



my Thai Christmas

Several years ago, my sister and brother-in-law were living with us at our home in Utah. My brother-in-law had served a mission in Thailand, and had learned that one of his former missionary companions (native of Thailand) was without a place to go for Christmas. We invited him to spend Christmas with our family. Yes, kind, but read on...

At the time, he was a chef at one of the local Thai restaurants, and not any Thai restaurant, but my favorite Thai restaurant. I love Thai food! There are few dishes I haven't loved, but my favorites, hands down, are Massaman Curry, Tom Kha Gai (Coconut Soup), and Cashew Chicken.

Well, the stage was set. Our new friend (and chef) was coming to spend time with us over Christmas. Of course, we needed to eat. You know where I'm going. Yes, a little embarrassing—I turned my act of kindness into, let's say, an opportunity to learn some authentic Thai culture. I offered to buy all the food (how thoughtful) and he offered to help prepare it (how kind). Now, you should know, he did seem genuinely excited to share his expertise with us—at least that's the way I remember it.

On the special day, the food was purchased and laid out nicely on our counter. Knives were sharpened. Helping hands were readily available—except my hands. As my new friend chopped and mixed, I excitedly typed away on my computer taking detailed notes. This was a turning point in my life—a life of authentic Thai food—and whenever I desired!

Well, I'm probably building this up too much. BUT, I have served these dishes dozens of times over the years following. I was even talked into preparing it for 150 at the Annual Blue & Gold Banquet. So, I'm willing to put myself out there—these are three of the very best Thai recipes, with origins from a fantastic Thai restaurant (undisclosed).

One of our favorite traditions each Christmas is to pick a new country on Christmas day, and prepare a feast of authentic foods. Sometimes it doesn't turn out as well as we'd planned, but it's always a new experience. Perhaps, this Christmas you will fly away to Thailand. If not, try them some other time.

Merry Christmas from the Knechts!



Chicken Massaman Curry

INGREDIENTS (BASE):

- 4 T Veg Oil
- 4 Cans Coconut Milk
- $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Massaman Curry Paste (depends on taste; I put in $\frac{1}{2}$ C)
- 2 Cups Water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ Cup Brown Sugar
- $\frac{1}{2}$ Cup Sugar
- 2 T Fish Sauce (smells awful, but trust the recipe)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ Cup Peanut Butter
- 1 T Chicken Bouillon Powder

INGREDIENTS (STOCK):

- 6 regular sized potatoes, diced ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick)
- 1 onion quartered and sliced
- 5 carrots chopped (thinner than the potatoes, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick)
- 3 lbs. Thinly sliced chicken breast (You'll need a good chef's knife for this part. Slice it very thin. It's easiest to do this when the chicken is just slightly thawed).
- Two handfuls of non-salted peanuts (I just use chunky peanut butter (above) instead of regular)

COOKING INSTRUCTIONS:

1. First, prepare the curry by adding a little vegetable oil to your frying pan or wok and then add the curry. Stir briskly until it foams. Then add the chicken and cook partially (a couple minutes). Then add the coconut milk and cream.
2. Then, add everything for the base (anything that dissolves, or is liquid)
3. Bring this to a boil, add carrots and onions, peanuts, and chicken and let simmer for 5 minutes. Add potatoes and let simmer 5 to 10 minutes (your preference, but in Thailand they cook the veggies less than we do here. I like to cook them until they are about $\frac{1}{2}$ way cooked. They will continue to cook after you remove them from the oven, fyi.).
4. Top with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup non-salted cashews, which have been microwaved for two minutes) and serve (I usually don't do this, but it's a nice touch if you're really trying to knock it out of the park).

TIP:

Buy the good Jasmine rice, curry paste, and coconut milk at the Asian food store. Don't buy the curry in a can. Buy the paste!!

Tom Kha Gai

Servings: Approximately 15

Step 1: Simmer and Strain (15 minutes)

Instructions: Ingredients marked with an asterisk are only available at an Asian food store. Although you can purchase coconut milk, fish sauce, bamboo shoots, bean sprouts, and other items at a grocery store, I like to get those at the Asian store, too. They're generally cheaper, and I'm convinced they are more fresh and more authentic. Step 1: Add the following, and simmer for 15-20 minutes. Strain into large pot and remove solids.

