

# VEGETABLES

Pak | ພົກ

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## Vegetables, Thai Style

The recipes in this chapter are tasty vegetable side dishes that you can add to any meal, Thai or not. They're mostly stir-fries because that's how we usually cook vegetable-only dishes in Thailand.

In addition to these recipes, I also want to share a few more ideas for cooking vegetables that you might not have thought to try, because over the years that I've lived in Canada, I've noticed many things Thai people do with vegetables that are not commonly done here.

- **Cook your cucumber.** In North America, cucumbers seem to be used either raw or pickled. I'm not sure why, because they cook up beautifully, just like their cousin, the zucchini. In Thailand they are commonly stir-fried, such as in Sweet and Sour Pork ([this](#)

[page](#)), and added to soups. You can cook them for just a few minutes to maintain their crunch, but in soups we like to let them simmer until soft and luscious. Mini cucumbers are preferred, as those are what we use in Thailand, but English cucumber will do.

- **Cook your lettuce.** The humble green leaf and romaine lettuces can be cooked like any other leafy greens. In Asia, they're often added to soups, but they can also be quickly stir fried. Try using romaine lettuce instead of napa cabbage in the Glass Noodle Soup with Pork Meatballs ([this page](#)).
- **Use beansprouts as the star.** I mostly see beansprouts used as the default vegetables in noodle dishes such as *pho* or *pad thai*, but they can be the star of the dish. In my family we often make a beansprouts stir-fry with garlic and a sauce similar to my Universal Stir Fry Sauce ([this page](#)), with or without meat. They also don't need to be chopped, which is perfect for a weeknight!
- **Use kabocha squash more often.** The go-to squash of North America appears to be butternut squash, but I promise you that kabocha has butternut beat in every way. It is sweeter, creamier, and you can eat the skin which saves you time and is more nutritious. It can be roasted, stir-fried, simmered, and used in desserts. Try the Kabocha Squash Stir Fry ([this page](#)), or use it instead of pumpkin purée in your baking.



# Green Beans Stir-Fried with Chili Paste

Tua Fak Yao Pad Nam Prik Pao | ถั่วฝักยาวผัดน้ำพริกเผา

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 8 minutes plus 20 minutes if making fried shallots For a long time I was searching for an easy go-to recipe for green beans, because they're always available and inexpensive, and they make a substantial veggie side to any meal. But I've always found green beans a bit unsatisfying, since they don't absorb any sauce, so most of the time they just end up tasting like...beans, which is hardly exciting. So my solution was to make a sauce so intense that even just a little bit that clings onto the waxy skin adds a lot of character. Thai chili paste to the rescue! In Thailand, we would use long beans, which have a nuttier flavor and are less watery than the typical green beans sold in North America, so use those if you can find them. The optional fried shallots add a fantastic crunch, and you can buy them at many Asian markets, though if you have time, homemade ones do taste better.

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## FRIED SHALLOTS (OPTIONAL)

As many shallots as you want

Table salt

Neutral oil, for frying

## SAUCE

2 tablespoons (30 ml) Thai chili paste, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#))  
1 tablespoon (15 ml) soy sauce

2 teaspoons (10 ml) fish sauce

2 tablespoons (30 ml) neutral oil

5 cloves (25 g) garlic, chopped

12 ounces (340 g) green beans or long beans, cut in 2-inch (5 cm) pieces

3 tablespoons (20 g) fried shallots, store-bought or homemade (optional)

Jasmine rice, for serving

#### FOR THE FRIED SHALLOTS

**Halve the shallots vertically** through the root, then trim off the root end far enough for the layers to come apart. Slice the layers lengthwise as evenly as possible. If the shallots are very large, halve them crosswise as well.

**Line a large plate or baking sheet with paper towel** and spread out the shallots in a single layer. Lightly but evenly sprinkle salt over the shallots and then let them sit for about 10 minutes; the salt will draw out moisture from the shallots, which will help them fry faster. Once the water has been pulled out and the shallots look wet, dry them off as much as possible with a paper towel. You may need to dry them twice if the first piece of paper towel gets soaked.

**In a wok or pot, add just enough oil to submerge all the shallots.** Turn the heat to medium and add a test piece of shallot to the oil. Once this piece has a constant stream of bubbles, add the remaining shallots and turn the heat down to medium-low.

