whatever spelling they think works best. *Pad kra pao, pad gaprao,* and *pad kapow* are all different spellings I have seen referring to the same dish.

I have to note that there *is* an official guide to romanizing Thai words, but this is a complex set of rules that is not very helpful in conveying how words actually sound and is often overly complicated, so I have chosen not to follow it. This is why you see silent h's added to words like *khao soi* and *pad thai* for seemingly no reason, and why Thailand's main airport is called "Suvarnabhumi" but is actually pronounced *su-wun-na-poom*!

The Basic Thai Pantry

The only real hurdle to making Thai cooking a weeknight breeze is gathering the basic pantry ingredients. Thankfully, many of our ingredients last a long time in the pantry, fridge, or freezer, so once you've made your first trip to the grocery store, you'll be well equipped for the next little while.

The Salty

In Western cuisines, granulated salt is added to essentially every dish. In Thai cuisine, however, salt on its own is rarely used in savory cooking because we like to use a variety of sauces that give not only saltiness but also flavor.

FERMENTED SHRIMP PASTE | *GAPI* | กะปิ This salty, purplish-gray paste made from fermented small shrimp (or sometimes krill) is the epitome of funky and is used all over Southeast Asia. It's one of those things that tastes better than it smells. It has lovers and haters. I am a proud lover of shrimp paste! You may have eaten shrimp paste without knowing it, because most Thai curry pastes contain it in small amounts. You can buy Thai shrimp paste in a plastic tub, or the Malaysian type in a plastic-wrapped brick called *belacan*. Where shrimp paste is used in small

amounts, such as in curry pastes, you can omit it and add extra fish sauce instead.

Note: Do not confuse this with a product called shrimp paste that looks like an oily orange paste and comes in a glass jar. That shrimp paste is *mun goong* and it is made from shrimp tomalley cooked with herbs and seasonings. It's delicious added to fried rice and stir-fries, but it is not fermented and cannot be used as a substitute for *gapi.*

FERMENTED SOYBEAN PASTE | *TAO JIEW* | เต้าเจี้ยว This delightful chunky sauce is what I call the Thai miso, but with a pourable consistency and the whole soybeans still visible. It's very salty, with an edge of acidity, and its aroma is different from that of Japanese miso. Many a time I have added too much *tao jiew* to a dish—it's actually a lot saltier than it looks (somehow the whole soybeans make it look like you can add a lot of it!)—so this is one ingredient I wouldn't eyeball. It's not used often, but when it is used, it is important to the character of that dish. Healthy Boy is the most popular brand of *tao jiew* outside Thailand. You can substitute Japanese miso or Korean doenjang in roughly equal amounts, but be prepared to taste and adjust.

FISH SAUCE | *NAM PLA* | น้ำปลา A must-have in any Thai home. Made from fermented anchovies and salt, this pungent amber liquid adds a sharp saltiness and a punch of umami that is an iconic characteristic of many Thai dishes, but especially our salads. When buying fish sauce, look for brands that contain as few ingredients as possible, preferably only anchovies, salt, and sugar. Squid, Megachef, and Tiparos are classic, good-quality Thai brands that are inexpensive, easy to find, and perfect for everyday cooking. A good, widely available Vietnamese brand is Three Crabs; it's a little milder and less salty than Thai ones, so this is a good choice if you prefer things less salty. Red Boat is a premium brand that contains no sugar, and it is pricier, but you can really taste the difference. Do not cheap out on fish sauce; the difference is huge.

If you're vegetarian, you can substitute soy sauce in roughly equal amounts. Larger Asian markets do sell vegan fish sauce, but some of

them can be rather awful. However, I have sampled a pleasant-tasting one labeled “premium pineapple-made vegetarian fish sauce” from Vietnam. There are many recipes on the internet for vegan fish sauce, but no combination of non-fish ingredients is going to make it taste fishy—so adjust your expectations.

