

# CURRIES, SOUPS & STEWS

Gaeng, Tom | ແກ່ງ ຕົມ

[Quick Yellow Curry with Beef](#)

[Pan-Seared Prawns in Red Curry Sauce](#)

[Green Curry Chicken with Winter Melon](#)

[Instant Pot \(or Not\) Massaman Curry Chicken](#)

[Southern Turmeric Crab Curry](#)

[Pineapple & Shrimp Red Curry](#)

[Yellow Curry with Roasted Potato & Cauliflower](#)

[Panang Curry Chicken](#)

[Grandma's Spareribs & Vegetable Stew](#)

[Chicken Wing Tom Yum Soup](#)

[Turmeric Fish Soup](#)

[Coconut Galangal Salmon Soup](#)

[Glass Noodle Soup with Pork Meatballs](#)

[Coconut Galangal Mushroom Soup](#)

[Coconut Mackerel Soup](#)

## Thai Curries, Soups, and Stews

Curries, soups, and stews are your best friend on a weeknight because they can be made entirely in advance and then reheated. These dishes play an important role in a Thai meal, as they serve as

the liquid, giving moisture to a meal that might otherwise be too dry. We never have a Thai meal without some sort of dish that has been simmered in a pot.

## How to Eat a Thai Curry

Thai curries are always eaten with rice. And although some of the curries might seem quite soupy, you still pour it over your rice on a plate. This is why we eat jasmine rice in Thailand—it has just the right amount of stickiness and fluffiness to hold the curry sauce. Short-grain or basmati rice would not work as well because they do not absorb sauce as readily.

Also, don't feel like you have to cover all your rice with the curry. In a Thai meal, where multiple dishes are served, people take a little bit of food at a time and go back for more as needed. You'd start with a couple of spoonfuls of curry on one corner of your rice, keeping the rest of the rice plain to eat alongside the other dishes.

## How to Eat a Thai Soup or Stew

Soups and stews are also served with rice, but they differ from curries in that they tend to be brothy (though some curries can be brothy too, but that's for another day). When there is soup or stew in a Thai meal, you are given a little bowl. You fill your bowl with some soup from the table, then you can choose to attack it however you want.

If it's a more substantial stew, such as Grandma's Spareribs & Vegetable Stew ([this page](#)), I spoon it over my rice. If it's a lighter, slurpable soup like Coconut Galangal Mushroom Soup ([this page](#)), I eat it on its own as I enjoy the meal, or add a bit of rice to the bowl and eat it like a rice soup. If the stew is the only thing I'm serving, I put it in a big bowl with some rice and eat it like a rice soup.

## A Note About Store-Bought Stocks

For the most part I am okay with you using store-bought stock for a weeknight Thai meal, even though they tend to have different flavors from what we use in Thailand. But for some dishes, such as the Glass Noodle Soup with Pork Meatballs ([this page](#)) and most noodle soups in the One-Dish Meal chapter ([this page](#)), homemade stock *really* makes a difference because the stock basically *is* the dish. This is one reason to always have some frozen stocks in the freezer! See [this page](#) for how to make a Thai-style pork or chicken stock.

# Quick Yellow Curry with Beef

Gaeng Garee Neua | ແກ້ງຈະຫວີ່ນ້ອ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 45 minutes

For years I thought of beef curry as a dish that required simmering chunks of stew beef for hours until tender. But for a weeknight, I wondered if there was a way to do it quickly and without a pressure cooker. Then I remembered my days working at a quick-service Thai restaurant, where we churned out pots of fork-tender beef curry in 45 minutes. The secret was using thinly sliced beef and choosing a flavorful but not-too-tough cut so it would not take a long time to tenderize. The restaurant used flank, which was great but a little lean for my liking. I found chuck top blade to be the perfect choice in terms of flavor and fat content, and it only takes about 20 minutes of simmering to become fork-tender.

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1½ pounds (675 g) chuck top blade steak (see [note](#))

1 teaspoon (5 ml) table salt

5 to 6 tablespoons (75 to 90 ml) yellow curry paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)), divided 2 cups (500 ml) coconut milk, divided

1½ tablespoons (18 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed

1 to 2 tablespoons (15 to 30 ml) fish sauce

1 tablespoon (15 ml) tamarind paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) (see [note](#)) 10.5 ounces (300 g) waxy potatoes, such as new or

red-skinned potatoes, cut into 1½-inch chunks  
½ medium (120 g) yellow onion, julienned  
¾ cup (100 g) halved cherry tomatoes  
Jasmine rice, for serving

**Slice the steak into ¼-inch (3 mm) pieces**, removing any silver skin on the exterior (the little strip of connective tissue running through the middle of the steak is fine to leave).

**Place the beef in a medium pot** and add just enough water to submerge it. Add the salt and 1 tablespoon (15 ml) curry paste and stir to mix; bring to a simmer over high heat. Turn the heat down to low and simmer for 20 to 25 minutes, until fork-tender. The timing will vary if you use a different cut of meat. Skim off any scum that floats to the top.

**While the beef cooks, make the curry sauce.** In a medium pot, bring ¾ cup (185 ml) coconut milk to a boil over medium-high heat, then add the remaining curry paste and stir to mix well. Turn the heat down to medium and stir frequently until the mixture is very thick and the coconut oil separates from the paste, about 5 minutes (the oil may not separate depending on the coconut milk you're using; this is okay).

**Add the remaining coconut milk**, sugar, 1 tablespoon (15 ml) fish sauce, and the tamarind paste to the curry. Stir to mix, then bring to a boil over medium-high heat.

**Add the potatoes and onions**, and simmer for 5 minutes, then remove from the heat while you wait for the beef to be done; the potatoes should not be fully cooked at this point.

**Once the beef is tender**, use a slotted spoon to transfer only the beef into the curry. Then add only as much of the beef cooking liquid as needed to keep everything barely submerged. Taste the sauce and adjust the seasoning with more fish sauce, tamarind, or sugar as needed.

**Turn the heat to medium and simmer the curry** for another 5 to 10 minutes, until the potatoes are fully cooked.

**Stir in the tomatoes**, turn off the heat, and allow the tomatoes to soften in the residual heat for 1 to 2 minutes. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Do-ahead:** *The whole curry can be made up to 3 days in advance and reheated. If reheating, be sure to not overcook the potatoes—or add them when serving.*

**Notes:** *If you can't find chuck top blade, you can choose other cuts of beef that are flavorful but not too tough. Most inexpensive steaks sold for marinating and grilling fit this bill, and if possible, choose one that is not too lean. If you have time to cook, you can choose any stewing beef and increase the cooking time accordingly.*

*If you don't have tamarind paste, no need to buy or make it just for this recipe. We just need a little bit of acid to brighten up the sauce, so a few dashes of Worcestershire sauce or a squeeze of lime at the end will also do.*

### Cooking Beef Out of the Curry

Why not just simmer the beef in the curry itself, you ask? The technique used in this recipe is one that's commonly used in Thai cuisine when cooking with beef, for a couple of reasons. When you simmer the beef, you will notice a lot of brown scum in and on top of the liquid, which would discolor the otherwise beautiful curry sauce. As well, many Thai people don't like the strong beef flavor that would be in the curry if it were all cooked together, especially because beef in Thailand can be quite gamey. And, in our weeknight-friendly case, it also saves time so that we can make the rest of the sauce while the beef is doing its thing.