**Keep frying, stirring frequently** and maintaining the heat so the bubbling is not too aggressive. The bubbling will naturally slow down as the shallots become crispy. (See [sidebar](#).) **Once the shallots are browned** and the bubbling has mostly subsided, remove them with a mesh skimmer or slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Cool completely and, if not using right away,

store in an airtight container. To ensure they stay crispy while stored, fry them until they're 100% dry.

#### FOR THE GREEN BEANS

**Make the sauce** by combining all the ingredients in a small bowl.

**Place a wok on medium heat** and add the oil and the garlic. Sauté until the garlic starts to turn golden. Turn the heat up to high, then add the beans and a splash of water. Stir for 1 minute.

**Add the sauce and keep stirring** until the beans are cooked to your liking, about 2 minutes. If the sauce dries up too quickly, add a splash of water. Don't add too much water, though, as you want the sauce to be thick in the end.

**Turn off the heat and taste the sauce;** depending on the brand of Thai chili paste you're using, you may need to add a touch of granulated sugar.

**Plate and top with the fried shallots.** Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Do-ahead:** Make the fried shallots in advance, if using, and store in an airtight container in the fridge indefinitely. The sauce can be made in bulk and kept in the fridge indefinitely.

#### The Secret to Crispy Shallots

The reason foods get crispy is that they are dry. So the secret to making crispy shallots is to fry them until they have no moisture left. How would you know this? The hint is in the bubbling. Foods bubble in frying oil because their moisture evaporates into steam as it is heated. If the food is no longer bubbling, there is no more moisture. This can be tricky, though, because if the heat is too high, the shallots will brown too much before they have time to crisp. If the heat is too low, too much oil will seep inside the shallots and they'll become greasy and soggy. Keeping the shallots bubbling not too

aggressively and not too weakly is a good rule of thumb, but it does take practice and experience.





# Garlicky Cabbage Fish Sauce Stir-Fry

Galum Plee Pad Nam Pla | กะหล่ำปลีผัดน้ำปลา

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 8 minutes This dish went viral for a while in Thailand, and it was quite astounding because it's just a simple plate of cabbage, cooked in the most basic way. But once you try it, you'll understand the wonder. How could a plate of cabbage possibly be this delicious? I never thought cabbage could be good on its own. As a slaw drenched in a tasty dressing, sure. As a component of something more complex, sure. But as just...cabbage? Turns out, the magic is in my favorite ingredient: fish sauce. The chunky pieces of garlic help too, so don't skimp on that. It's a great side to any Thai meal but, honestly, just give me some hot jasmine rice with it and it's all I need for a great light lunch.

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8 cloves (40 g) garlic

1 to 2 tablespoons (15 to 30 ml) neutral oil

6 cups (300 g) bite-sized Chinese cabbage pieces (see [note](#)) 1½ tablespoons (22 ml) fish sauce (see [note](#))

Ground white or black pepper, to taste (optional)

Jasmine rice, for serving

**Lightly smash the garlic with a mortar and pestle** until it breaks into large chunks. Alternatively, you can crush the cloves with the flat side of your knife and then coarsely chop into large chunks.

**Place a wok on medium heat** and pour in just enough oil to coat the bottom. Add the garlic right away (no need to wait for the oil to get hot), and keep stirring until the edges start to turn golden, about 2 minutes.

**Turn the heat up to high and add the cabbage**, then toss to get the leaves coated in oil. Drizzle the fish sauce over the cabbage, add the pepper, and keep tossing for 1 to 2 more minutes, just until the thinner leaves are wilted but the thicker parts are still crisp.

**Remove from the heat**, plate, and garnish with an extra sprinkling of pepper, if desired. Serve immediately with jasmine rice. Enjoy!

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**Notes:** While regular green cabbage will work, Chinese cabbage has more delicate leaves and a sweeter flavor. Their shape is more squat than round, and you can find them at Chinese supermarkets. Cut thicker parts into smaller pieces.

Use a good-quality fish sauce, such as Red Boat, Mega Chef, or Squid, for this recipe, as it is the only sauce used.





# Bok Choy Stir-Fry with Thai Miso

Pak Gwang Toong Pad Tao Jiew | ພັກກວາງຕຸ່ປັ້ນຝັດເຕົາເຈື້ອວ

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 10 minutes Do you ever get all excited about some lush greens at the store, bring them home, then every time you open the fridge, you're completely uninspired by them? Then two weeks later you end up doing something boring just to save them? This happened to me a lot with baby bok choy because they always look so cute on the shelves, but they don't really have much to offer in terms of flavor. Then I realized that I can use *pad pak boong* sauce on them, and that changed everything. *Pad pak boong* is a water spinach stir-fry that is arguably the most popular vegetable dish in Thailand, and the secret is in the salty, umami *tao jiew*, or fermented soybean paste. Oh, and lots of garlic.