OYSTER SAUCE | *NAM MUN HOI* | น้ำมันหอย This is the queen of stir-fry sauces. It’s so delicious in itself, you could drizzle it over some blanched veggies and call it a day. Imagine a combination of the briny flavors of oysters, the umami of soy sauce, and a subtle sweetness—that’s the flavor of oyster sauce. A common Thai brand is Maekrua, but the widely available Lee Kum Kee is also great for Thai cooking. Oyster sauce quality varies significantly, with the better ones containing more “oyster extract,” which is the oyster poaching liquid. Lee Kum Kee has a few grades, but these two are the most common: the basic Panda brand, which is fine for everyday use, and the premium “lady on a boat” version, which I recommend for recipes that use oyster sauce as a main ingredient. Price and protein content are also a good general indicator of how many oysters were used to make the sauce—the more expensive and the more protein, the greater the quantity of oysters.

SALT | *GLEUA* | เกลือ Salt on its own is not used very often in Thai cooking except for in desserts. When we do add it, most people use iodized table salt, and sometimes sea salt. Since this book will find its way into homes all around the world, I’ve decided to call for table salt in my recipes because it is the one salt everyone has access to (we don’t have kosher salt in Thailand, for example). This is important to note, because salt measures differently depending on the size of the grains—larger, more irregular-shaped grains will not pack as tightly into a teaspoon as the fine grains of table salt. You can, of course, use any salt that you like, just keep in mind that you may need to adjust the amount slightly. Conversion charts for different types of salt can be easily found online.

SOY SAUCE | *SEE EW KAO* | ซีอิ๊วขาว You probably have Japanese or Chinese soy sauce in your kitchen already, but Thai soy sauce is unique.

Compared with those more common soy sauces, ours is a little lighter in both color and body, and has a distinctly different aroma and flavor. The literal translation of *see ew kao* is “white soy sauce,” which actually refers not to its color but to the fact that it is the thinnest and lightest among our soy sauces (it’s still a dark brown color). Healthy Boy is a classic brand available at many Asian markets, but if you can’t find it, Japanese soy sauce will work as a substitute. Note: Healthy Boy makes various kinds of soy sauce, and to make sure you’re getting *see ew kao*, look for a bottle labeled “thin soy sauce” (yellow label) or “mushroom soy sauce” (brown label); these are two varieties of *see ew kao* (see top photo on this page). The mushroom version is one I prefer, though either will work in the recipes just fine. Do not use a non-Thai mushroom soy sauce as a substitute.

SOY SAUCE, BLACK | *SEE EW DUM* | ซีอิ๊วดำ Translating literally as “black soy sauce,” *see ew dum* is a nice-to-have ingredient but not essential because it’s usually not integral to the dish. Think soy sauce mixed with molasses—it’s thick, mildly salty, a little sweet, and very dark. It’s used mainly to add a dark brown color and a touch of richer flavor. Whenever you see a Thai dish with a very dark color, like some dark soup broths or stir-fries, it’s probably *see ew dum* in action.

Black soy sauce brands vary significantly in terms of how dark they are, so in my recipes I always give a range, and you should always start with the smaller amount. Healthy Boy brand, for example, is very dark, and it’s easy to add too much if you’re not careful. Dragonfly brand, the one I grew up with, is lighter and more forgiving, so it is my preference if I can find it. You can instead use Chinese dark soy sauce, which will give you the dark color, but it tends to be saltier, so if using more than ½ teaspoon (5 ml) or so, you might want to cut back on other salty stuff you’re adding.

THAI SEASONING SAUCE (GOLDEN MOUNTAIN SAUCE) | *SAUCE PROONG ROHT* | ซอสปรุงรส You might be asking yourself, “Aren’t they *all* seasoning sauces?” Yes, but there is a specific type of sauce that we literally call “seasoning

sauce.” I suppose it’s because they didn’t know what else to call it and didn’t want it confused with soy sauce…though it kind of *is* soy sauce! *Sauce proong roht* is basically soy sauce with a different character, and it is a bit richer and darker than *see ew kao*.

Although it’s not an essential ingredient to stock, you can find Golden Mountain brand seasoning sauce at many Asian markets. Both Maggi Seasoning and Bragg Liquid Aminos taste similar, and either will work as a substitute. In my recipes, *sauce proong roht* is usually used in combination with soy sauce to create a more complex flavor, but if you don’t have it or the other options, substituting more soy sauce is fine.