# Pan-Seared Prawns in Red Curry Sauce

Choo Chee Goong | ชูฉีกงู

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 20 minutes

*Choo chee* is a term for a simple dish of seafood served in a red curry sauce. Most commonly, *choo chee* is made with Thai short mackerel, whose firm flesh and strong flavor holds up well to the spicy and robust sauce. But at nice seafood restaurants you'll find versions made with pricy seafood, such as large river prawns. Unlike our regular curries, *choo chee* is meant to be *kluk klik*, which means saucy but not soupy.

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4 to 5 makrut lime leaves

2 tablespoons (30 ml) neutral oil

1 pound (450 g) large prawns (16/20 count), peeled and deveined, patted dry (see [note](#))  $1\frac{1}{4}$  cups (310 ml) coconut milk, divided, plus extra for garnish

2 to 3 tablespoons (30 to 45 ml) red curry paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) 1 tablespoon (12 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed

Fish sauce, as needed

Jasmine rice, for serving

**Pull off the center ribs from larger makrut lime leaves** and discard. Stack the leaves and julienne them with a sharp knife as thinly as you can. Set aside a little pinch for garnish.

**Place a large skillet on high heat** and add the oil. Once hot, add the prawns in one even layer. Cook without moving them until browned on the underside and the prawns are about two-thirds cooked, about 2 minutes. Flip and sear the other side just until they are cooked through. Remove from the pan and set aside.

**Make the curry sauce.** In the same pan, turn the heat down to medium and add  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup (60 ml) coconut milk; bring it to a simmer. Add the red curry paste and stir frequently, about 2 minutes, until it's very thick and you can see oil sizzling out of the paste (the oil may not separate depending on the coconut milk you're using; this is okay).

**Add the remaining coconut milk**, lime leaves, and sugar, and simmer on low heat for about 3 minutes to allow the flavors to mingle.

**Add the prawns to the sauce** and toss to coat and to warm back up for about 1 minute. If the sauce feels a little too thick to easily coat the prawns, add a splash of water to thin it out.

**Taste and add fish sauce as needed;** it's important to taste first, as different curry pastes have different salt levels.

**Plate the *choo chee*** in a shallow bowl or a plate with a bit of depth, then drizzle with coconut milk to garnish, and top with the reserved julienned makrut lime leaves. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Note:** *If buying frozen prawns, be sure to buy about 25% more to account for the weight of the ice glaze.*

**For Special Occasions**

I love *choo chee* because it can be so luxurious, yet the preparation is simple. If you have a lobster tail or big scallops, *choo chee* is the perfect treatment. For a more elegant presentation, don't toss the seafood with the sauce; simply pour the sauce onto a nice platter and arrange the seafood on top of it so you can showcase the catch. Use only meaty seafood, as delicate items like crab or tender fish would be overpowered by the sauce.





# Green Curry Chicken with Winter Melon

Gaeng Kiew Waan Gai Sai Fak | ແກ່ງເຂົ້າວຫວານໄກໄສຟັກ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 30 minutes

People often ask me if they can use a different vegetable or meat in this curry instead. And my answer is always: Of course! While that is true, in Thailand there are some common curry-meat-veggie combinations, and this trio of green curry, chicken, and winter melon is a real classic. Winter melon has almost no flavor of its own, but it absorbs flavor like a sponge. When cooked, it becomes translucent and so soft that it disintegrates in your mouth, and you wonder how it ever held its shape in the curry. The melon can grow to a pretty massive size, so it's often sold at Asian supermarkets pre-cut into chunks. If it's not available, zucchini makes a great substitute.

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1¾ cups (435 ml) coconut milk, divided

1½ cups (22 g) Thai basil leaves, plus an optional 10 to 15 leaves (see [note](#))

3 to 4 tablespoons (45 to 60 ml) green curry paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) 1 pound (450 g) boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut in bite-sized strips

1 cup (250 ml) unsalted or low-sodium chicken stock

12 ounces (340 g) winter melon, peeled and cut in 1½-inch (4 cm) cubes  
6 to 7 makrut lime leaves  
1 tablespoon (12 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed  
½ red bell pepper, julienned  
1 to 2 tablespoons (15 to 30 ml) fish sauce  
Jasmine rice, for serving

**Place ¾ cup (185 ml) coconut milk** in a medium pot over medium heat and reduce until very thick, about 5 minutes.

**Optional step for a more vibrant color:** While the coconut milk is reducing, julienne 10 to 15 basil leaves and pound them with a mortar and pestle until fine, then add the curry paste and pound to mix. (Alternatively, you can blend the basil in a blender with just enough of the remaining coconut milk until smooth.) **Add the curry paste to the reduced coconut milk** and stir frequently for 2 to 3 minutes, until the mixture is very thick and the coconut oil separates from the paste (the oil may not separate depending on the coconut milk you’re using; this is okay). If the paste sticks to the bottom of the pot, deglaze with a bit of coconut milk.

**Add the chicken and stir to coat it with the paste**, then add all the remaining coconut milk (including the basil-blended coconut milk), stock, and winter melon. Twist the makrut lime leaves to bruise them and release their aroma before tearing them into big chunks and adding to the pot, removing any big center stems. Stir in the palm sugar and simmer gently for about 15 minutes, until the chicken is fork-tender.

**Stir in the bell peppers** and cook for 2 minutes to soften.

**Taste the broth**, then add fish sauce to taste. How much fish sauce you need depends on how salty your curry paste is, so it’s important to taste first. You want this to be strongly seasoned, as it will be served with plain rice.

**Turn off the heat** and stir in the 1½ cups (22 g) basil. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Note:** *The optional basil is for boosting the green color of the curry. The green in the curry paste comes from green chilies, which means that if you add more curry paste because you want the dish to look prettier, it'll also be spicier. Adding blended green basil leaves is a way to get around that.*

### Using Chicken Breasts

Even though I always recommend using chicken thighs for curry, I know some of you are going to insist on using boneless, skinless chicken breasts. So here's a tip for making sure it's still going to be delicious. You don't want to stew it for a long time, as you do with thighs, or you will get dry, overcooked chicken. The two meats do not behave the same way when cooked. For breasts, you want to cook them minimally, so add the strips at the end along with the bell peppers and simmer for 2 to 3 minutes, just until they're cooked through. To compensate for the time the breasts won't have to absorb flavor from the sauce, you'll want to marinate them in 2 teaspoons (10 ml) fish sauce for at least 10 minutes beforehand.