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1 pound (450 g) baby bok choy

7 cloves (35 g) garlic

1 to 3 Thai chilies, to taste (optional)

2 tablespoons (30 ml) neutral oil

1 teaspoon (5 ml) granulated sugar

Freshly ground white pepper, to taste

Jasmine rice, for serving

SAUCE

1 tablespoon (15 ml) fermented soybean paste

1 tablespoon (15 ml) oyster sauce

2 teaspoons (10 ml) soy sauce

**Halve the bok choy lengthwise** through the root so the leaves stay attached.

If working with larger ones, you may need to quarter them. Dry them off as much as you can to prevent the stir-fry from being too watery.

**Make the sauce** by combining all the ingredients in a small bowl.

**Pound the garlic and chilies** with a mortar and pestle briefly, just until they are broken into big chunks.

**Place a wok on medium heat** and add the oil and the smashed garlic and chilies. Sauté gently for about 2 minutes, until the garlic is golden. Don't use high heat at this stage—you want the garlic chunks to have time to cook and soften before they brown.

**Turn the heat up to high, then add the bok choy** and toss for 30 seconds. Add the sauce mixture and sugar; toss for about 1 minute, or just until the bok choy are heated through and wilted. Don't cook them for too long or they will release too much water and they will continue to wilt as they sit.

**Transfer the bok choy to a shallow serving bowl**, top with freshly ground pepper, and serve with jasmine rice.

### Does That Sauce Need Thickening?

When I make a stir-fry, I am sometimes asked why I don't thicken the sauce with a cornstarch slurry. It's an understandable question, given that many people are first exposed to stir-fries through Chinese cuisine, which often uses starch-thickened sauce. Thai stir-fry sauces are never thickened, and because we always serve them with rice, the sauce is absorbed by the rice and doesn't go anywhere. You might also have noticed that Thai sauces in general

are rarely thick and heavy, and very few things are thickened with starch.





# Vegan Five-Spice Roasted Brussels Sprouts

Galum Dao Kua Prik Gleua | กะหล่ำดาวคำวพริกเกลือ

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 30 minutes Growing up in Thailand, I had never seen or heard of Brussels sprouts, and when I came to Canada I was enamored with how cute these tiny cabbages are! They intrigue me because they can be so awful when cooked badly, yet so delicious when done right, and I have always enjoyed the challenge of coming up with unique ways to make them delicious. This recipe was an instant winner. The slight sweetness is key to softening the bitterness of the sprouts, and the subtle aroma of five-spice is the magic touch. The fried garlic is the real hero here, though, so don't skip that. Warning: these are hard to stop eating!

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3 tablespoons (45 ml) neutral oil

8 cloves (40 g) garlic, chopped

1 pound (450 g) Brussels sprouts, halved or quartered if large (see [note](#))  
½ teaspoon (2 ml) table salt

1 teaspoon (5 ml) granulated sugar

¼ teaspoon (1 ml) five-spice powder, store-bought or homemade ([this page](#)) Freshly ground white pepper, to taste

2 teaspoons (10 ml) soy sauce

1 to 2 Thai chilies, chopped (optional)

**Preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C)** and set a rack in the middle.

**Meanwhile, fry the garlic.** Place a metal sieve over a large, heatproof mixing bowl. Place a wok on medium heat and add the oil and a small piece of garlic as your test piece. Once the garlic is bubbling, add the remaining garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until golden. Pour the garlic and oil into the sieve, letting the oil drain into the mixing bowl.

**Add the Brussels sprouts to the garlic oil**, add the salt, and toss thoroughly. Place the sprouts on a baking sheet, cut side down, spreading them out so they are not touching each other. Do not wash the bowl just yet.

**Roast the sprouts in the oven** for about 15 minutes, until they are well browned on the underside and the tenderness is to your liking. Check the tenderness by poking a sprout with a fork.

**Meanwhile, stir together the sugar**, five-spice powder, and pepper in a small bowl.

**As soon as the sprouts are cooked**, return them to the mixing bowl, then sprinkle the five-spice mixture, soy sauce, and chilies overtop; toss to mix well.

