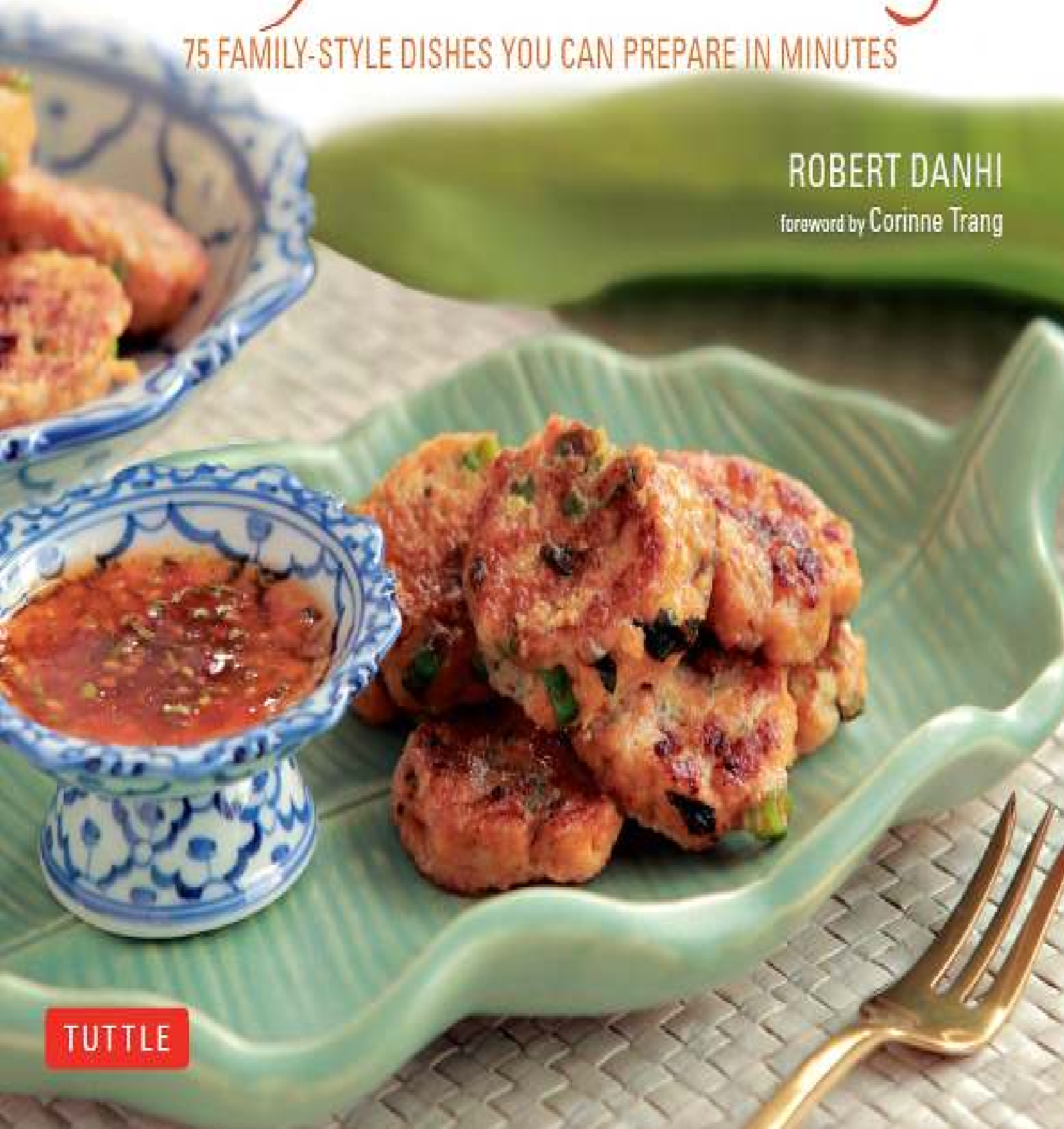


Easy Thai Cooking

75 FAMILY-STYLE DISHES YOU CAN PREPARE IN MINUTES

ROBERT DANHI

foreword by Corinne Trang



TUTTLE

"Easy Thai Cooking is a manifestation of Robert Danhi's intense passion—and deep knowledge—about Thai cuisine. A must-have for Thai food lovers who wish to explore beyond Tom Yum and Pad Thai."

—Bee Yinn Low, author of *Easy Chinese Recipes*

"We have known Chef Robert Danhi for more than 10 years and his work and love of Thai food have always connected us. The more we get to know each other, the more we become aware of how wonderful Thai food can be when Chef Danhi creates a recipe."