A Note on Storage:

Salty things keep well by nature because salt is a preservative, and in Thailand, most people keep these sauces at room temperature because we go through them fast. But even though they won’t spoil, the flavors can change for the worse over time. So, for occasional users, I recommend keeping these items in the fridge. Oyster sauce should always be kept in the fridge, as it isn’t as salty as the others and can get moldy over time.

The Sour

In most cases, the sour flavor of Thai dishes comes from only two things: lime juice and/or tamarind. Limes are used when we want a bright, fresh-tasting acidity, such as in salads, while tamarind has a richer, sweeter flavor and is usually used in hot cooked dishes.

Thai Ingredient Playlist

Palm Sugar | *Nam Taan Peep*

LIMES | *MANAO* | มะนาว Limes are pretty straightforward. I'll just mention here that lime juice tastes best when it's not cooked, so if adding to cooked dishes, add it at the end. Freshly squeezed lime juice has the best flavor, though I have found that crystalized lime powder (True Lime brand) is a great substitute in a pinch. Do not use bottled, shelf-stable lime juice, especially in Thai salads where it is a main dressing ingredient, as it can be slightly bitter and doesn't have as much of the lovely citrus flavor. Choose limes that have smooth, shiny skins, which indicate a juicy lime.

TAMARIND PASTE | *NAM MAKAAM PIAK* | น้ำมะขามเปียก Tamarind is a fruit with dark brown sticky flesh encased in a hard, brittle pod. The pulp can range from very sweet to very sour. For cooking, we mix sour tamarind pulp with water until it is a pourable liquid that can be easily incorporated into the dish.

You can buy prepared Thai tamarind paste in plastic tubs or glass jars, usually labeled "tamarind concentrate" or "tamarind paste" and found in the sauces section of your Asian grocery store. As a side note, the name "tamarind concentrate" is a misnomer because this product is not actually a concentrate. Quite the opposite!

I used to use prepared tamarind paste for its convenience, but I have noticed that it's often too diluted and lacks flavor, so I have switched to making my own from store-bought pulp, and the result is a million times better. The pulp is squished together into a block and sold wrapped in plastic. To make your own, see Homemade Tamarind Paste (this page).

Do not get Indian tamarind concentrate, as that is a very different product. While Thai and Vietnamese ready-to-use tamarind pastes are diluted pulp with a thick but easily pourable consistency, Indian tamarind *is* a true concentrate. It is extremely thick, sticky, and much more sour than what we use in Thailand.

If you can find fresh tamarind in the pods, great, but don't use them for cooking. These are sweet tamarind for eating fresh, so go ahead and enjoy them as sweet, sticky, yummy snacks!

Once tamarind paste is opened, refrigerate if you'll finish it within a few months, or freeze in an ice cube tray, then transfer to a freezer bag.

The Sweet

In Thai cuisine we mainly use two types of sugar: granulated sugar and palm sugar. On rare occasions, brown sugar is used.

GRANULATED SUGAR | *NAM TAAN SAI* | น้ำตาลทราย You know all about good old granulated white sugar, but I want to mention that even though it isn't the traditional sugar, it is now very commonly used in Thai cuisine for both sweet and savory applications. In dishes where the amount of added sugar is small, we usually go for granulated sugar for convenience, and because adding the more expensive palm sugar wouldn't make any difference in flavor. It's also the sugar of choice when a neutral sweetness is desired, such as in some desserts.

PALM SUGAR | *NAM TAAN PEEP* | น้ำตาลปี๊ป Palm sugar is the traditional Thai sweetener, used before the more convenient granulated sugar became available. It is made by reducing and caramelizing the nectar from the flowers of either the coconut palm or the toddy palm, which produce very similar sugars. It has a gorgeous butterscotch flavor that is delicious on its own, so much so that I often eat it straight up while I'm cooking! Fresh, unreduced palm nectar is sold as a magnificent, refreshing drink that I always seek out when I'm in Thailand.