- 5 Cans coconut milk
- 4 C Water (depending on the consistency of the coconut milk)
- 1 - 2 C Sugar (This depends on preference and the kind of coconut milk you purchased. Add a cup and continue until you reach your desired sweetness.)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ C Cilantro roots (chop up the ends or stalks of the cilantro, save tops for later. If out of season, get this at the Asian store)
- 8 Cloves garlic (make sure to crush the cloves slightly before adding)
- *6 Stalks lemongrass (Peal and use the bottom 1/3 of each stalk. Cut each into 1-inch pieces and crush slightly.)
- *4-5 Thai chilies, or oriental dried chilies (You can get the dried chilies at most stores, and they work great, too. Add more if you want it spicier.)
- *2 Cubic inches of grated galangal or ginger (I love the tube ginger! Expensive, but easy. People swear by galangal, but I like it just as much or more with ginger.)
- *10 Kaffir lime leaves (tear each leaf into a few pieces before adding.)

Step 2: Add Chicken or Shrimp and Remaining Liquids (10 minutes)

Instructions: Make sure the chicken is really thin. Do not add the limes—just the juice.

- 3-4 lbs. Chicken thinly sliced or shrimp (Cut chicken with a good chef's knife and when the chicken is nearly frozen. Cut a large breast in half, length-wise, before slicing. This will make nice thin 1 to 1.5" pieces.)
- 4 Limes (juice)
- *4 Tbsp. Fish sauce (This smells terrible, but use it nonetheless. It's important. Best purchased at the Asian store.)

Step 3: Add Onions (5 minutes)

Instructions: Add the onion and let cook for five minutes before adding the remaining vegetables.

- 1 Large Sweet Onion (cut long and thin)

Step 4: Add Remaining Vegetables (5 minutes)

Instructions: Don't let these vegies cook too long. Five minutes is plenty. I always add more vegetables to Thai dishes. I think it makes the meal, but a lot of people like it thinner. That's why there is a range of 1 to 2 cups for the items below. You can add more or less, based on what you like, but each of these are great in this recipe and adds an awesome crunchy texture to the soup. Authentic Tom Kha Gai doesn't generally include all of these, but I love them all and have had them in one version or another. In this section, I've take more creative liberties than everything above, fyi. Whatever you use, cut them long and skinny.

- *1-2 C Bean sprouts (You can do without these, but I really like them in this recipe. It's very hard to find a grocery stores, now, but usually you can find them at the Asian stores.)
- *1-2 15oz cans of straw mushrooms (You can get these in the can at the Asian market or use sliced button mushrooms if you want to go easy.)
- *1-2 15oz can(s) bamboo shoots (I use 2 cans, but 1 is plenty. I really like the skinny ones the best)
- 1 Yellow or orange pepper
- *1-2 C Snow peas (they always have these at the Asian food store and cheap)

Step 5: Serve with cilantro and limes on the side for people to add as desired, with jasmine rice and/or with chow mien noodles

Cashew Chicken

Servings: Approximately 10

Prepare Chicken:

$\frac{1}{4}$ C of Vegetable oil
2 $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. of thinly sliced and chopped chicken breast
2-3 Chopped garlic cloves and brown
2 T Ginger
1 1/2 Peppers (1/2 green, then some of the other colors)
1 Yellow or sweet onion
1/4 C Sherry or chicken broth

Sauce:

$\frac{1}{2}$ T of Chicken bouillon powder
2 T Sweet chili sauce
3 T Brown sugar
 $\frac{3}{4}$ C Oyster sauce (most important for this recipe)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ C Water
2 T Cornstarch
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ Cup Cashews

Other:

Water chestnuts (2-3 small cans)
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ C Non-salted, raw cashews
Pea snaps (LOVE these!)
Bamboo shoots
Baby corns
Green onion (sprinkle top)
Lemon wedges (served on top)

Heat the vegetable oil in a large skillet over high heat and add the chicken. Sprinkle with a small amount of salt, then leave it alone for at least a couple of minutes to give the chicken a chance to brown. When the chicken has turned golden, stir it around so that it can brown on all sides. Throw in the garlic and ginger and stir to combine. Stir in the bell pepper and let it cook for 2 to 3 minutes. While the pan is still hot, pour in the sherry. Stir it around, scraping the bottom of the pan to loosen all the flavorful bits.

Turn the heat to medium-low and pour in the sauce mixture, then mix the cornstarch with 1/4 cup water to make a slurry and pour it in. Stir the sauce for 1 to 2 minutes to thicken.

Then add the water chestnuts, cashews, and vegetables and stir to coat everything with the sauce, adding water if the sauce is too thick. Cook for another 5 to 10 minutes. Finally, sprinkle on the green onions and place a few lemon wedges. Serve with jasmine rice and/or chow mien noodles.