—Kobkaew and Ning Najpinij,
KHAO Cooking School, Bangkok

"What a remarkable book! Simple, practical, easy to execute, with a variety and range that will bring so much joy to your everyday dining table. A must for all foodies, culinary students and beginners." —Chef Wan

Thai cooking has taken the world by storm. Its rich combinations of sweet, sour, salty, and spicy flavors makes Thai dining a complete sensory pleasure. Most people think Thai dishes are difficult to prepare, but Robert Danhi's *Easy Thai Cooking* proves that isn't so. This book gives you a variety of easy-to-make recipes and techniques that allow you to recreate the flavors of Thailand in your own kitchen. Chef Robert Danhi has spent over twenty years traveling in Thailand and wants to share everything he's learned about Thai food in his new book, featuring 75 delicious Thai recipes.

James Beard nominee and CIA trained chef, Robert Danhi, gives you expert guidance on acquiring and maintaining a well-stocked Thai pantry. With these basic ingredients and his step-by-step instructions you can make stunning dishes like Grilled Chicken Wings with Kaffir Lime Chili Glaze or Sweet-n-Spicy Pork Ribs or Green Mango and Cashew Salad.



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Foreword by Corinne Trang



The cuisine of Thailand remains one of the most popular cuisines in the world. No matter where I've taught or lectured, I've often encountered students who wanted to learn how to cook Thai food. As a result, in my lesson plans, I've always included a popular Thai recipe or two, and now I can recommend to them a cookbook they'll actually use for cooking. *Easy Thai Cooking* by Robert Danhi, includes easy to understand step-by-step simple and delicious recipes for the home cook and professional chef alike. For more than 20 years Robert has traveled back to Thailand, immersing himself in its food culture and bringing back with him a wonderful array of authentic recipes he's recreated in such a way that anyone can grasp. Filled with classics such as Thai Spring Rolls, curries, satays, and Pineapple Fried Jasmine Rice, as well as contemporary recipes such as Red Curry Shrimp Cakes, Sriracha Chicken Salad, and Coriander Beef, *Easy Thai Cooking* is a great illustration of how a classic cuisine inevitably evolves over time, due to trade, tourism, neighboring countries, and any number of factors. For example, many Asian aunts all made spring rolls differently, yet the original family spring roll recipe was my grandmother's. Same source, but different hands and as a result new interpretations. Robert explains from the beginning, how there is not one defining flavor profile that can describe Thailand's food. Rather, like all world cuisines, there are regional differences. Read *Easy Thai Cooking*, follow the recipes, but loosen up in the kitchen, he's giving you the path to authentic Thai flavors and textures as well as the freedom to enjoy the process of cooking by giving you smart shortcuts (like calling for store-bought items such as curry paste, coconut milk, and tamarind concentrate, if you don't feel like

making your own from scratch). The chapters are broken down into traditional cookbook chapters, organizing vegetables, fish, and meat into separate chapters, for example, but I pay special attention to the chapter entitled “Basic Recipes,” which contains a few essential recipes that are at the core of Thai cuisine, such as fried shallots, garlic, and chilies, and a few sauces including homemade Sriracha, if you so desire. I love Robert’s loose approach to cooking, always taking into account and respecting Thailand’s unique cuisine. The flavors are authentically Thai, yet there is room for experimenting because, as he says, “things ALWAYS change.”

Enjoy!

Corinne Trahan
Corinne Trahan





My Adventures with Thai Food

My first trip to Southeast Asia came at the relatively young age of nineteen, over 20 years ago, the year prior I had met Estrellita Leong, a beautiful Malaysian woman. We met while taking a cooking class in Los Angeles. We took a journey to visit her family in Malaysia and while we were in the region we visited Thailand. It was immediately apparent that Thailand had a very different food culture. Since then, Thailand's unrestrained range of flavors have delighted my soul.

Once you arrived in the Land of Smiles (as Thailand is called), you know that this is an amazing place, a place where everyone feels welcome. There are endless offerings of food everywhere you look, the lively street corners are active with culinary exchange and narrow alleyways are packed with people eating, chatting, and playfully laughing about the day's happenings. Open air restaurants churn out plates of addictively spicy cuisines that can be traced to the colorful local markets that supply the country with a bounty of crisp vegetables, aromatic herbs, and fresh seafood.

In the past two decades I have dedicated my life to gaining a better understanding of this region's culinary identity, immersing myself into the traditional food ways that have evolved over the last few thousand years. My first book, *Southeast Asian Flavors* was published with the goal to summarize this dynamic region and give the world a snapshot of the unique cultures of Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore. This book is different.

What makes this book different?