Palm sugar is usually sold in tan-colored pucks or in tubs as a spoonable paste. Essentially all palm sugar sold outside Thailand (and even most of what is sold in Thailand) is mixed with granulated sugar to some degree, because of the cost and availability of palm nectar. So the key is to find one that has the least amount of granulated sugar, and the only real way to tell is to taste it. The less flavor it has, the more granulated sugar is mixed in. Never trust the label; even if it says "100%

pure palm sugar," if it's exported and costs you only a few dollars, it's most certainly not pure.

If using a solid puck, you can shave it with a large knife, then finely chop the shavings. You can also pound the puck with a big stone mortar and pestle so it breaks into smaller pieces. I like to chop or pound a bunch at a time, then store in an airtight container so I don't have to chop the palm sugar every time I need it. Like brown sugar, palm sugar dries out and becomes rock hard over time, so if you're not going to use it up quickly, chop it while still fresh.

> **Note:** In my recipes, I call for palm sugar to be finely chopped so that it can be packed and measured in measuring spoons or cups, but if you are measuring by weight, there's no need to chop it finely unless it needs to be dissolved in cold liquid—for example, in salad dressings. I find weighing is the easier way to work with palm sugar and is why I've provided the weight measure in the recipes.

If using the tub kind, you can spoon it out, but if it has hardened, heat it up in the microwave briefly to soften, and then spoon it out while still warm.

Is palm sugar the same as coconut sugar? Yes and no. Coconut sugar is a type of palm sugar, but the modern granulated varieties that are sold in health food stores in the West do not taste the same as traditionally made Thai coconut sugar, especially the one that is dark brown in color. Different processing really does make a difference here, so for Thai cooking, it's best to stick with the Thai brands.

Herbs & Spices

Here are some of our core herbs and spices, some of which you may not be familiar with. There are obviously more on the list, but these are the most important and most commonly used ones.

BASIL, HOLY | *GAPRAO* | กะเพรา A little more peppery than the sweet scent of Thai basil, holy basil goes well with dishes that are intensely spicy. If not available, Italian basil is a fine substitute.

BASIL, THAI | *HORAPA* | โหระพา Fragrant and floral, Thai basil adds so much complexity to stir-fries and curries. If not available, you can use Italian basil instead.

CHILIES, DRIED | *PRIK HANG* | พริกแห้ง In the same way that raisins taste nothing like grapes, chilies develop an entirely different character once dried. We use two major types of dried chilies: small (spicy) and large (mild). Don't get too hung up on which specific varieties you need, because fortunately most dried chilies have a similar-enough flavor that they can be substituted for one another in Thai recipes, but you *do* want to be aware of the heat levels, which vary greatly.

Spicy, small dried chilies are used to add heat to curry pastes, and we also roast and grind them up into chili flakes, which can be added to just about anything. The generic no-name dried chilies you can usually find at Chinese grocery stores, as well as Mexican chiles de árbol, are great for this purpose, and they are not too hot. If you find small dried chilies from Thailand, just know that these are *very* spicy. You can remove the seeds and pith of any dried chilies to reduce the spiciness.

Large, mild chilies are most often used in curry pastes because we want to maximize the bright red color and chili flavor without making the curry too spicy. The Thai variety, *prik chee fa*, is essentially impossible to source, but dried guajillo or puya peppers are perfect substitutes. You can find them anywhere Latin American groceries are sold. You can also use Korean gochugaru pepper flakes instead. If these are not available, you can experiment with whatever you can find; anything larger than about 4 inches (10 cm) is likely going to be mild enough. If you can only find small ones, remove the seeds and pith from them. The only caveat is to stay away from very large and dark chilies, such as ancho or pasilla peppers, or anything smoked, like chipotle.

CHILIES, FRESH | *PRIK* | พริก To add spiciness in our dishes, we most often

use small and super-spicy bird's-eye chilies, or *prik kee noo.* In North America, you can find these sold as "Thai chilies," and they can be found red (ripe) or green (underripe).

We also use larger, milder chilies to add color and chili flavor without heat, and for this we turn to spur chilies, or *prik chee fa.* These are not easy to find, but you can substitute any other mild red pepper you can find; even red bell pepper will do in a pinch.