**Plate the sprouts**, sprinkle the fried garlic overtop, and serve.

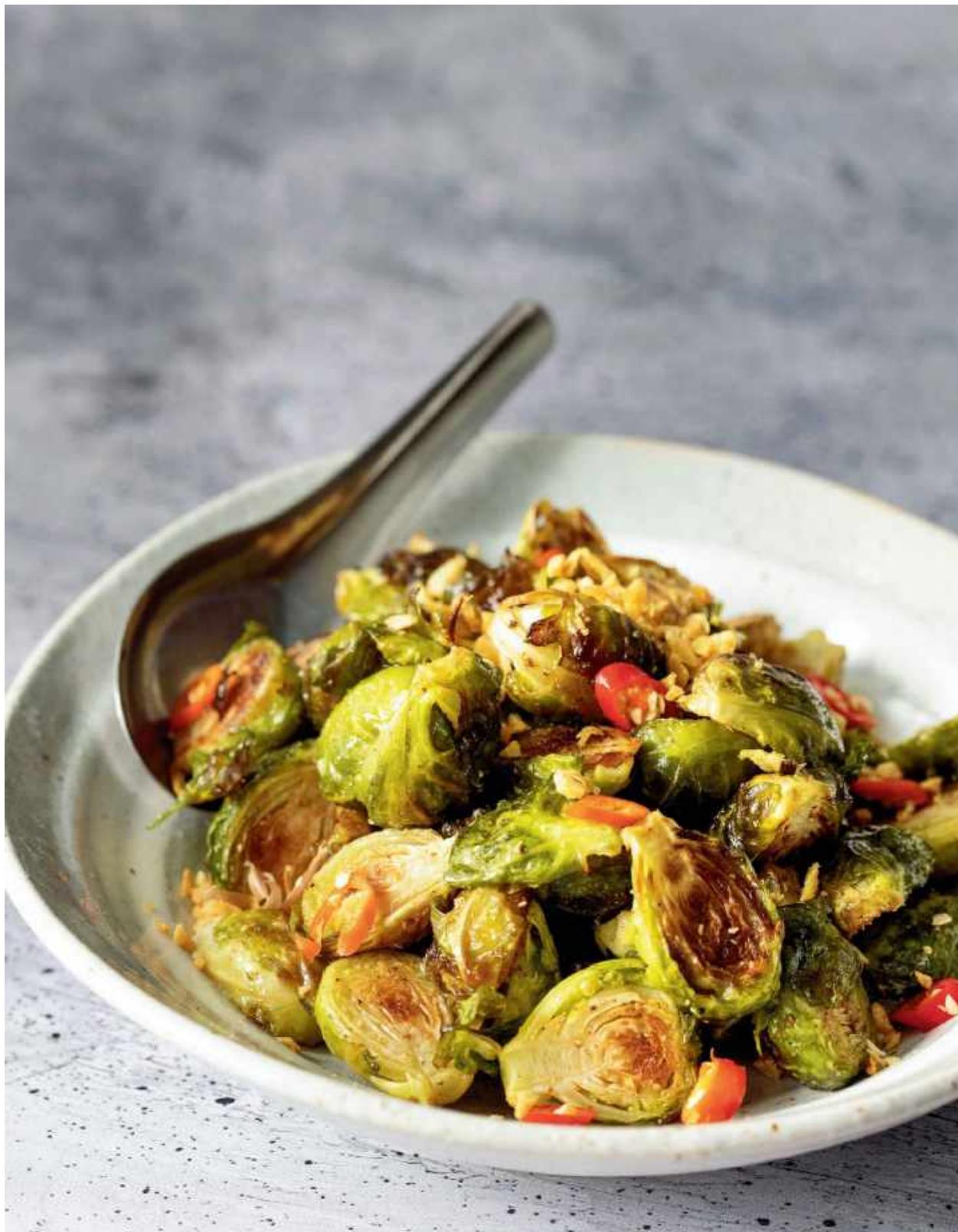
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**Do-ahead:** *Make the sauce up to 1 week in advance and keep in the fridge.*

**Note:** *Before cutting the Brussels sprouts, make sure they are dried thoroughly if they've been washed, to ensure good browning.*

### No-Oven, Al Dente Brussels Sprouts

Roasting Brussels sprouts in the oven until they are browned will get you tender sprouts. If you want them al dente, try pan-roasting them. Pour enough oil into a large skillet to coat the bottom. Place the sprouts cut side down (you'll need to do this in two batches), then turn the heat to medium-high. The sprouts will slowly heat up and eventually sizzle. Cook without moving them for a few minutes; once the undersides are well browned, lower the heat to medium and flip them over to cook on the other side for 1 minute. If they're too al dente at this point, add a splash of water and cover the pan for 30 to 60 seconds to steam them. For this method, I would add the salt to the five-spice mixture.