This book is about everyday cooking for the home cook. Traditional recipes? Not really. Authentic flavors? For sure! My wish is that these recipes become your "go to" recipes for when friends come over for a quick meal, or you need to whip up a weekday dinner or for a party, or a sit-down meal with the family.

Easy Thai Cooking was created after numerous requests for me to write a book with simpler recipes than *Southeast Asian Flavors*. Frankly, at first I was hesitant to write an "Easy Thai Cookbook." Fearful that I would oversimplify recipes that had taken centuries to create. I have too much respect for Thai people and their food culture. Then

started to think about all the food I had eaten in Thailand that were not the iconic dishes that food writers have memorialized in thousands of Thai books, like the *tom yum goon* (hot and sour shrimp soup) and papaya salad (*som tom*), and saw that food evolves and that Thais cook just like us. Not all my meals at home are American classics. People across the US cook from a similar pantry. So I began to lighten up a bit and think of ways I could create a book with recipes that taste Thai but may not be the traditional versions that I have come to love. Rather, the food I eat when visiting a friend's home in Koh Samui, attending a party in Chiang Mai, or walking down the street late one night in Bangkok discovering a vendor selling their version of fried ramen noodles

I spent countless hours recalling the food I cooked in my home; the recipes I created in my test kitchen; the flavors of Thailand that I fashioned from the condiments on my shelves and from my produce packed refrigerator. I began to realize that the cooking principles I employed in creating dishes that tasted Thai were not really Thai recipes *per se*. There is no one flavor profile that encompasses all of Thailand's food but there are some complex flavors conjured by combining ingredients in balance and employing cooking techniques that produces tastes that are distinctively Thai. It was an "ah-ha" moment, excited that I figured out the focus of the book, I began to pour through my notes, recipe books, thousands of photos, hundreds of videos that I have compiled over the years. I did look at some classic dishes and constructed recipes that pay homage to them but don't quite replicate them.

This was not a new process for me. I taught the culinary arts full time for many years and while teaching at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, I had to figure out a way to teach authentic food without over simplifying it. I found myself saying "There are a lot of right ways to make a traditional dish...and there are a few ways to do it wrong." For instance, using heavy cream instead of coconut milk in a Thai curry changes it all together and, in my opinion, it's no longer Thai food. Now, what if I used premixed curry paste instead? Well, if you go to local markets in Thailand you will see mounds of curry paste waiting to be scooped up and taken home to create an authentic curry. So I began to accept that selecting some key pre-made ingredients could save considerable time and get me closer to creating a simpler recipe for the home cook and still retain the taste of real Thai food.

Some of the recipes that follow I have enjoyed in Thailand, others are renditions of classics that are sure to satisfy, and then there are some recipes that I created. They began with the first step of what I like to call "Cooking on Paper." Step one: decide on a flavor profile that is typically Thai: a salad with a sour-salty and sweet dressing, based on raw ingredients, tossed to order and accented with fresh herbs. Then I look back at the many times I have been to Thailand and try to recall dishes that match that description. Step two: read through the dozens of Thai books I have amassed looking for common threads that run through that style of recipe. Step three: formulate the resulting dish.

Using my computer, I used a recipe template, “guesstimating” the ingredient amounts. I would do this for a few weeks, compiling enough recipes to fill a few days of intense cooking. Then I go to the kitchen to try it out, I prepare all the ingredients and keep them measured separately to get a feeling if they are in the right proportions.



I have even developed a technique for what I call “cooking like a chef.” Suppose I am making a stir-fry sauce that I can’t figure out the exact amount for the ingredients. I weigh each open container and enter this into one column of a spreadsheet, then cook like I normally would: using my heart, hands and mind. Then, after I get the right taste, I weigh these ingredients again and enter them in the next column and it calculates how much I used. Then I convert to volume measures and edit the recipe. I print out the recipe and get everything measured out ahead of time, prepare it as written, and make any necessary adjustments along the way. Even if it comes out perfectly, I always test it one more time. Every time I made the recipe I would ask the same very core question: “Does this taste Thai?”

So there you have it, simple recipes that have an authentic taste but may not be traditional recipes.

A Snapshot of Traditional Thai Culture

Many factors influence and create the characteristics of a culture. It all begins with the geography. Thailand is situated in between Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia. Most of the country is situated between 10° and 20° latitude in the northern hemisphere and its vast landscape enables a wide variety of crops to be grown and animals to be raised. The extensive river network is ideal for aquaculture. The Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea provides access to the ocean’s bounty and bustling ports for import and exportation, allowing Thailand to become a significant player in the food manufacturing world.

Unlike its surrounding neighbors, Thailand has never been colonized and so it seems to readily absorb foreign influences. A large majority of Thais are Buddhist and hence a spiritual approach to even the most mundane tasks is commonplace. All young males take their turns at becoming a monk. The sages roam the streets to collect food that is donated by average citizens, it is an honor to do so and these morsels of food sustain them each and every day.

