

Vietnamese Rice Noodle Salad

By MollyandBrandon

Excerpted from DELANCEY, by Molly Wizenberg (Simon & Schuster, 2014) During Delancey's gestation, and for a long time after it opened, we ate a lot of takeout. One of our favorite quick, cheap lunches was (and still is) a Vietnamese rice noodle salad called bun, and we like it enough that now, sometimes, we even make our own version at home. Don't be put off by the number of steps. The dressing, a take on nuoc cham, can be made a few days ahead, and if you've got the ingredients on hand and the dressing prepared, you can bang this meal out in very little time. This salad is wide open to adaptations and a great vehicle for using up leftovers or odds and ends. Take the recipe and run with it, using whatever vegetables and cooked meats you have on hand. (And though it changes the whole concept, try substituting hot freshly cooked rice for the noodles. We do that often. I like to use Calrose, an inexpensive Japanese-style medium-grain rice that's grown in California and commonly sold in Asian grocery stores.)

Serves 2 to 3 The dressing:

- 3 tablespoons fish sauce
- 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice
- 2 to 3 tablespoons light brown sugar
- 6 to 8 tablespoons water, to taste
- 1 medium clove garlic, minced
- 1 fresh Thai (also sold as "bird's eye") chile, minced

The salad:

- 8 ounces thin rice noodles (roughly the width of linguine)
 - 3 or 4 napa cabbage leaves, thinly sliced crosswise
 - 1 medium carrot, shredded or cut into matchsticks
 - 1/2 cucumber, halved, seeded, and thinly sliced
 - 1 handful chopped fresh herbs, preferably a combination of basil, cilantro, and mint
 - 8 ounces cooked meat or shrimp, cut or torn into bite-sized pieces
 - 1/2 cup salted peanuts, coarsely chopped
1. To prepare the dressing, combine the fish sauce, lime juice, 2 tablespoons of the brown sugar, 6 tablespoons of the water, the garlic, and the chile. Whisk well. Taste: if it's too pungent, add more water, 1 tablespoon at a time. If you'd like more sweetness, add more brown sugar, 1/2 tablespoon at a time. Remember that you're going to be putting this dressing on unsalted vegetables and noodles: you want the dressing to have a lot of flavor, but it shouldn't knock you over. Pour into a serving bowl. (Covered and chilled, the dressing will keep for 3 days to a week.)
 2. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add the rice noodles, and cook for 4 to 5 minutes, until tender but not mushy. Immediately drain the noodles into a colander, and rinse them well with cold water. Lay out a clean kitchen towel on the countertop, shake the colander to drain away excess water, and then spread

the cooked noodles on the towel to drain further.

3. Divide the noodles between two or three good-sized bowls, depending on the number of diners, and top with the vegetables, herbs, and meat. Scatter the peanuts on top. Allow each person to spoon on dressing to taste. Toss well, and eat. (Alternatively, you can present this salad family-style: Toss the vegetables, herbs, and noodles in a mixing bowl and then mound them on a serving platter. Arrange the meat over the noodles, and top with peanuts. Each diner can scoop their own portion from the platter and dress it as they see fit.)