# Instant Pot (or Not) Massaman Curry Chicken

Gaeng Massaman Gai | ແກ່ງມ້ສນ້ນໄກ

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 45 minutes in the Instant Pot, or 65 minutes on the stovetop

Unlike other Thai curries, *massaman* is always paired with slow-braised meats, so it usually takes a long time to cook, but the flavor reward is well worth it. You can buy *massaman* curry paste, but it's not always available and, quite frankly, not always good. Fortunately, it's easy to turn red curry paste, whether store-bought or homemade, into *massaman*, since both pastes use the same base. All you need are some spices, most of which you probably already have. I usually make *massaman* chicken on the stovetop because it doesn't require too much cooking time, and I do feel that the chicken tastes better with a longer braising time to allow the flavors to absorb, but it works well using a pressure cooker if you have one and want it even faster.

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#### QUICK MASSAMAN CURRY PASTE

4 whole cloves, or  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon (1 ml) ground cloves

2 pods green or white cardamom, or  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon (1 ml) ground cardamom

1 teaspoon (5 ml) coriander seeds

1 teaspoon (5 ml) cumin seeds

1 teaspoon (5 ml) ground cinnamon, or 2 inches (5 cm) cinnamon stick

$\frac{1}{8}$  teaspoon (0.5 ml) freshly grated or ground nutmeg

4 to 5 tablespoons (60 to 75 ml) red curry paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) 1 teaspoon (5 ml) fermented shrimp paste (optional, see [note](#))

#### CURRY

2 cups (500 ml) coconut milk, divided

5 to 6 tablespoons (75 to 90 ml) *massaman* curry paste

3 tablespoons (36 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed

2 to 3 tablespoons (30 to 45 ml) tamarind paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) 2 to 3 tablespoons (30 to 45 ml) fish sauce

2 pounds (1 kg) chicken thighs, bone-in, skin-on

10.5 ounces (300 g) waxy potatoes, such as new or red-skinned potatoes, cut in 1-inch (2.5 cm) chunks  $\frac{1}{2}$  large yellow onion, cut in  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch (1.2 cm) strips

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup (35 g) unsalted roasted peanuts

Jasmine rice, for serving

#### FOR THE CURRY PASTE

**Place all the spices in a dry skillet** and toast over medium-high heat, moving them constantly, until the cumin seeds have darkened slightly and the spices are aromatic.

**Transfer the spices to a plate and cool slightly.** Grind into a powder using a coffee grinder or mortar and pestle.

**Mix all the spices with the red curry paste and shrimp paste** until combined—I find it's easiest to mix them by pounding with a mortar and pestle.

#### FOR THE CURRY

**Place  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (125 ml) coconut milk in a large pot** and bring to a boil over medium heat. You can also use an Instant Pot, and bring to a boil on the medium sauté mode.

**Add the curry paste** and stir to mix well, and let the mixture thicken, stirring frequently, until the mixture is very thick and the coconut oil separates from the paste, about 5 minutes (the oil may not separate depending on the coconut milk you're using; this is okay). If the paste sticks to the bottom of the pot, deglaze with a bit of coconut milk.

**Add the remaining coconut milk** and stir to mix, scraping the bottom to make sure no curry paste is stuck. Add the palm sugar, 2 tablespoons (30 ml) tamarind paste, and 1 tablespoon (15 ml) fish sauce. Stir to mix well, then taste the sauce and add more fish sauce as needed. You will need to adjust the seasoning again after it's done, but it's important that the chicken is cooking in a well-seasoned sauce.

**For the Instant Pot:** Add the chicken and cook it under high pressure for 5 minutes. Allow the Instant Pot to naturally release for 10 minutes before releasing the remaining pressure.

**For the stovetop:** Add the chicken to the sauce and simmer gently over low heat, partially covered, for 35 minutes.

**Add the potatoes, onions, and peanuts;** if there is not enough liquid to keep the potatoes and onions barely submerged, top it up with more coconut milk or water (using coconut milk will make a richer curry). Cook the potatoes over medium heat, or on the medium sauté mode, for about 10 minutes, until they are fully cooked.

**Taste and adjust the seasoning** with more fish sauce or tamarind paste as needed. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Do-ahead:** *The whole curry can be made in advance and reheated. If reheating, be sure not to overcook the potatoes, or add them when*

serving. The curry paste can be frozen.

**Note:** Add shrimp paste only if the red curry paste doesn't already contain it.

### My Thoughts on the Instant Pot

I have an Instant Pot, but I don't use it often. As a chef, I like to be able to see how my food is doing so that I can make adjustments as it cooks. I feel an unnerving loss of control when I put things into a completely enclosed machine that I can't check on until it's done. However, there are a few things that I like the Instant Pot for, and one is for making stocks. It's freeing to not have to worry about topping my stock up with water or keeping an eye on the time, and I love not having to turn the annoyingly loud hood fan on for hours. I also don't mind it for making braised beef dishes, because beef can take 2 to 3 hours to tenderize, so the time saved is significant. But for many dishes that don't take as long, by the time I factor in the preheat, the cool down, and any parts of the dish that require me to cook it in regular sauté mode, I'm not saving much time in the end.





# Southern Turmeric Crab Curry

Gaeng Pu Bai Chaploo | ແກ່ງປຸ້ບໍໃບຂະພລູ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 10 minutes

Simple luxury. Good crabmeat may be expensive, but it can be a ready-to-eat protein that requires no prep, so it's a wonderful way to treat yourself to a fine meal even when you're short on time. This dish is the epitome of southern Thai food, which is known for seafood and its liberal use of turmeric. You can make southern Thai curry paste, or *prik gaeng tai*, from scratch, but I've shared a shortcut method here using store-bought red curry paste as a base and just adding to it the ingredients that make it "southern." Red curry is the basic paste containing ingredients common to most curries, so it's super versatile in this way.

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## QUICK SOUTHERN CURRY PASTE

½ teaspoon (2 ml) black peppercorns

2 inches (10 g) fresh turmeric, or ½ teaspoon (2 ml) ground turmeric

3 to 4 tablespoons (45 to 60 ml) red curry paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) 1 to 2 teaspoons (5 to 10 ml) fermented shrimp paste (see [note](#))

## CURRY

2 cups (500 ml) coconut milk, divided

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup (125 ml) unsalted chicken stock or water  
2 teaspoons (8 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed  
2 to 3 teaspoons (10 to 15 ml) fish sauce, to taste  
4 cups (90 g) wild betel leaves, cut in  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch (2 cm) ribbons (see [note](#))  
10.5 ounces (300 g) fresh crabmeat  
Jasmine rice or rice vermicelli, for serving (see [sidebar](#)) **Make the curry paste** by pounding the black peppercorns with a mortar and pestle until fine. If using fresh turmeric, add it to the peppercorns and pound into a fine paste. Add the red curry paste, ground turmeric (if using), and shrimp paste; pound to mix.

**Place  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup (80 ml) coconut milk** in a medium pot and bring to a boil over medium heat. Add the curry paste and keep stirring until it is very thick and coconut oil starts to separate from the paste, 4 to 5 minutes (the oil may not separate depending on the coconut milk you're using; this is okay).

