chinese and Vietnamese versions. They are also rather mildly flavored, and the sweet sauce is an essential accompaniment.

INGREDIENTS:

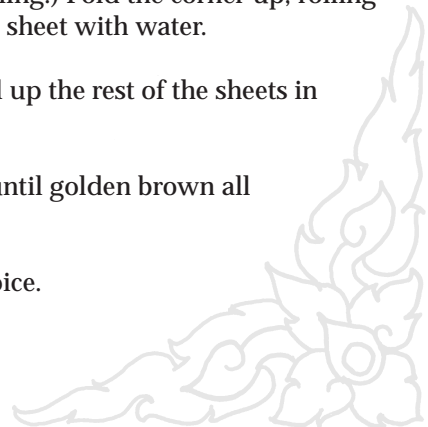
- 8 spring roll sheets
- 2 oz dry *Wun Sen** noodles soaked in cold water until soft, about 30 minutes
- 8 pieces dried tree-ear mushrooms, soaked in cold water to soften and sliced very fine (tree-ear mushrooms are available pre-shredded)
- 1 cup shredded bamboo shoots (thin shreds)
- 1 cup grated carrots
- 1 cup julienned cabbage
- 3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon light soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 1/8 tsp ground white pepper
- 3 tablespoons water
- 3 cups oil for deep-frying

* *Wun sen*: a very thin, wiry, transparent soybean-flour noodle, called either vermicelli, or cellophane noodle. Only available dried.

PREPARATION AND COOKING:

1. Drain the vermicelli noodles and, using scissors, chop into small pieces. Place in a bowl and mix thoroughly with finely chopped mushrooms, bamboo shoots, carrots, cabbage, white pepper, garlic, fish sauce and soy sauce.
2. Lay a spring roll sheet flat with a corner towards you. For large spring rolls place 2 tablespoons of the filling on the lower portion of the sheet. (If making small spring rolls, cut each sheet into 4 equal pieces, and use 1 heaping teaspoon of filling.) Fold the corner up, rolling once. Bring the sides in and brush the upper portion of the sheet with water.
3. Roll the sheet up, sealing the entire spring roll. Fill and roll up the rest of the sheets in the same way.*
4. Heat the oil to 350 F (180 C) and deep-fry the spring rolls until golden brown all over, turning as needed.
5. Serve with a sweet and sour sauce or other dip of your choice.

* The rolls can be chilled or frozen for future use.



Lemon Grass Salad

(*Yum Ta-Krai*)

© 2003, Boosaba Nualhing

As a verb, *yum* means to slice and mix together, and as a noun refers to spicy and tangy Thai salads. These refreshing dishes are often served as hors d'ouvres with drinks before a meal. Although rarely seen in American Thai restaurants, there are many types of yum, some made with meat or fish, others with fruits, vegetables or mushrooms. The *yum ta-krai* described here is made with pork, but one could easily substitute ground beef, fish, shrimp or squid.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup finely sliced lemon grass
- 1 cup minced pork loin
- 3 tablespoons water
- 3 tablespoons dried shrimp
- 4 tablespoons roasted cashew nuts
- 4 red or green Thai chiles, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons finely sliced shallots
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon white sugar

PREPARATION AND COOKING:

1. Place the ground pork in a pot with the water over moderate heat and stir until the pork is cooked (around 5 minutes). Turn off the heat.
2. In a mixing bowl toss the cooked pork with the lemon grass, shallots, dried shrimp, chiles, lime juice, fish sauce, soy sauce, and sugar. Taste and season additionally as desired.
3. Just before serving, sprinkle cashew nuts on top.



Hot and Sour Shrimp Soup

(Tom Yum Goong)

© 2003, Boosaba Nualhing

Tom yum goong is the most famous of all Thai soups. Each region has its own particular variation of the recipe. Other seafoods could be used in this dish, for example mussels, scallops or crab claws. This method of preparing a hot and sour soup can also be used with finely sliced chicken or thin slices of beef.

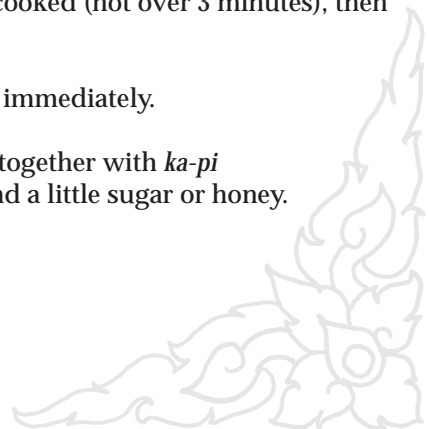
INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound shrimp or prawns, with shells removed
- 2 stalks fresh lemon grass, chopped 2 in. long and slightly crushed to release the aromatic oils.
- 3 cups water or soup stock
- 5 thinly sliced sections of fresh galanga (*kha*)
- 4 shallots, peeled and slightly crushed
- 2 tablespoons roasted chile paste (*nam prik pow* *)
- 1 cup fresh brown mushrooms, cut in half
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 1 tablespoon tamarind juice
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 1 small tomato, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 5 fresh Thai chiles (*prik kee-noo*)
- 5 fresh kaffir lime leaves (*bai-ma-grood*)
- 1 tablespoon cilantro leaves