The Thai spirit is truly special, they try to have fun in everything they do, actually they have a word for this, *sanuk*. It’s a much more casual social setting than any of the adjacent countries. Thais wearing shorts and t-shirts is commonplace. However, the

contrasting opposite is the formality seen each Monday where most of the population wears yellow clothing to honor the king, many with the king's official crest affixed to their outfit. Anytime they pass a photo or statue of the king they *wai*, this gesture of putting both hands together with a modest bow is a sign of respect, especially to elders. Just as with most of Asian cultures, "saving face" is very important, it is improper etiquette to embarrass yourself or others in public.

Another regional practice, specific to Southeast Asia, is not eating as often with chopsticks and more so with the combination of a spoon and fork. Once you try eating this way you will never go back. The spoon is held in your dominant hand and the fork is in the other hand pushing some rice, a bit of sauce and maybe a few stray bits of chili onto the spoon. Yes, chopsticks are used here, but mostly for noodle dishes and often in conjunction with a spoon in the other hand to scoop up the soup or sauce.

Thais possess an aesthetic for their food. Much of this may very well have evolved 700 years ago from Sukhothai, the capital of Thailand. The king was adamant that special attention and training was given to the artful presentation of food and ornate carving of fruits and vegetables. To this day, carved cucumber leaves may be used to scoop up Thai chili dip, national food carving happens throughout the year and an overall attention to details can be seen across every socio-economic group and region in Thailand.

Street food sustains today's modern busy city dwellers, many of these foods are one bowl meals meant to be eaten individually. More formal meals consist of a selection of dishes. Usually no special order is followed. At Thai homes, dishes are cooked and served out at room temperature (in the tropics things stay relatively warm) and all are eaten once. Relax and go with the flow!

Table condiments are a big deal in Southeast Asia, and Thailand is no exception. Most Thai tables have a few small jars filled with seasonings that each person can use according to their preference. The most common is a small jar filled with chopped Thai chilies covered with fish sauce, this gives you a burst of sodium along with a bit of spice. Ground roasted dry chilies are sprinkled on noodles, and often balanced with another table seasoning: granulated sugar. Other forms of heat like Sriracha chili sauce, and various others that don't have international status because they are created by individual street hawkers, restaurant cooks, and fine dining restaurant chefs.

Yes, there is a vibrant dining scene in Thailand and major cities like Bangkok are packed with posh dining establishments or Thai food and other international cuisines. And the multi-national hotel chains have numerous restaurants, and there are culinary schools that teach the traditional and modern art of Thai food.

Get in Your Kitchen and Cook!

This book is here to guide you as you explore the fabulous tastes of Thailand. If you need it, I have videos and photos to lead you step-by-step in the kitchen and give you

insight into the nuances that will help you create really special Thai food and drink (chefdanhi.com).

Haven't been to Thailand? Start planning now. In the meantime I want to share my experiences with you. Within the pages of this book I have hopefully provided you with enough information to get you on the right track creating the flavors of Thailand in your own kitchen. If you need help, reach out and I am here. Go to chefdanhi.com for contact information.

Stocking Your Thai Pantry

My goal in this chapter is to demystify the ingredients used within this book. Enabling you to find these building blocks of flavor at your local grocer or order them online. Once you know what to look for, discover how they are commonly used, and learn the basics for storage you are well on your way to creating the authentic flavors of Thailand in your kitchen.

The following pages will lead you through the basic ingredients, however, the quality and overall flavor variation between different growers, manufacturers, importers, and distributors is enormous, so knowing what to look for is essential in finding the most appropriate ingredient. Cooking the foods of Southeast Asia for the past two decades I have discovered, tasted, experimented with and sometimes, discarded thousands of things. What was once my favorite brand replaced by another one years later and other items, like rice powder already roasted and ground, I could not find even five years ago is now in most markets frequent. It is an evolving landscape and is why I created chefdanhi.com, to constantly keep you informed of the latest and greatest building blocks of Thai flavor. There are links there for finding your closest market stocked with Asian ingredients.

Stocking your kitchen puts you in control and only a few items need to be bought fresh. Storing these building blocks of flavor in your pantry, refrigerator and freezer allowing you to whip up a meal at a moment's notice. The freezer will extend the shelf life of some key ingredients. Buy and store some of these items for when you are in need. Some things such as banana leaves, lime leaves, chilies, shrimp, minced lemongrass can be bought and immediately stored in the freezer. The same goes for seeds, nuts, fried shallots, garlic, and dried shrimp.