"No chilies, no fun" is the mantra of many Thais. Spicy food gives us an adrenaline rush that's become part of the excitement of Thai food, and some dishes need at least a little bit of spiciness in order to be complete. Not only that, but chilies also give their own unique flavor to the dish. So even if your heat tolerance is low, don't omit them altogether, because you'll be missing an important component of the dish! Add as much as you can tolerate, and remove the seeds and pith to reduce the spiciness.

CILANTRO | *PAK CHEE* | ผักชี Cilantro is the most frequently used herb in all of Thai cuisine, as you're about to find out as you cook your way through this book. It is our default finishing herb, adding an element of freshness to just about everything. This is especially important in dishes that tend to be heavier, such as fried rice and noodle soups.

When used as a finishing herb, cilantro is almost always used together with green onions, so much so that markets in Thailand will usually sell the two together in the same bunch! But for simplicity at home, it's fine to use one or the other.

Aside from being an all-purpose finishing herb, the cilantro plant has roots that serve as one of the three members of an herb paste we call *saam glur*, meaning "three friends," the other two being garlic and white pepper. This paste, which one could call the Thai holy trinity or Thai mirepoix, forms the flavor base of many dishes, from marinades to sauces to curries.

When using cilantro as a finishing herb, always use the whole sprig—leaves *and* stems. When making a paste for cooking, use only the stems (or the roots, if you're lucky enough to find them), because the leaves will turn black in this application. Under no circumstance should you pick off

the leaves and throw away the stems, as the stems are actually *more* fragrant than the leaves!

If you have an aversion to cilantro, as I know some people do, feel free to substitute chopped green onions, or in the case of salads, mint.

GALANGAL | *KHA* | ข่า Galangal is a firm rhizome whose aroma is very much like that of a lush pine forest. It's cooling, calming, and refreshing. Although it looks like ginger, and many people will say that you can use ginger as a substitute, I insist that you don't. Not if you expect it to have a similar flavor, anyway!

There are two common uses of galangal: pounded into curry pastes, and sliced into rounds for infusing into soups. While not done as often, it can also be finely chopped and added to salads or stir-fries.

Galangal freezes very well. Slice into thin rounds and freeze in a single layer on a tray lined with plastic wrap before storing in a freezer bag. This will prevent the rounds from sticking to the tray and to each other.

Fresh is best, frozen is second-best, and paste is third-best. Dried galangal and powdered galangal retain flavor better than their lemongrass counterparts, so they can be used if necessary.

LEMONGRASS | *TAKRAI* | ตะไคร้ Lemongrass is a sturdy herb that has a citrusy aroma but gives no actual sour taste to food. It's as core to Thai cuisine as garlic is to Italian cuisine. Lemongrass can be bruised and infused into soups, like a cinnamon stick might be, or finely chopped and added to salads, dips, or stir-fries. It's also a key ingredient in many curry pastes.

I use only the bottom half of lemongrass because the flavor gets weaker at the top. I freeze the tops for making stock, but you can also make lemongrass tea. If making soup where the lemongrass is added to infuse and then discarded, there is no harm in also adding the tops—it'll just be more pieces to fish out later.

Fresh lemongrass is widely available these days, but it can also be found frozen, dried, powdered, or in paste form. Fresh is best, frozen is second-best, and paste is third-best. Avoid dried or powdered, as neither

has much flavor left in them. If you find fresh, do stock up, as it freezes very well. I cut it into 2-to 3-inch (5 to 8 cm) long pieces before freezing, for ease of use. Use them without thawing.

MAKRUT LIME LEAVES | *BAI MAGROOD* | ใบมะกรูด Previously called kaffir lime leaves, these thick, sturdy leaves smell like the grassier sister of lime zest. It's all aroma, though, as makrut lime leaves don't impart any of the sour taste you might expect from something with such a citrusy fragrance.

Makrut lime leaves are extremely versatile. They can be roughly torn and infused into soups and broths, or finely julienned and added to just about anything you can imagine. Make sure those juliennes are really fine, though, as these leaves are tough and too-big juliennes can leave you feeling like you've got a piece of hay stuck in your teeth.