**Add the remaining coconut milk**, stock, and sugar, and simmer for 5 minutes to allow the flavors to mingle.

**Taste the sauce and add fish sauce as needed;** how much depends on how salty your curry paste is, so it is important to taste first. If you want a stronger turmeric flavor, you can also add more; if using fresh turmeric, simply pound it into a paste or finely grate before adding.

**Add the greens** and cook just until wilted, about 30 seconds, then gently stir in most of the crabmeat, setting aside a little for garnish. Once the crab is heated through, another 30 seconds or so, remove the pot from the heat.

**Ladle the curry into a serving bowl** and top with the reserved crabmeat. Serve with jasmine rice or rice vermicelli.

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**Do-ahead:** The curry paste and curry sauce can be made in advance and frozen. Or make the curry sauce a few days in advance and store in the fridge. Add the crabmeat and greens just before serving.

**Notes:** Use only 1 teaspoon (5 ml) shrimp paste if the curry paste already contains some.

Traditionally, we use wild betel leaves or bai chaploo (not to be confused with the psychoactive betel leaves). You can find them at some Vietnamese stores, sometimes labeled la lot. You can use any other dark leafy greens you like, such as Chinese broccoli, yu choy, or kale.

### Crab Curry Noodles

Although you absolutely can serve this dish with rice, southern crab curry is unique in that it is often served with rice vermicelli. There are a few different products on the market labeled “rice vermicelli”—some are thread-thin, while others are round and a little thicker; you can use whichever you prefer. You can serve it like a bowl of pasta, with the sauce poured over the noodles, or you can also serve it family style, along with other dishes. If that’s case, after you have cooked the noodles, dunk them into a big bowl of cold water to cool, then grab a small bunch and coil them into little bundles. Then you can take a little bundle to eat with the curry, while still enjoying the rest of the meal with rice.



# Pineapple & Shrimp Red Curry

Gaeng Kua Subparod Goong | ແກ່ງຄ້ວສັບປະຈຸດກຸງ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 30 minutes

At the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown, I found myself at the grocery store faced with half-empty shelves, and I started to panic. Next thing I knew, I was grabbing all sorts of canned and dried goods I don't even normally buy, and that is how I ended up with canned pineapple, something I never buy because I find it so flavorless. After staring at the cans every time I looked in the cupboard, I finally realized after a few months that this curry is the perfect use for them. Red curry has such a strong flavor that it doesn't really matter if your pineapple is disappointing. The most important trick in this recipe is squeezing the juice out of the pineapple to make room for the curry sauce to penetrate it —this allows the flavors of the curry and the pineapple to coalesce, rather than it tasting like curry in one bite and pineapple in another.

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2 tablespoons (15 g) dried shrimp (optional)

1 (14 ounce/398 ml) can pineapple chunks, drained, or 1¾ cups (435 ml) chopped fresh pineapple (see [note](#)) 1½ cups (375 ml) coconut milk, divided

3 to 4 tablespoons (45 to 60 ml) red curry paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) ½ to 1 cup (125 to 250 ml) water or unsalted chicken stock

7 to 8 makrut lime leaves

1 to 2 tablespoons (15 to 30 ml) fish sauce  
2 to 3 teaspoons (8 to 12 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed  
1 to 2 tablespoons (15 to 30 ml) tamarind paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#))  $\frac{1}{2}$  red bell pepper, julienned  
1 pound (450 g) shrimp, size 26/30 or larger, peeled and deveined, thawed if frozen  
Jasmine rice, for serving

**Finely chop the dried shrimp** or grind them into “fluff” in a coffee grinder.

**Place the pineapple chunks in a bowl** and squeeze them with your hands so they give up some of their juice. You want them to have room to absorb the curry sauce. Leave both the juice and the pineapple in the bowl.

**In a medium pot, bring  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (125 ml) coconut milk to a boil** over medium heat, then add the red curry paste and stir to mix. Cook, stirring frequently, until the mixture is very thick and the coconut oil separates from the paste, about 5 minutes (the oil may not separate depending on the coconut milk you’re using; this is okay). If the paste sticks to the pot, deglaze with a bit of coconut milk.

**Add the remaining coconut milk,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup (125 ml) water, the dried shrimp and the pineapple and all the juice you squeezed out, but not the juice from the can.** Twist the makrut lime leaves to bruise them and release their aroma before tearing them into big chunks and adding to the pot, discarding any big center stems. Simmer on low heat for 5 minutes.

**Add 1 tablespoon (15 ml) fish sauce,** 2 teaspoons (10 ml) sugar, and 1 tablespoon (15 ml) tamarind paste. Stir to dissolve the sugar, then taste and adjust the seasoning. How much of the seasonings you need will depend on the flavor of the pineapple and also the curry paste—you want the sauce to be a little sweet and a little tart, with a good amount of saltiness as a base.

**Add the bell peppers** and cook for 1 minute. Then add the shrimp and cook for 30 seconds to 1 minute, or just until they are done. Turn off the heat and do a final taste. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Note:** Be sure to buy canned pineapple packed in pineapple juice, not in syrup.





# Yellow Curry with Roasted Potato & Cauliflower

Gaeng Garee Dok Galum | ແກ່ງກະທົ່ຽດອົກກະທລ່າ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 35 minutes

This dish is inspired by one of my favorite Indian dishes, *aloo gobi*, a delightful mix of potatoes, cauliflower, and lots of spices. The turmeric, spices, and potatoes in *aloo gobi* have always reminded me of Thai yellow curry. So, while it's not traditional to put cauliflower in yellow curry, the brilliance of this combination cannot be denied. Since there is no meat, the trick here is roasting the vegetables to add more robustness to the curry. While you could drop raw veggies into the sauce, roasting them develops that delicious "browned" flavor. Just think about how much better roasted potatoes are than boiled—that is the difference.

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12 ounces (340 g) waxy potatoes, such as new or red-skinned potatoes, cut in 1½-inch (4 cm) chunks

¼ teaspoon (1 ml) table salt, divided

2 tablespoons (30 ml) neutral oil, divided

12 ounces (340 g) cauliflower florets, about 1 medium head

2 cups (500 ml) coconut milk, divided

5 to 6 tablespoons (75 to 90 ml) yellow curry paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) 1 to 2 tablespoons (15 to 30 ml) fish sauce or

soy sauce

1 to 1½ tablespoons (15 to 22 ml) tamarind paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) (see [note](#)) 1½ tablespoons (18 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed

½ medium (120 g) yellow onion, cut in strips

1½ cups (375 ml) unsalted chicken or vegetable stock

¾ cup (100 g) halved cherry tomatoes

Jasmine rice, for serving

**Preheat the oven to 450°F (230°C)** and set two racks in the oven, spaced apart evenly.

**Toss the potatoes in ¼ teaspoon (0.5 ml) salt** and 1 tablespoon (15 ml) oil. Spread them on a baking sheet, cut side down, and roast for 20 to 25 minutes, until browned on the underside.