Sometimes I like to get ahead and prepare some things before freezing. Peeled galangal and ginger hold up well, I simply grate them when frozen or slice a few pieces as needed. I even have minced lemongrass in bulk, and spread onto a baking sheet to freeze (freeze in small particles) then gather up into a bag or container so I can scoop them out and cook later—about 1 tablespoon minced lemongrass per stalk. If I have extra fresh squeezed lime juice, I portion into small containers, or an ice cube tray, freeze and pull out what I need. If you want to make your own curry pastes, look to my *Southeast Asian Flavors* book for the

recipes, you can make the paste and freeze in portions for later reference.

In Thailand, most condiments and spice pastes are stored at room temperature, however they often consume these items more quickly than Westerners. Hence, storing some items in the refrigerator makes them last longer. Chili sauces, curry pastes, seafood condiments (fish sauce, oyster sauce), and tamarind paste can be chilled for maximum quality retention.

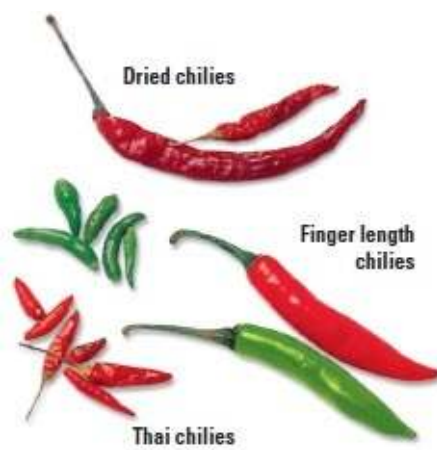
Fresh vegetables, fruits, herbs, meat, and seafood must be bought when you need them. Getting to know your local store's staff will surely help you glean the most select cuts of meat, fresh fish, and produce. Take the time to establish these relationships and you will be rewarded with the things you need to create truly delicious Thai flavors. I sometimes even bring samples of the food I make—keeping the staff happy means they will look out for quality ingredients for my Thai meal.



Asian Greens It almost pains me to group such a diverse family of vegetables into one category. The various deep green versions of bok choy, choy sum, water spinach, or flowering broccoli of the brassica family can be used in the recipes, use your judgment pairing heartier greens with bold flavored recipes. Firm, perky leaves and stems without any discoloration on the cut stem side are sure signs of freshness. Keep these covered to avoid wilting from dehydration.



Bean Sprouts Made from sprouting the small green mung beans. Fastidious cooks pick off the straggly ends one by one, leaving the sweetest pearly, white crunchy small stalks for adding texture to salads, noodle bowls and stir-fries. Avoid brown, wilted, or slimy bean sprouts. Handle them gently and keep them in an air tight bag or container for a couple of days.



Chilies The Thai people's passion and copious use of chilies is profound. The recipes in the book primarily use two chilies: the intensely spicy small **Thai chili** and the more mild, yet still hot, finger-length red chilies. These chilies are pounded, sliced thinly, minced, crushed or left whole for a gentle infusion. The capsaicin compound responsible for the spice is primarily located in the veins, seeds are guilty by close association and the rest of the chili has some heat (see "Working with Chilies," page 25). They should be firm, dark green to red and not shriveled and black. The best substitute is frozen Thai chilies, available in freezer section or just freeze fresh ones when available. You can substitute with Serrano. For the finger-length red chilies you could use jalapenos but I prefer the ripe red Fresno chilies.

Dried Chilies When chilies are dried their taste evolves since the drying process is slow they slightly ferment and concentrate, and achieve a deep red color. Water soaked chilies are often pounded or ground into spice pastes, marinades, and dressings. Also found on the table as a condiment, the dried chilies are roasted and ground. They can also be quickly fried whole and used as a spicy and crispy edible accompaniments to a variety of salads and other dishes.



Chili Paste in Soya Bean Oil (Nahm Prik Pow) Flavorful concoction of deep roasted-slightly sweet flavor comes from fried garlic and shallots, chilies, and dried shrimp. Palm sugar and tamarind balance the flavor and crates this multi-purpose sauce used in many of the recipes in this book. The base of a quick hot and sour soup (see Hot and Sour Tamarind Soup, page 56), component of a glaze (Grilled Chicken Wings with Tangy Chili Glaze, page 46), or simply spread on bread with a few slices of cucumber as a snack this is one of my favorite ingredients. This complex sauce is not easily duplicated and this ingredient tends to hold a pivotal role in the recipes it resides in. If a store-bought product cannot be found, you can make it yourself (see Thai Chili Jam, page 36). Once a container is open it keep in the refrigerator for months.