# Chinese Broccoli with Oyster Sauce

Kana Pad Nam Mun Hoi | ຂະນ້າຜັດນໍາມັນໂອຍ

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 12 minutes This is a workhorse of a side dish: so easy you will want to make it regularly, and so good no one will complain.

Chinese broccoli, or *gai lan*, is a staple vegetable in Asian households because it's incredibly versatile and lasts a long time in the fridge. So having a good basic recipe for *gai lan* is gold for busy weeknights. The key to success is separating stems and leaves and cooking them at different times, because the key to not having chewy leaves is to cook them minimally. Pay attention to the heat instructions carefully here, as the final key to success is to adjust the heat as the cooking progresses.

## SAUCE

1½ tablespoons (22 ml) oyster sauce

½ tablespoon (7 ml) soy sauce

1 tablespoon (15 ml) water

## CHINESE BROCCOLI

10.5 ounces (300 g) Chinese broccoli (*gai lan*, see [note](#)) 7 cloves (35 g) garlic

2 tablespoons (30 ml) neutral oil

½ teaspoon (2 ml) granulated sugar

¼ to ½ teaspoon (1 to 2 ml) ground white or black pepper

Jasmine rice, for serving

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**Make the sauce** by combining all the ingredients in a small bowl.

**Cut any thick Chinese broccoli stems** on a sharp diagonal into thin slices. Thinner parts of the stems can be chopped into 2-inch (5 cm) pieces. Once you get to the leaves, cut them into bite-sized chunks. Keep the stems and leaves separated.

**Pound the garlic cloves with a mortar and pestle**, just until they break into larger pieces; you can also smash the garlic with the flat side of your knife and cut each clove into 2 to 3 large chunks.

**Place a wok on medium-low heat**, then add the oil and the garlic and stir for about 2 minutes, until light golden.

**Turn the heat up to medium** and add the Chinese broccoli stems; stir for 30 to 45 seconds.

**Turn the heat up to high**, then add the Chinese broccoli leaves, sauce, sugar, and pepper. Toss for 30 to 45 seconds. Immediately remove from the heat when the leaves look mostly wilted. Do not overcook—the residual heat will wilt the leaves further, and the leaves also get chewy when cooked too much.

**Serve** with jasmine rice.

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**Note:** Choose younger, smaller *gai lan*, as they are more tender and less likely to be bitter.

### Garlic Gold

I learned this trick from my mom, who loves eating big chunks of garlic in stir-fries, and I think it works exceedingly well in this simple recipe. Instead of chopping the garlic, I briefly pound the cloves until they look shredded but are still in larger pieces. Then I cook the

garlic pieces gently and slowly in the oil so they soften and become sweet, while at the same time infusing the oil with maximum garlic flavor. These soft, big garlic pieces then absorb the umami oyster sauce, and finding them in the pile of greens is like finding gold.





# Mixed Veggie Stir-Fry

Pad Pak Ruam | ພັດພັກຮວມ

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 10 minutes This basic dish unexpectedly became one of the most popular recipes on my YouTube channel. I was surprised at first, but I think it's because everyone needs a delicious-but-simple recipe for a vegetable side dish that will go with any meal. And this is it. Considering what it is, it is incredibly tasty. The suggested veggies are my “optimal mix,” but you do not need six different kinds nor do you need these specific ones. Feel free to find your own optimal mix. The secret to having all the different veggies properly cooked is to stagger-add them according to how long they take to cook.

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## SAUCE

2 tablespoons (30 ml) oyster sauce (see [note](#))

2 teaspoons (10 ml) soy sauce

2 teaspoons (10 ml) Thai seasoning sauce

1 tablespoon (15 ml) water

## STIR-FRY

1 small (70 g) carrot, cut in bite-sized sticks

4.5 ounces (125 g) small cauliflower florets (about  $\frac{1}{4}$  head)

3 cups (200 g) bite-sized green cabbage pieces

3.5 ounces (100 g) Chinese broccoli (*gai lan*), stems thinly sliced on a diagonal, leaves roughly chopped into chunks 10 sugar snap peas, strings removed, cut in half on a diagonal

5 fresh shiitake mushrooms, tough stems removed and caps sliced

2 tablespoons (30 ml) neutral oil

6 cloves (30 g) garlic, chopped

1 teaspoon (5 ml) granulated sugar

Ground white pepper, to taste

Jasmine rice, for serving

**Make the sauce** by combining all the ingredients in a small bowl.

**Organize your vegetables** in the order they will be cooked. In the first bowl, place the carrots and cauliflower, or other hard veggies that take the longest to cook. A second bowl should hold the cabbage, Chinese broccoli stems, snap peas, and mushrooms, or any other medium-firm veggies. A third bowl will have the Chinese broccoli leaves or any other leafy greens.