PREPARATION AND COOKING:

1. In a saucepan, heat the water or soup stock.
2. Add the sliced galanga, lemongrass, shallots simmer for 5 minutes.
3. Add chile paste, tamarind juice, fish sauce, lime juice, Thai chile. Stir.
4. Add mushrooms, shrimp and tomato. Stir until shrimp is cooked (not over 3 minutes), then turn off the heat.
5. Add thinly sliced kaffir limes leaves, cilantro leaves. Serve immediately.

* *nam prik pow*: a thick paste made with dried chiles roasted together with *ka-pi* (shrimp paste) and then mortar-blended with fish sauce and a little sugar or honey.



Beef Panaeng Curry

(*Kaeng Panaeng Nuea*)

© 2003, Boosaba Nualhing

In Thai, the word *kaeng* (rhymes with 'gang') refers to any dish with a lot of liquid, from *kaeng jeut* (bland soup) to the chile-based *kaeng phet* (hot curry). Kaeng Panaeng is a relatively mild curry named after an island off the west coast of Malaysia. The seasonings, however, are more Thai than Malay. Unlike Indian curries which rely primarily on dry spices, the basic foundations of Thai curries are *kreuang-kaeng*—thick, mortar-blended pastes of fresh aromatic herbs, bulbs and pungent roots, giving the curries an intriguing complexity of flavor that is both light and refreshing.

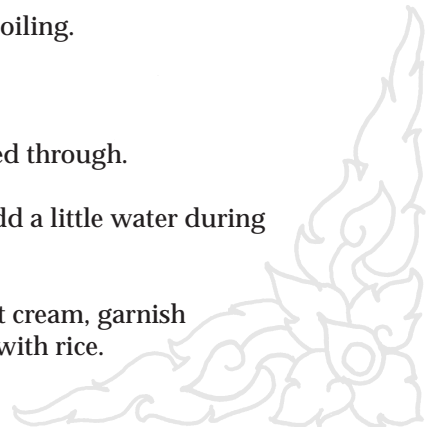
While traditional *kreuang-kaeng* are made from scratch (using a stone mortar and pestle), Asian markets offer ready-made curry pastes which individual cooks then customize to suit their own tastes. Try replacing the beef with shrimp, chicken or fish for some interesting variations.

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pound lean beef, sliced
- 1/2 cup coconut cream
- 1-1/2 cup coconut milk
- 2 tablespoons panaeng curry paste
- 1 tablespoon fish sauce
- 1 tablespoon light soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/2 cup sweet Thai basil leaves
- 5-6 kaffir lime leaves, sliced length-wise into 1/8-inch-wide strips
- 1 fresh Thai red chile, seeded and very thinly sliced

PREPARATION AND COOKING:

1. Heat the coconut cream (reserving 1 tbs for garnish) in a saucepan on medium heat until it begins to separate.
2. Add the curry paste and stir until the paste and coconut cream are well blended and aromatic.
3. Add the beef, stir for 1 minute, add coconut milk, heat to boiling.
4. Add the fish sauce, soy sauce and sugar, and stir.
5. Stir and cook gently for 5 minutes or until the beef is cooked through.
6. Add the basil leaves. This is meant to be a dry curry, but add a little water during the cooking if you feel it is drying out too much.
7. Pour the mixture into a serving bowl. Top with the coconut cream, garnish with kaffir lime leaf strips and sliced red chiles, and serve with rice.



Panaeng Curry Paste

(*Nam Prik Panaeng*)

© 2003, Boosaba Nualhing

The name of this curry paste shows its Malaysian origin. Traditional *nam prik Panaeng* is made from scratch using a stone mortar and pestle. However, Asian markets will have ready-made curry pastes which individual cooks may season to their own tastes.

INGREDIENTS:

- 10 dried long red chiles (*prik chee fa haeng*)
- 1 tablespoon coriander seed (*met pak chee*)
- 2 tablespoons chopped shallots
- 2 tablespoons chopped garlic
- 1 tablespoon chopped galangal (*kha*)
- 2 tablespoons chopped lemon grass
- 1 tablespoon kaffir lime skin (*piew ma-grood*)
- 1 teaspoon shrimp paste (*kapi*)

PREPARATION AND COOKING:

1. Place galangal, lemon grass, red chiles, kaffir lime skin, coriander seed in a mortar and crush with the pestle for 1 minute.
2. Add shallots and garlic and crush until they form a smooth paste.
3. Add shrimp paste and crush all ingredients to form a thick paste.