Cinnamon (Cassia) The dried bark of two varieties of trees, is infused in savory stews and broths and is part of the famous Chinese five spice used throughout Asia. The thicker bark known as cassia is most common in Asia, yet the thinner type is acceptable in small amounts. Rather than grinding to a powder, it is common to use whole strips to infuse a soup or sauce. The two different types of this spice do not need to be labeled differently so follow the aforementioned visual clues and try to find the thicker cassia at an Asian market or online.



Coriander Leaves (Cilantro) The leafy green herb from which the coriander seed produced has an amazing flavor all its own. Possessing a lemony, floral aroma and sharp tartness on the palate. As the most widely used herb in Southeast Asia all parts of this plant are very useful. The leaves and tender stems are usually chopped together, the seeds are used as a spice (Coriander Beef, Page 69), and roots have an earthy flavor used in most curry pastes and many marinades.

Coriander Seeds These seeds emerge from the top of the coriander (cilantro) plant at maturity. Their strong earthy and lemon-like flavor is ground into spice pastes. Toast seeds until slightly darkened, let cool, then, if need be, grind. There is no substitute, you might want to try to use fresh coriander leaves (cilantro).

Fresh Coconuts Coconuts change as they mature, young green-skinned ones are packed with juice (referred to as coconut water) and the flesh is soft and gelatinous. The older they get the thicker, and firmer and rich with fat that provides coconut milk, a pillar of Thai cooking. Cracking open a coconut requires a few swift swings of a large knife. Buying fresh coconuts can be challenging, many stores have inventory that sit for a long time and go sour, so seek out a reliable supplier. Young coconut juice/water can be bought canned, actually some brands are quite tasty. The frozen plastic containers have the best flavor and still somewhat silky flesh. Mature coconut should be heavy with juice, give a shake to feel for this and listen



Coconut Milk and Cream Decadent white liquid with a hint of sweetness and velvety smooth texture. Made by taking the shredded hard white flesh of mature coconuts, blended with water and squeezed to yield opulent creamy fluid. Coconut cream on the other hand is traditionally made by squeezing the shredded meat without water, then the water is added for a second extract on coconut milk. To learn more about making your own fresh coconut milk look up *Southeast Asian Flavors* or chefdanhi.com. Coconut milk is used as a foundation for savory curries, to enrich soups and sauces and create decadent sweet treats.

Canned or boxed coconut milk is pasteurized, often homogenized and sometimes stabilized; making the milk thicker than hand-made. To keep it simple this book was developed using all canned/boxed milk.

Squeezing the shredded meat without water traditionally makes coconut cream, then the water is added for a second extract on coconut milk. Used to begin Thai curries (see pages 28–29), for coconut toppings and custards and other places the rich satisfying cream is appropriate. Coconut milk should have about 15–23% fat content. Coconut cream contains about 24% fat.



Eggplant There are dozens of varieties commonly used in Asia, in Thailand some common varieties include the round (1½–2 inch / 4–5 cm) diameter variegated green orbs, or the long slender purple Chinese/Japanese varieties. The variegated green are used raw to scoop up spicy chili dips or simmered in green curries, where as the longer eggplants are usually cooked. Firm fleshed, smooth skin with firm stems should be present. Store loosely covered in the refrigerator.

Fried Garlic and Shallots These two favorite flavor boosters have become staples in kitchens across all of Southeast Asia. Although browned garlic and shallots can be created at the first stage of cooking a recipe, these crispy versions are used at the last moment, adding a crunch, a rich flavor and appealing look. You can make your own (see Fried Garlic, page 36 and Fried Shallots page 37). Bags, jars or plastic containers are available—the quality varies greatly. I look for those that only list shallot or garlic and oil, those with palm oil tend to have

the best crunch and overall flavor. Avoid those that have flour or other starches included. They keep for months in the freezer or even the refrigerator where I keep a jar with a shake top for quick reference. They can be left at room temperature for weeks, I use my homemade versions at room temperature. If they are store-bought, I store them frozen and defrost when needed.



Fish Sauce This salty, pungent, and essential seasoning has an amber color, and substantial umami impact, rounding out a lot of flavorful Thai foods. It is often the major sodium source in Thai food. Cooking a majority of real Thai food for vegetarians is a challenge since fish sauce is used so often, I turn to light soy sauce or low-sodium soy sauce and begin with the same amount. If you don't use it often you may want to keep in your refrigerator to slow down the aging process. Sometimes sodium crystals form in the bottle over extended times, no need to worry, proceed on!



Galangal (blue ginger) (Kha) Much tougher than ginger, the readily apparent lines around the circumference of the thin skin encompasses a mustard-camphor like citrusy aroma. I like to keep them loosely wrapped in the refrigerator. If they are hard for you to find (or order online) peel and freeze a large piece (you can find it in many freezer sections at markets also). When in need, grate it frozen so you can measure them easily or slice off a few pieces. Dried powder or slices have no flavor, better to use nothing or substitute with ginger.



