

Osher Cooking Class @ Vanderbilt University with Jim Myers

Class II: Fresh rolls with nuoc cham and tom ka (gai) soup

Nuoc Cham: This is the classic Vietnamese table condiment that's the perfect blend of sour, sweet, salty and spicy. Start with a ½ cup of water, then add fresh lime juice and grated palm sugar. When that tastes balance (i.e. not too sweet), add fish sauce a small amount at a time until it's balanced to your personal taste. Slice 1-2 small Thai chili peppers for heat, seeds and all. You can adjust heat by removing seeds first.

Fresh Rolls: Dampen rice wrappers (Three Ladies Brand is the best), lay flat on a non-sticky surface and fill with rice vermicelli, herbs (mint, cilantro, thai basil, fish basil (!), cucumbers and carrot sticks, meat or shrimp of choice. Use peanut dipping sauce cut with a little fish sauce and some chopped chilli peppers).

Tom Ka Gai

Serves 4

2 inch piece of galangal, peeled and sliced
small bunch fresh cilantro with stems
4 kaffir lime leaves (also called makrut), torn (each leaf is a figure-8 shape)

1 stalk lemongrass, cut in 2-inch pieces, bruised
3 tablespoons fish sauce ("three crabs" or "red boat" are my favorite brands)
juice of 2 small limes
2 cups coconut milk + 1 cup for adjusting flavor
1 can whole straw mushrooms, rinsed (we used fresh shitake in class)
1/2 pound skinless chicken breast, cut into thin strips (optional)
1 red Thai chile or Serrano, seeded and sliced (optional)

1. Put the galangal, cilantro roots (tied in a bundle), lime leaves, lemongrass and 4 cups of water in a saucepan and bring to the boil. (Putting these in cheese cloth makes them easier to remove. You can also run the soup through a colander later, before you add the mushrooms and chicken.)

2. Add the [fish sauce](#) and half of your lime juice, decrease the heat, and simmer for 10 minutes.

3. Remove the cilantro roots. Add the coconut milk, bring back to a boil and boil for a couple of minutes.

4. Add the chicken pieces and straw mushrooms and cook for just a couple minutes, until the chicken is soft and milky looking and cooked through.

5. Throw in the chile and mix well. (optional)

Serve in bowls with the cilantro leaves roughly chopped and scattered over the top.

Options & Notes:

-use shrimp instead of chicken

-use fresh crimini (brown) mushrooms or shitake for a stronger flavor instead of canned straw mushrooms. Just add them with the coconut milk to cook longer. Gives the soup a deeper, earthier flavor.

-ginger is not a substitute for galanga. The Vietnamese market near Kien Gang usually carries frozen galanga. For some reason K&S doesn't. Most Asian markets carry fresh lemon grass and kaffir leaves. The Cambodian market on 8th Ave. South (if still open) usually has everything you need and their coconut milk is a lot cheaper and you can find Thai brands.

-I always tweak this to my own personal taste. For example, adjust the tartness and richness with more lime juice or more coconut milk. If not salty enough, add more fish sauce to taste.