**Toss the cauliflower in ¼ teaspoon (0.5 ml) salt** and 1 tablespoon (15 ml) oil. Spread the florets on a baking sheet, cut side down, and roast for about 15 minutes, until browned on the underside.

**While the vegetables roast, make the curry sauce.** Place ¾ cup (185 ml) coconut milk in a medium pot and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Stir in the curry paste, mixing well, then turn the heat down to medium and stir constantly until the mixture is very thick and the coconut oil separates from the paste, about 5 minutes (the oil may not separate depending on the coconut milk you’re using; this is okay). If the paste is sticking to the pot, deglaze with a bit of coconut milk.

**Stir in the remaining coconut milk,** 1 tablespoon (15 ml) fish sauce, 1 tablespoon (15 ml) tamarind paste, and sugar. Simmer over low heat for at least 5 minutes, until the vegetables are done roasting.

**Add the roasted vegetables and the onions** to the curry sauce, then add just enough of the stock to submerge everything. Simmer the vegetables for about 5 minutes to allow them to absorb the curry flavor.

**Stir in the tomatoes and turn off the heat**, allowing them to soften in the residual heat for a few minutes. Taste and adjust the seasoning, adding more fish sauce, tamarind paste, or sugar as needed. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Note:** If you don't have tamarind paste, no need to buy or make it just for this recipe. We just need a little bit of acid to brighten up the sauce, so a few dashes of Worcestershire sauce or a squeeze of lime at the end will also do.

### Yellow Curry vs. Yellow Curry

Store-bought yellow curry paste is not usually that spicy, but after having a few people report to me that their yellow curry was unexpectedly incredibly spicy, I realized that there are two Thai yellow curry pastes on the market. The “wrong” paste to use in this recipe is the one for yellow *sour* curry, or *gaeng leuang*, a southern Thai water-based curry that is indeed exceedingly spicy. It is actually the “true” yellow curry, because *gaeng leuang* literally means “yellow curry.” So, when shopping, make sure the label does not say “sour,” or look for the word *garee* (sometimes spelled *karee*).





# Panang Curry Chicken

Panang Gai | ພະແນັງໄກ້

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 20 minutes

Everyone needs a go-to recipe that elevates basic boneless, skinless chicken breasts. Look no further, this is it. *Panang* is the fastest curry to make because it's the simplest. Instead of being soupy, like other Thai curries, *panang* sauce is thick, rich, and concentrated, making it ideal for lean, mild-flavored meats. Because the chicken doesn't spend much time in the sauce, a quick marinade ensures that the meat itself will not be bland. A little water in the marinade is my trick for creating a mini brine, which adds juiciness to lean meats and builds a bigger buffer against overcooking.

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## QUICK-MARINATED CHICKEN

1 pound (450 g) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut in  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch (1.2 cm) thick strips

2 tablespoons (30 ml) water

2 teaspoons (10 ml) fish sauce

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon (2 ml) granulated sugar

## QUICK PANANG CURRY PASTE

2 teaspoons (10 ml) coriander seeds, toasted

1 teaspoon (5 ml) cumin seeds, toasted  
3 tablespoons (28 g) unsalted roasted peanuts  
3 to 4 tablespoons (45 to 60 ml) red curry paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)), to taste 1 teaspoon (5 ml) fermented shrimp paste (see [note](#))

#### CURRY

1½ cups (375 ml) coconut milk, divided  
10 makrut lime leaves (7 roughly torn, 3 finely julienned)  
2 tablespoons (24 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed  
1 to 2 teaspoons (5 to 10 ml) fish sauce, to taste  
½ medium (80 g) red bell pepper, julienned  
Jasmine rice, for serving

**Marinate the chicken.** Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Let sit at room temperature for 15 minutes.

**Make the curry paste.** Grind the coriander and cumin seeds until very fine, using a coffee grinder or mortar and pestle. Add the roasted peanuts and grind until fine, but don't turn them into peanut butter. If using a coffee grinder, transfer the peanuts and spices into a small mixing bowl and mix in the red curry paste and shrimp paste until combined; otherwise, add the curry paste and shrimp paste to the mortar and pound to mix.

**Bring ¾ cup (185 ml) coconut milk** to a boil in a wok or large skillet over medium-high heat. Stir in the curry paste, then turn the heat down to medium and stir constantly until the mixture is very thick, 5 to 7 minutes. You may see coconut oil separate from the paste. If the paste sticks to the pan, deglaze with a bit of water.

**Add the torn makrut lime leaves**, palm sugar, and 1 teaspoon (5 ml) fish sauce and cook for about 1 minute, until the sugar is dissolved.

**Add the chicken strips** and toss with the curry paste. Once the chicken is halfway cooked, about 1 minute, add the remaining coconut milk and stir for another minute or just until the chicken is fully cooked. If it looks too dry, you can add a splash of water to create more sauce.

**Stir in most of the bell peppers** and turn off the heat, allowing them to soften just slightly in the residual heat. Taste and adjust the seasoning with the remaining fish sauce and sugar as needed.

**Garnish with the julienned makrut lime leaves**, the remaining bell peppers, and a splash of coconut milk, if desired. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Note:** Add the shrimp paste only if the red curry paste doesn't already contain it.





# Grandma's Spareribs & Vegetable Stew

Jub Chai | ຈັບຈ່າຍ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 50 to 60 minutes

There are a few dishes that make me think of my grandmother, and this is one of them. Actually, I associate *jub chai* with grandmothers in general, as though one isn't truly qualified to make it until they become a grandma. So, despite being too young to make this well, I think my version is (almost) as good as my grandma's. Using pork ribs is key, as it results in a rich broth without needing to use a drop of stock, and the daikon adds sweetness without needing a drop of sugar. It takes a bit of time to cook, but the fantastically unfussy prep makes it a fine candidate for a weeknight meal.

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6 cups (1.5 L) water

1½ pounds (675 g) chopped pork spareribs (see [note](#))

3 (15 g) dried shiitake mushrooms, rinsed

8 ounces (230 g) peeled daikon, cut in 1-inch (2.5 cm) chunks (about 2 cups/500 ml)

6 cloves (30 g) garlic, smashed

½ teaspoon (2 ml) ground white pepper

2 tablespoons (30 ml) soy sauce

2 tablespoons (30 ml) oyster sauce  
½ tablespoon (7 ml) Thai seasoning sauce  
½ to 1 teaspoon (2 to 5 ml) black soy sauce (optional)  
1 medium carrot (100 g), cut into bite-sized pieces  
2 cups (150 g) bite-sized green cabbage pieces  
2 cups (100 g) coarsely chopped Chinese broccoli (*gai lan*, see [note](#))  
Jasmine rice, for serving

**Bring the water to a rolling boil** in a large pot over high heat. Add the pork ribs, shiitake mushrooms, daikon, garlic, pepper, soy sauce, oyster sauce, Thai seasoning sauce, and just enough black soy sauce to darken the mixture's color slightly. Simmer gently over medium-low heat, partially covered, for about 30 minutes, until the meat is fork-tender.