Green Papaya Actually an immature, not just unripe papaya, is firm and really not the

flavorful, it's a textural experience and a medium for seasonings. Look for smooth green skin without wrinkles. The surface should be very firm, almost hard. Store loosely covered or in a drawer in the refrigerator.



Kaffir Lime Leaves and Zest This aromatic branch of the citrus family tree is prized most for its pungent leaves. The wrinkly fruit has a wonderfully strong scented zest used in spice pastes but the juice of the fruit is almost never used. Leaves are steeped whole in broths and curries, fried quickly to a crisp for snacks or garnish. Look for the uniquely double lobed sturdy leaves that are shiny and dark green on one side and a matte light green on the other. For every 6 lime leaves I use 1 teaspoon lime zest, usually added towards the end of the recipe. Best when fresh, useless when dried. They freeze quite well, make sure to keep them airtight and only pull out those needed for each recipe.



Lemongrass These sturdy slender stalks are an icon for Thai food. It has a crisp citrus aroma that perfumes Thai dishes at all ends of the spectrum from cool salads to fiery hot curries. Most commonly, the bottom 4–6 inches (10–15 cm) are used for infusing, mincing, or slicing very thinly to shorten the tough fibers that run lengthwise. The outer tougher leaves must be stripped away, revealing the aromatic and tender inside. As a substitute I would suggest 1 teaspoon lemon zest with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon lime zest for each stalk of lemongrass. Better yet, buy frozen already chopped lemongrass or buy fresh stalks when available and freeze them for future use. Keep them, wrapped loosely, in the refrigerator for a week or two.



Limes Limes and all citrus are indigenous to the Asian continent. There are a variety of lime

used in Thai cuisine including the largest Persian lime or common lime, small “key” lime, knobby kaffir lime, and the perfumed kalamansi lime. This book only utilizes the most common limes. In Thai cuisine, the juice is commonly used in uncooked recipes for dressing and as a final tableside garnish, the flavor does not hold up well under heat or over time, so juice your limes as you need them. Never buy bottled lime juice. The zest is grated when the aroma of the lime is what you want, the oils contain most of the precious aroma. Look for bright or dark green limes that are firm to the touch without any brown or soft spots. They can be kept room temperature for a few days, but I keep them loosely covered in the refrigerator.

Long Beans (Yard Beans) Heartier than standard green beans these earthy tasting beans are 1–2 feet long (about ½ meter). Snacked on raw as part of a table salad to accompany salads and rice dishes or cooked, these are flavorsome beans. I prefer the deep green variety. The stem end should not be dried out and shriveled. Store covered loosely in the refrigerator.



Mint (Peppermint) Mint’s unique ability to produce a refreshing cooling sensation gives it a star role in the Southeast Asia. It may pack a wallop of flavor yet extensive exposure to heat kills its flavor so it’s usually eaten raw or added at the very last moment. There are two primary varieties: peppermint (more commonly used), which has wrinkled leaves and hard woody stems; while spearmint has smooth darker green leaves and soft edible stems and has a more assertive bite—same as Thai basil.



Dried flat rice noodles



Dried rice vermicelli noodles



Fresh flat rice noodles



Dried bean thread noodles
(Cellophane noodles, Glass noodles)

Noodles, Dried Flat Rice Probably the most popular noodle in Thailand, these noodles come in many sizes, as thin as ⅛ inch (3 mm) and as wide as ¾ inch (2 cm). Transform these noodles into soups and stir-fried dishes. Soak for 30 minutes in room temperature water before a quick boil. More often than not dried

noodles will be labeled with the Vietnamese “Banh Pho.” Store at room temperature, sealed air tight—almost indefinitely.

Dried Rice Vermicelli Noodles (Rice Sticks) The thinnest of all rice noodles, they have a subtle flavor and delicate texture. In Thailand there is one special variety known as Khanom Jin—the batter is slightly fermented before making noodles. Salads, noodle bowls, soups, and stir-fried dishes all welcome these firm threads that act as flavor carriers. I prefer to soak them in water first, then boiled to cook for the best texture. I look for ingredient statements that list only rice and water (maybe salt). Recently some manufacturers have been adding tapioca starch, making them more durable but creating a different texture.

Fresh Flat Rice Noodles The Chinese invented the technique of making a thin batter of ground rice or rice flour batter that’s steamed into sheets then cut into various widths. Once refrigerated they get brittle, so buy them, take them home, and pull into individual noodles, then gather up and refrigerate in portions. They are often sold on a shelf in a non-refrigerated section of the market. Look for markets that have daily deliveries of these supple ribbons. It’s okay to buy at room temperature and use that same day, then keep in the refrigerator for up to a week, they are vastly superior on the first day.