**Place a wok on medium heat**, then add the oil and garlic, and sauté until the smaller bits of garlic turn golden.

**Add the hard veggies (bowl 1)** and a splash of water, then turn the heat up to high and toss for 2 to 3 minutes, until the veggies are halfway done. Allow most of the water in the wok to dry up before adding the second set of vegetables.

**Add the medium veggies (bowl 2)**, sauce, sugar, and pepper. Toss until the vegetables are cooked to your liking, 2 to 3 minutes.

**Add the leafy greens (bowl 3)** and toss just until wilted, about 15 seconds. Remove from the heat and serve with jasmine rice.

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**Note:** To make this dish vegetarian, use a vegetarian stir-fry sauce instead of the oyster sauce; it's available at many Asian grocery stores.

### Adding Protein

If you want to make this a complete meal in itself, you can add some protein. Mix 8 ounces (225 g) of bite-sized meats with 2 teaspoons (10 ml) soy sauce. Cook the meat over high heat until browned and remove from the pan. Throw it back in along with the leafy greens at the end.





# Kabocha Squash & Thai Basil Stir-Fry

Pad Faktong | ພຶດຝັກທອງ

SERVES 4

**COOKING TIME:** 20 minutes There are a few dishes that instantly remind me of my childhood, and *pad faktong* is one of them. It's a simple, popular vegetable dish that's made in just about every home. Sometimes we scramble eggs into it, sometimes we add a few slices of meat, but whatever the variation, the basil is a must. Kabocha squash is, without question, my favorite squash. It's sweeter and creamier than most other winter squashes, it cooks quickly, and the skin is edible, so you don't even need to peel it unless you prefer a smooth texture. Not to mention it's great in desserts too. In Thailand, we use a variety of squash called *faktong thai*, but it tastes pretty much identical to kabocha, which are widely available in North America.

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## SAUCE

1 tablespoon (15 ml) oyster sauce  
2 teaspoons (10 ml) soy sauce  
1 teaspoon (5 ml) fish sauce  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup (80 ml) water

## STIR-FRY

14 ounces (400 g) chopped kabocha squash (see [note](#))

$\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon (1 ml) ground white pepper, or to taste

2 tablespoons (30 ml) neutral oil

5 cloves (25 g) garlic, coarsely chopped

1 teaspoon (5 ml) granulated sugar

1 cup (15 g) Thai basil leaves

Jasmine rice, for serving

**Make the sauce** by combining all the ingredients in a small bowl.

**To prep the squash**, carefully cut the squash in half, then scoop out the seeds. Remove any woody blemishes on the skin. The rest of the skin is edible, but if you prefer a smoother texture, you can peel it, either partially or fully, with a vegetable peeler. Cut the squash into 1-inch (2.5 cm) wedges and weigh out 14 ounces (400 g); keep the remaining squash in the fridge for another use (such as Steamed Kabocha Squash Coconut Custard, [this page](#)). Slice each wedge crosswise into  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch (6 mm) thick pieces, leaving the pointy ends thicker to even out the size.

**Place a wok on medium-high heat** and add the oil and garlic. Once the garlic bubbles, stir for a few minutes, until the garlic starts to turn golden at the edges.

**Add the squash, sauce, and sugar** and toss to mix well. Cover the wok with a lid and let the squash cook for 3 minutes. Remove the lid and toss briefly, and if the wok has dried up, add a little splash of water, being careful not to add too much, as you don't want the end result to be soupy. Cover and cook for another 2 minutes. Uncover and toss, then check doneness by piercing a piece of squash with a fork to see if it is cooked through. If it's not, let it cook a little longer, adding another splash of water as needed.

**Once the squash is cooked, toss in the basil** and turn off the heat, using only the residual heat to wilt the leaves. Taste and adjust the seasoning as needed, then plate. Serve with jasmine rice.

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**Note:** Choose a larger squash that feels heavy for its size—it will have thicker flesh. The weight called for is for the squash already prepped as per the instructions.