**Remove the mushrooms** from the soup and set aside to cool slightly. Then add the carrots, cabbage, and Chinese broccoli; simmer for another 10 minutes, or until the veggies are tender.

**While the veggies are cooking, remove and discard the mushroom stems.** Thinly slice the caps and return them to the soup.

**Taste and adjust the seasoning** with more soy sauce as needed. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Do-ahead:** *Jub chai* is known for being better the next day, so if possible, make this the night before.

**Notes:** Chopped spareribs are split and cut across the bones into 1-to 2-inch (2.5 to 5 cm) cubes; they're commonly available at Asian markets. You can buy a full rack and split the ribs apart, but you'll end up with bigger pieces, which are a bit unwieldy in soups. Some pieces of spareribs are all meat with no bones, meaning the meat is much thicker

*than when on the bone; make sure you chop these into pieces no larger than ½-inch (1.2 cm) or they will take much longer to tenderize.*

*Instead of Chinese broccoli, or gai lan, you can use bok choy, yu choy, or another leafy green, such as Swiss chard.*

### If You Have Time

The spirit of this dish is no-fuss—it's a throw-everything-into-a-pot kind of dish. But if you have time, there are opportunities for maximizing flavor by browning the pork and sautéing the garlic and pepper. Start by putting a little neutral oil in the pot and searing the pork ribs on high heat until browned. Remove the ribs, turn the heat down to low, and sauté the garlic and pepper in the same oil until aromatic, about 2 minutes. Add the ribs back in, then add the water and proceed with the recipe.





# Chicken Wing Tom Yum Soup

Tom Yum Peek Gai | ຕົ້ນຢຳປຶກໄກ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 30 minutes

*Tom yum* soup can be made with any kind of meat or seafood, but the version with shrimp is the most popular outside Thailand, probably because it has an intense, rich flavor thanks to the Thai chili paste. The chicken version, however, has a simpler, cleaner-tasting broth, and it is one of the most soul-soothing dishes we have to offer. You can use boneless chicken, but I love using chicken wings in this because they have an extremely high bone-to-meat ratio, which means that in 20 minutes the wings will turn plain water into chicken stock that's richer and tastier than any stock you can buy. Wings also don't require any chopping, and I'm *all* about less cleanup any time!

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5 cups (1.25 L) water

1½ pounds (675 g) chicken drumettes (see [note](#))

½ cup (60 g) coarsely chopped shallots

3 to 4 tablespoons (45 to 60 ml) fish sauce

2 to 3 teaspoons (10 to 15 ml) granulated sugar

5 spicy dried chilies, such as Thai chilies or chiles de árbol, or more to taste

2 stalks lemongrass, bottom halves only, smashed and cut in 2-inch (5 cm) pieces

10 thin slices (25 g) galangal  
10 makrut lime leaves  
3.5 ounces (100 g) shimeji or oyster mushrooms  
1½ cups (200 g) halved cherry tomatoes  
3 to 4 tablespoons (45 to 60 ml) lime juice  
7 to 8 sprigs cilantro, chopped  
Jasmine rice, for serving

**Bring the water to a boil** in a large pot over high heat. Add the chicken drumettes, shallots, 3 tablespoons (45 ml) fish sauce and 2 teaspoons (10 ml) sugar. Simmer for about 20 minutes, until the chicken is fork-tender.

**While the chicken is cooking, char the dried chilies** for additional smoky flavor. Place the chilies in a dry skillet over medium-high heat and stir them for a few minutes, until they develop charred spots and smell smoky. Keep an eye on them and don't walk away! Once charred, set aside.

**When the chicken is tender, add the dried chilies** (keep them whole for a milder soup, break them up for a spicy soup), lemongrass, galangal, and mushrooms. Twist the makrut lime leaves to bruise them and release their aroma before tearing them into big chunks and adding to the pot, discarding any big center stems. Simmer for 5 to 7 minutes.

**Add the tomatoes** and cook for about 2 minutes, or just until the tomatoes are soft but still hold their shape. Turn off the heat and stir in 3 tablespoons (45 ml) lime juice. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more fish sauce, sugar, or lime juice as needed. You want it to lead with sour and salty. The sweetness is there for balance, but the soup should not taste distinctly sweet. Before serving, you can remove the herbs, as they are not meant to be eaten, though they are traditionally left in the soup. I like to remove only half to make it a little easier to eat while keeping the traditional look. Be sure to remind your guests not to eat them!

**Garnish the soup with cilantro** and serve with jasmine rice. The meat should be super tender and easy to pry off the bones with a spoon.

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**Note:** Drumettes are easier to eat in soups than whole wings. If you've got the whole wings, save the flats for Fish Sauce Wings ([this page](#)).

### Boneless Chicken Tom Yum

If you don't want to navigate chicken bones while eating soup, I get it. You can opt to use 1 pound (450 g) bite-sized pieces of boneless chicken thighs instead, but then you must use unsalted chicken stock instead of water. Without the bones, the meat will not give a rich enough broth and the soup will not be nearly as good.





# Turmeric Fish Soup

Pla Tom Kamin | ປລາຕົມຂມືນ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 15 minutes

This is a comforting soup from southern Thailand, where turmeric is used much more often than in the rest of the country. With the broth being so light and loaded with herbs, it's the kind of soup that feels therapeutic. It's perfect for when you've got a cold (add extra chilies if that's the case) or when you just feel like you deserve a bit of tasty self-care.

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3 cups (750 ml) unsalted chicken or fish stock

½ cup (60 g) coarsely chopped shallots

3-inch piece (16 g) turmeric, thinly sliced (see [note](#))

8 thin slices (18 g) galangal

5 cloves (25 g) garlic, smashed

5 makrut lime leaves, torn into chunks

2 to 3 dried or fresh Thai chilies, halved on a diagonal

1 stalk lemongrass, bottom half only, smashed and cut in 2-inch (5 cm) pieces

1 pound (450 g) fish fillet, cut in 2-inch (5 cm) chunks (see [note](#))

2 tablespoons (30 ml) fish sauce

2 tablespoons (30 ml) tamarind paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) 1 teaspoon (5 ml) granulated sugar

7 to 8 sprigs cilantro, chopped (optional)

Jasmine rice, for serving

**In a medium pot, combine the stock**, shallots, turmeric, galangal, garlic, makrut lime leaves, chilies, and lemongrass, and bring to a boil over high heat. Turn the heat down to medium and simmer for 5 minutes to allow the herbs to infuse.

**Add the fish, fish sauce**, tamarind paste, and sugar, and simmer for 1 to 2 minutes, just until the fish is cooked. Remove from the heat, then taste and adjust the seasoning with more fish sauce, tamarind paste, or sugar as needed. Before serving, you can remove the herbs, as they are not meant to be eaten, though they are traditionally left in the soup. I like to remove only half to make it a little easier to eat while keeping the traditional look. Be sure to remind your guests not to eat them!