We do not generally use the juice of makrut limes, of which there isn't much anyway, though the zest is often used in curry pastes. Look for frozen leaves if you can't find fresh; if not available, look for dried.

Makrut lime leaves freeze like a dream. Simply put them into a freezer bag and press as much air out as possible.

Note: Makrut lime leaves are double leaves, meaning that each leaf is made up of two single leaves attached end to end. When a recipe calls for "5 leaves," I mean five single, average-sized leaves. You can use more if they're small; you can never add too many of these!

Holy basil | *Gaprao*

Dried chilies | *Prik hang*

Thai basil | *Horapa*

Makrut lime leaves | *Bai Magrood*

Galangal | *Kha*

Lemongrass | *Takrai*

PANDAN LEAF | *BAI TOEY* | ใบเตย This aromatic, long, blade-shaped leaf is the star of Thai desserts because its floral aroma pairs fantastically with coconut. Most commonly, we simmer the leaf in liquid to infuse its fragrance, though it can be blended with water and strained when its natural green color is also desired.

Fresh pandan leaves are harder to find, though frozen ones are perfectly fine to use. In fact, if I buy them fresh, I end up freezing them anyway. Pandan extract, though not ideal, can be used instead, but be sure to add a little at a time as it can be intense and easy to overdo it.

WHITE PEPPER | *PRIK TAI KAO* | พริกไทยขาว Unlike in North America, when we say "pepper," we mean white pepper, as it is our default. We use black pepper occasionally, but it's not a staple in every home. If you don't have or don't like white pepper, black pepper is a fine substitute.

Cupboard Staples

COCONUT MILK | *GATI* | กะทิ The most important liquid in the Thai kitchen. Coconut milk is our only source of creaminess, because we do not use dairy in Thai cooking. Even though canned coconut milk is the most widely available, I highly recommend you look for coconut milk in UHT paper cartons. Because of different methods of processing, the stuff in the cartons has a much better flavor, more similar to freshly squeezed coconut milk. Aroy-D and Chaokoh are two good brands that come in UHT cartons.

Another thing to look at is the ingredient list. Choose coconut milk with the fewest ingredients possible, as that indicates more real coconut flavor. And never buy "light" coconut milk, because all the flavor is in the fat. Stay away from powdered coconut milk too.

Also, if you're looking at a carton of "coconut milk" in the beverage section of the grocery store, walk away. That is a milk substitute meant for drinking, not cooking. It has *no* coconut flavor in it. The fat, and therefore flavor, has all been removed.

COOKING OIL | *NAM MUN* | น้ำมัน You can use any neutral-flavored, high-heat-resistant oil for Thai cooking. I personally use avocado oil because it is a healthier option, but because that's pricy, I use canola when I deep-fry. You may think we use coconut oil a lot in Thai cuisine, but we actually mostly use coconut milk and rarely the oil. If you want to use coconut oil, choose refined coconut oil, which does not have the coconut flavor. Using virgin coconut oil will make everything taste like coconut!

CURRY PASTES | *PRIK GAENG* | พริกแกง If you want to make your own curry pastes and keep them in the freezer, great! (See this page for the recipes.) But I want to assure you that there is no shame in buying prepared pastes, and that most Thai people do not make their own. I certainly do it less often now that I am a mom! In fact, if you can't get all the ingredients, instead of making substitutions, I'd rather you buy a good paste to make sure that you're getting the right flavors.

How Coconut Milk Is Made Documentary

The Ultimate Guide to Coconut Milk

There are many brands of curry pastes these days, and curry paste is one of those things that you have to try to know if it's good or not. I can say this: make sure it's made in Thailand, and make sure it doesn't have any seasoning other than salt in it. You want the paste to be as pure as possible, so that you can do all the seasoning when you're cooking. Mae Ploy and Aroy-D are both good brands that are widely available, though there are many other good ones out there too.

When you try a curry paste, consider these four things: (1) Flavor: Does it have good, bold flavor? (2) Spiciness: Is it too spicy for you? Don't use less paste to cut down on spiciness, because you'll also be lacking the other herbs and spices. It's better to buy a brand that is less spicy so you can use the right amount. (3) Saltiness: Is it too salty if you add the amount that the recipe calls for? (4) Shrimp paste: whether the curry paste contains it is just something to note, especially if you're vegetarian. I personally like curry pastes that contain shrimp paste, but I can always add it myself if need be.