Dried Bean Thread Noodles (Cellophane Noodles, Glass Noodles) Skinny, transparent noodles made from the starch of mung beans. Little flavor to speak of but with a resilient texture. They are used in salads, soups, and spring rolls. Simply cooked by covering dried noodles in boiling water for about 5 minutes and then draining.

Oyster Sauce This Asian food essential was invented in China in 1888 by Lee Kum Kee, one of history’s finest accidents. A pot of oyster stew was forgotten, it boiled down into the enchantingly heady nectar. Now used across Asia, this culinary powerhouse is deep brown with hues of gold and has a potent salty, slightly sweet, seafood flavor. Flavor from oyster extract, slightly sweet with sugar, seasoned with salt, and thickened with starch, it has the unique ability to not only season, but tenderize marinated meats and seafood. It also can give a distinctive sheen to sauces and glazed items. The more oyster extractives the better—higher priced bottles are often an indication of this desirable quality trait. For those with diets that exclude oysters, look for “vegetarian oyster or stir-fry sauce” that can be used as substitute, using equal amounts.



Pandanus leaves Long slender deep green leaves contain the most charming aroma due to the natural presence of 2-Acetyl-1-pyrroline. Any green sweet in Thailand is bound to be colored and aromatically infused with this special herb. There is no substitute, vanilla added to a recipe that calls for pandanus may taste good but will not taste Thai. I buy fresh when it

available, and freeze some when I get home or I buy frozen leaves. Always trim the light colored bottom portion (it tastes like dirt). Keep fresh, wrapped tightly in the refrigerator for a few days, frozen they keep for months.

Peppercorns True peppercorns created the primary spicy sensation across Asia before chilies arrived in the 15th century. The same plant is processed into three colors: green peppercorns are picked immature and usually pickled; black are produced by fermenting and drying green ones; white are soaked, husked, and sun dried. Whole black pepper-corns can be used to infuse; coarsely crushed they add bursts of fiery bites; white pepper is generally ground finest, added to spice pastes or added at the very end of cooking. Green peppercorns are usually used whole. Thai cooks use each colored peppercorn separately and don't buy mixtures. Green ones are rarely found fresh outside of Asia. I buy them brined in salted water (avoid vinegar). Black and white are both sold dried. Look for plump, somewhat evenly colored white and evenly shaped shriveled black peppercorns.

Peanuts (Groundnuts) An icon for Southeast Asian cuisine, peanuts are included on all parts of the menu. Creamy peanut sauce, pan-roasted, crushed, and tossed into noodles or transformed into a sweet filling for a sweet snack, the peanut's versatility is unmatched. Roasting your own peanuts has its flavorful rewards. Slowly pan roasting or a quick deep-frying are best. Some shelled peanuts still have the skin attached, they are delicious if not a bit messy to peel so you may want to get peeled raw nuts and roast them yourself. If you choose to save time by buying them pre-roasted then make sure they are unsalted and unseasoned. Keep in the freezer to extend their life to 6 months.

Pork Fat This is a common cooking ingredient. The flavor elements it contributes and the texture it creates is unmatched. This is like to deep-fry, pan-fry, or stir-fry in rendered pork fat. You can buy what is labeled as lard—a somewhat neutral flavored pork fat. It does have more flavor and a thicker mouth feel than vegetable oil and, for some stir-fries, I like this.

Jasmine Rice Uniquely aromatic rice naturally contains aromatic compound called 2-Acetylpyrroline. Commonly called steamed rice by mistake it is cooked by covering with water and bringing it to a boil. Jasmine rice that's grown in Thailand is government authorized to be labeled as Thai Ho Mali, it is quite special. This species, however, is grown around the globe even in California, with great results.

Sticky Rice A long grain rice packed with a unique starch structure that gives the cooked rice a firm and elastic texture. A staple of northern Thailand, usually soaked then steamed. Used in sweets, toasted and ground as a flavorful thickener and used to scoop up sauce and salads. Look for the stark long-grain white rice often labeled as glutinous or sweet rice. There is no true substitute, regular long grain rice can be served as a side instead. Store at room temperature, sealed air tight—almost indefinitely.

Salt In the USA, most cooks and chefs prefer kosher salt. Most sea salt is also not over-processed, and available globally, so that is another salt you can use. The size of the grains actually can make a significant difference in measuring salt. Since salt is not used too much in the book (sodium is usually added in the form of fish sauce, soy sauce, or ready-made

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