**Stir in the chopped cilantro**, if desired, and serve with jasmine rice.

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*Note: I much prefer fresh turmeric to ground in soups because the powder settles at the bottom. It's also easy to overdo ground turmeric, which will make the soup taste medicinal. If you cannot find fresh, start with ½ teaspoon (2 ml) ground turmeric and add more as needed.*

*Any mild white fish will work, such as cod, sea bass, or tilapia. In Thailand, mackerel is used if something firmer and with a stronger flavor is preferred.*

### Removing Turmeric Stains

If you don't want a yellow cutting board, put down a piece of paper towel or some other kind of barrier when you cut the turmeric, to avoid staining. Also, don't use a wooden spoon to stir the soup

unless you want it to turn yellow as well. It's a good idea to wash anything that touches turmeric as soon as you're done with it so that the color doesn't have time to sink in. But if you do end up with yellow kitchen tools, putting them out in the sun for a day will help fade the stain. Otherwise, think of it as adding character!





# Coconut Galangal Salmon Soup

Tom Kha Pla Salmon | ต้มข่าปลาแซลมอน

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 20 minutes, plus 30 minutes if making fish stock This dish is a bit reminiscent of a seafood chowder, except with the iconic herbs that are common to many Thai soups. The citrusy herbs and the subtle hint of lime make this dish pair beautifully with any fish, but I particularly love using salmon for the color it brings to an otherwise white dish. Use chicken stock for an easy version, or if you have an extra 15 minutes, make a quick fish stock for a pronounced seafood flavor (my preferred option).

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## QUICK FISH STOCK

3 cups (750 ml) water

12 ounces (340 g) fish bones, cut in 2-inch (5 cm) chunks

Top half of lemongrass, smashed and cut in 2-inch (5 cm) pieces

## SOUP

2 cups (500 ml) unsalted chicken or fish stock

1½ cups (375 ml) coconut milk

1 stalk lemongrass, bottom half only, smashed and cut in 2-inch (5 cm) pieces

15 thin slices (35 g) galangal

1 to 2 Thai chilies, smashed until broken  
6 to 7 makrut lime leaves  
3.5 ounces (100 g) oyster or shimeji mushrooms  
1½ tablespoons (22 ml) fish sauce  
½ teaspoon (2 ml) table salt  
12 ounces (340 g) salmon fillet, or another fish of your choice, cut in 1-inch (2.5 cm) cubes  
1 to 2 tablespoons (15 to 30 ml) lime juice  
6 to 7 sprigs cilantro, or 1 green onion, chopped  
Jasmine rice, for serving

#### FOR THE QUICK FISH STOCK

**Bring the water to a boil** in a medium pot over high heat. Add the bones and lemongrass, then turn the heat down to medium-low; simmer for at least 15 minutes. If you have 45 minutes, even better. You may need to top it up with more water to keep the bones submerged.

**Remove the bones**, and if there's lots of meat left on them, pick it off to add back into the soup. Strain the stock; you should have about 2 cups (500 ml); if you have less, add water to make up for the shortfall.

#### FOR THE SOUP

**Bring the stock to a boil and add the coconut milk**, lemongrass, galangal, and chilies. Twist the makrut lime leaves to bruise them and release their aroma before tearing them into big chunks and adding to the pot, discarding any big center stems. Simmer over medium heat for 5 minutes.

**Add the mushrooms, fish sauce, and salt**, bring back to a simmer, and cook for about 2 minutes, until the mushrooms look wilted. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more fish sauce or salt as needed.

**Add the salmon and stir to separate the pieces.** If you're using an electric stove, turn it off immediately and let the residual heat gently cook the salmon through in the next 3 minutes or so. If using a gas stove, keep the heat on for another 15 seconds before turning it off. The soup will remain hot enough to cook the salmon for a while, so this is a technique for making sure the fish does not overcook.

**Stir in 1 tablespoon (15 ml) lime juice,** then taste, and if you prefer a tarter soup, you can add the remaining lime juice. Before serving you can remove the herbs, as they are not meant to be eaten, though they are traditionally left in the soup. I like to remove only half to make it a little easier to eat while keeping the traditional look. Be sure to remind your guests not to eat them! Stir in chopped cilantro and serve with jasmine rice.





# Glass Noodle Soup with Pork Meatballs

Gaeng Jeud Woonsen Moo Sub | แกงจีดวุ้นเส้นหมูสับ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 30 minutes

*Gaeng jeud* literally means “bland curry,” but this one is anything but bland. The term refers to a family of clear soups that are seasoned simply and are never spicy, in contrast to more strongly flavored curries. It’s the epitome of simple Thai home cooking, and every Thai household makes some version of this dish regularly, especially if there are kids. One could say it’s our chicken noodle soup. This recipe features glass noodles, which is one of the most popular versions, but it is not served on its own like ramen or pho. It is served with rice like all our other soups. Yes, carb on carb at its best!

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1.4 ounces (40 g) dried glass noodles (bean threads)

1 tablespoon (15 ml) neutral oil

5 cloves (25 g) garlic, chopped

4 cups (1 L) unsalted homemade pork or chicken stock ([this page](#)) 5 cups (200 g) bite-sized napa cabbage pieces

1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon (20 ml) soy sauce

2 teaspoons (10 ml) fish sauce

½ teaspoon (2 ml) granulated sugar

1 to 2 green onions and/or 7 to 8 sprigs cilantro, chopped

Freshly ground white pepper, to taste

Jasmine rice, for serving

#### **MEATBALLS**

10.5 ounces (300 g) ground pork

1 tablespoon (15 ml) soy sauce

½ tablespoon (7 ml) fish sauce

1 teaspoon (5 ml) granulated sugar

¼ teaspoon (1 ml) ground white pepper

**Soak the glass noodles** in room temperature water for 7 to 10 minutes to soften, then cut them into sections, about 3 inches (8 cm) long.

**Pour the oil into a medium pot** over medium heat, then add one test piece of chopped garlic. Once the garlic is bubbling, add the remaining garlic, stirring constantly until the pieces are light golden, about 5 minutes. Do not let the garlic turn brown or it will be bitter. Turn off the heat and use a slotted spoon to remove the garlic, leaving the oil in the pot. Put the garlic in a small bowl.

**To the same pot, add the stock** and bring to a boil over high heat.

**Meanwhile, combine all the ingredients for the meatballs** in a mixing bowl and mix just until combined.

**Once the stock is boiling, use two spoons** or a small disher to scoop and drop bite-sized chunks of the meatball mixture into the stock. They're supposed to be rustic, so no need to make them pretty.

**Once all the meatballs are in the pot, add the napa cabbage**, soy sauce, fish sauce, and sugar, and bring the soup back to a boil. If serving right away, add the glass noodles and cook for 3 minutes before removing from the

heat. If not serving right away, turn off the heat for now, and then closer to serving time bring it back to a boil to add the noodles.

**Taste and adjust the seasoning with fish sauce or sugar as needed,** then stir in green onions and/or cilantro to taste. Transfer to serving bowls and top with the fried garlic and pepper. Serve immediately with jasmine rice.