Once curry paste is opened, keep any leftovers in the freezer.

DRIED SHRIMP | *GOONG HANG* | กุ้งแห้ง Basically, *goong hang* are shrimp jerky. Little shrimp are salted and dried in the sun, and in that process they develop a robust, savory flavor. You can buy these in the refrigerated section at Asian grocery stores. I stick with medium-sized ones, which are most versatile. Freeze them and they will last indefinitely.

NOODLES, GLASS | *WOONSEN* | วุ้นเส้น These clear, thin noodles are also called bean threads or bean vermicelli because they are made from mung bean starch. My grandma always has glass noodles in the pantry, as everyone loves them, they're quick to cook, and they're extremely versatile. They're delicious in salads, soups, stir-fries, and spring rolls, and they're a staple for hot pots. They are also often used to bulk up meat-based fillings and stuffing.

To cook, soak them in room temperature water for 7 to 10 minutes, until they're pliable, then drain and cut with scissors a couple of times to shorten, if desired. They're now ready to go into boiling water for 2 to 3 minutes, or straight into the wok for stir-fries, with a bit of extra water or stock. If you realize at the last minute that you've forgotten to soak them, a 2-minute soak in the hottest tap water also does the trick, though you want to be careful with this, as they can overcook if left to soak for too long. If using room temperature water, they can linger in the water longer than necessary with no harm done.

NOODLES, RICE | *SEN GUAY TIEW* | เส้นก๋วยเตี๋ยว Dry rice noodles are a great thing to keep in your pantry because they are versatile and last seemingly forever. Choose brands from Thailand if possible, as Vietnamese ones can sometimes have tapioca starch mixed in and will have a slightly different texture. They come in many sizes and shapes, but the thin ones are the most convenient for weeknight cooking because they don't take long to soak and cook.

The Minimum Thai Pantry and Freezer

I realize this pantry section might seem like a long list of ingredients for some, so below is a list of what I consider the *essential* Thai ingredients

that will allow you to make many of the dishes in this book. Everything else not on this list would be nice to have and would allow you to make more dishes, but they're not critical.

PANTRY/FRIDGE

- Fish sauce
- Soy sauce
- Oyster sauce
- Coconut milk
- Red curry paste, or another one of your favorites
- Palm sugar or light brown sugar
- Tamarind paste
- Jasmine rice
- Rice noodles and/or glass noodles

FREEZER

- Thai chilies (fresh)
- Lemongrass
- Makrut lime leaves
- Galangal (if available)

Essential ingredients for Thai cooking.

Nice-to-have ingredients, but not necessary.


ASIA
Sweet Chili Sauce
THIN SOY SAUCE
HEALTHY BOY BRAND

Ingredient Substitution Guide

When someone asks “What can I use instead of…?” my follow-up question is always “For what dish?” Substitutes are rarely universal, and you can’t determine the best substitute until you know what role that ingredient plays in that dish. For the same ingredient, I may suggest different substitutes depending on the dish. Or I may tell you to just omit it. Or I may even tell you not to try to make that dish without it.

Having said that, there are some substitutions that generally work, so I have provided a guide here, but please use this guide in combination with your own good cooking judgment and intuition!

INGREDIENT	SUBSTITUTE
Basil, holy	**Italian basil.** Thai basil can also be used, but the flavor of Italian basil is more similar to that of holy basil, so it’s my preferred substitute.
Basil, Thai	**Italian basil.**
Dried shrimp	**Generally, you can omit,** or use Japanese bonito flakes instead.
Fermented soybean paste (*tao jiew*)	**Korean doenjang or Japanese miso,** starting with the same amount, then tasting and adjusting as needed. *Tao jiew* is runnier, but it tends to be saltier.
Fermented shrimp paste (*gapi*)	**Korean doenjang or Japanese miso,** but this works only when used in small amounts. The flavors of these pastes are completely different,