# Coconut Galangal Mushroom Soup

Tom Kha Hed | ຕົ່ນຂ້າເຫດ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 35 minutes

One of my all-time favorite soups, and the first dish I made to cure my homesickness after moving to Canada, is *tom kha gai*. It's a heart-warming coconut soup with chicken and mushroom, infused with what I call the "Thai trinity"—lemongrass, galangal, and makrut lime leaves. For years I resisted veganizing *tom kha gai* because, to me, the chicken is core to this soup. But now that you can get so many types of Asian mushrooms at most Asian markets, plus my realization that mushrooms are quite rich in umami, I thought it was time I gave the no-chicken version a go, replacing it with a fun mix of mushrooms. The verdict? It's so good I didn't miss the chicken at all! Just one rule: no button mushrooms in this, please.

---

#### QUICK VEGETABLE STOCK

3 cups (750 ml) water

$\frac{1}{4}$  medium yellow onion, small-diced

3 cloves (15 g) garlic, chopped

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup (65 g) diced peeled daikon and/or 1 stalk celery, small-diced

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon (2 ml) ground white pepper

## Soup

5 makrut lime leaves  
1 stalk lemongrass, bottom half only, smashed and cut in 2-inch (5 cm) pieces  
15 thin slices (35 g) galangal  
3 to 4 Thai chilies, smashed  
1½ cups (375 ml) coconut milk  
10.5 ounces (300 g) mixed Asian mushrooms, cut in bite-sized pieces (see [note](#)) 1½ tablespoons (22 ml) soy sauce or fish sauce  
1 tablespoon (12 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed  
½ teaspoon (2 ml) table salt  
¾ cup (100 g) halved cherry tomatoes (see [note](#))  
1½ to 2 tablespoons (22 to 30 ml) lime juice  
8 to 10 sprigs cilantro and/or 1 to 2 green onions, for garnish  
Jasmine rice, for serving

**Make a quick vegetable stock.** Place the water in a medium pot, then add the onions, garlic, daikon and/or celery, and pepper, and bring to a boil over high heat. Turn the heat down to medium and simmer for 15 minutes.

**Strain the stock** into a liquid measuring cup—you should have about 2 cups (500 ml). If you have less than that, add water to make up for the shortfall. Pour the measured amount of stock back into the pot.

**Twist the makrut lime leaves to bruise them**, then tear them into big chunks and add them to the stock, discarding any big center stems. Then add the lemongrass, galangal, chilies, and coconut milk, and bring to a simmer over high heat. Turn the heat down to medium-low and simmer for 5 to 7 minutes.

**Add the mushrooms**, soy sauce, sugar, and salt, and cook for 2 to 3 minutes, until the mushrooms are cooked through.

**Add the tomatoes** and simmer for 1 minute to soften, then turn off the heat. Add 1 tablespoon (15 ml) lime juice, then taste and add the remaining lime juice and more salt as needed. Before serving you can remove the herbs, as they are not meant to be eaten, though they are traditionally left in the soup. I like to remove only half to make it a little easier to eat while keeping the traditional look. Be sure to remind your guests not to eat them!

**Garnish with chopped cilantro and/or green onions to taste.** Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Notes:** Choose a few types of any of these mushrooms: *shimeji*, *oyster*, *straw*, *maitake*, *fresh shiitake*, *enoki*, and *king oyster*.

*Tomatoes are not traditionally added to tom kha, but without chicken it's good to have another vegetable in the soup besides the mushrooms, and I have always loved the combination of tomatoes and coconut.*





# Coconut Mackerel Soup

Tom Gati Pla Too | ຕົ່ມກະທີປາຫຸ້ງ

SERVES 4

COOKING TIME: 20 minutes

*Tom gati* is one of those basic, old-school dishes that are commonly eaten in Thai homes, but you rarely see it outside Thailand, maybe because it's not pretty, or is too simple, or perhaps the shrimp paste funk makes it a bit of an acquired taste. Whatever the reason, I think it's such a hidden gem (and the funk is super subtle!). In Thailand, *tom gati* is most commonly made with shrimp or Thai short mackerel, but here I use regular mackerel, which works fantastically. The key salting agent in *tom gati* comes from fermented shrimp paste, but if you don't have it or don't like it, you can use fish sauce instead and cut out the salt.

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$\frac{1}{2}$  pound (225 g) asparagus

2 to 3 tablespoons (30 to 45 ml) neutral oil

2 mackerel fillets (9.5 ounces/275 g total)

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon (2 ml) white peppercorns

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup (60 g) chopped shallots

1 to 2 teaspoons (5 to 10 ml) fermented shrimp paste (see [note](#))

$1\frac{1}{4}$  cups (310 ml) coconut milk

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup (125 ml) water

2 to 3 teaspoons (10 to 15 ml) tamarind paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) 2 teaspoons (8 g) finely chopped palm sugar, packed

Chopped Thai chilies and/or chopped cilantro, for garnish

Jasmine rice, for serving

**Cut off 1½ inches (3.5 cm) from the bottom of the asparagus** to remove the woody ends. Cut the trimmed spears into 2-inch (5 cm) pieces.

**To sear the mackerel fillets**, place a 12-inch (30 cm) skillet over high heat and add enough oil to coat the bottom. Pat the fish dry, then once the oil is hot, sear the fish without moving it until browned and cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Remove from the pan and let cool.

**Make the herb paste** by pounding the peppercorns into a powder with a mortar and pestle, then adding the shallots and shrimp paste and pounding into a rough paste.

**Place the coconut milk** and water in a medium pot and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Stir in the herb paste and simmer gently for 3 to 4 minutes. If using fish sauce instead of shrimp paste, add it at this step.

**Meanwhile, remove all the bones and fins from the mackerel**, then tear the fillets into big chunks. The skin is edible, but you don't have to put it in if you don't like it. You can also leave one fillet whole and place it on top for a more elegant presentation.

**Taste the broth** and add more shrimp paste, fish sauce, or salt as needed. Add the asparagus, 2 teaspoons (10 ml) tamarind paste, and sugar. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, depending on the thickness of the asparagus.

**Add the mackerel pieces and simmer** for just 30 seconds to heat through. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more tamarind paste as needed.

**Garnish with chopped chilies** and/or cilantro, and serve with jasmine rice.

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**Do-ahead:** The mackerel can be fried a few days in advance and stored in the fridge until ready to use. This is also a great dish to make with leftover fish.

**Note:** If you're a shrimp paste novice, add 1 teaspoon (5 ml) at first, then taste the soup and add more if desired. If you're happy with the shrimp paste flavor, use salt to adjust seasoning. If you don't like shrimp paste, use 2 tablespoons (30 ml) of fish sauce instead.

### The Asparagus Bend-and-Snap

In Thailand, lotus stems are often used in *tom gati*, but I find asparagus to be a great substitute. You've probably heard that you should bend asparagus until it snaps and discard the tough bottom piece, but I find that this way, perfectly tender parts often end up wasted. I simply chop off about 1½ inches (3.5 cm) and it has worked for me so far.



