



Cook Like A Thai Academy

Thai Pantry Essentials Guide:
Your Path To Thai Cooking
Mastery

Sawaddeeka & Welcome

I'm Pradichaya Poonyarit, and I'll be your guide through your Cook Like A Thai Journey



How To Make The Most Of Your Guide

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Thai Pantry Essentials Guide: Your Path To Thai Cooking Mastery is where you start your Thai cooking journey, even when you have never cooked Thai food before.

It is comprised of basic ingredients, essential for Thai cooking, especially outside Thailand. We can say that it's a survival Thai cooking kit.

There is a small section that introduces Thailand, its food culture, the Thai way, and my Thai way. -- My Thai way is where I talked mostly about my "cook like a Thai" story while living in America.

You don't need all of the ingredients and tools listed here. but it's always good to have this book nearby when you are ready to grow into a more advanced level.

Most of these items will take an important part in your Thai cooking journey as you learn and grow your skills.

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For permission requests, contact

hi@pradichayapoonyarit.com

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Thai Pantry Essentials Guide: Your Path To Thai Cooking Mastery

So you will be equipped and ready to
cook like a Thai



With Pradichaya Poonyarit
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What's Inside

We are beginners of something at some point in life. What you are about to learn in this guide is my lifetime learning of the “cook like a Thai” way. It is my path of authentic Thai cooking. Take a little time to learn this, so you can be on your way to Thai cooking success.

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Thai cooking mindset & framework





Humble food by humble Thais

The saying is “Siam smiles,” which refers to the way Westerners referred to Thais in the old days. They lived in a land far away-- far enough to make Siam (sa-yaam) a new, exotic place. Thailand in today’s world is where humble people continue to cook the most amazing looking and tasty food. They cook, eat, and live as freely as their hearts desire-- as it is who they are-- hence the meaning of the word, “THAI.”

Let’s get you acquainted with Thailand.

From the ancient Siam

To today's Thailand

Thailand, which used to be known as Siam (pronounced sa-yaam, not si-am), sits in the best location of Southeast Asia. It was a big region that covered parts of Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Malaysia until two hundred years ago, when big chunks of the country in all four directions were handed to England and France, along with gold, gems, and other invaluable artifacts, just so Thailand could keep its freedom-- "Thai."

Today, Thailand is about the size of France - or, a little smaller than the state of Texas.





Sukothai period 1238–1438

Fish in the water. rice in the field.

The soil is good, and with many outlets to the seas and the oceans, Thailand is an agricultural country.

Even today, the old saying of "ในน้ำมีปลา ในนามีข้าว" which translates directly to "In water there's fish, in field there's rice," still holds true.

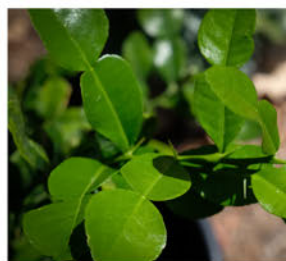
ในน้ำมีปลา ในนามีข้าว



The Sukhothai Period 1127–1438

Since the beginning (around 800 years ago during the Sukhothai era), Thai cooking relied on herbs.

Thais would make use of all their plants and cooked from roots, to stems, to the top of the plants - young leaves, flowers and fruits - any and all edible parts.



The spicy heat came generally from these plants. Curry bowls weren't red, green, or yellow; instead, they were murky and muddy-looking.



As far as I know, today's Thais still cook one curry bowl in this style. There are a few more similar dishes, but the practice is dying, along with those who know how to cook them.



Chili, garlic, shallots and many more things came to Thailand 200-300 years afterwards, during the Ayutthaya era, as did foreign people - the farang. (Farahng refers to people of European descent. Others also got their own specific terms.)

It was during this time that Thais added these ingredients to their cooking. This has led to many dishes that we know today.



If you ask a Thai person to describe Thai food or its taste, the first thing you are most likely to hear is, "It's well-balanced."

But when you go to a restaurant and try a dish, you'll find that it's rather sweet.

The degrees of sweetness vary from "a little on the sweet side" to "OMG, did someone spill sugar in this dish?"



I've asked people in the food business, and although they take a stand behind "Thai food is balanced," they can't support it.

When I mention curry (spicy), yum (sour), stir-fried & fried dishes (savory) and palow (sweet and savory), they agree that Thai dishes bring out punchy flavors.

However, they can't explain what they mean when they say, "Thai food is well-balanced."



Red curry



Tom yum goong

In my opinion, saying that Thai food is "balanced" has created only confusion and misunderstanding, especially when those who say it do not deliver.

Perhaps it's time you and I redefine the term to describe Thai food.

TIP: Chopsticks are used when Thai people eat Chinese, Japanese, or Korean food; but **when Thais eat Thai food, they use a spoon and fork.**





Meegrawb



Curry

Put aside the usual sweet taste that every restaurant dish seems to represent.

Restaurants here serve the "American" version of Thai food, anyway.

They also claim that they only serve you - farang, and all non-Thais.

Thais in the US know that if we want good, great, and real Thai food, it's best that we cook it at home!

I started cooking based on following "the smells of food" that my grandfather and mother cooked from their kitchens - each from different times in my life.

Then, I learned from elders of my friends' families, friends of friends', and so on.

I'd say I have a pretty good idea what Thai food is all about.



Thai food is flavorful, full of surprise punches; however, each ingredient acts on its own.

The term "less is more" works well in Thai cooking. Most dishes don't require many ingredients to complete.

However, those Thai people long before me knew so well how to match ingredients together in order to create an impactful, first impression, one-spoonful-bite kind of taste.

I'd say that's humble.



Through the eyes of an American expat





Through the eyes of an American expat

The essence of being Thai is difficult to explain to someone who has not spent some time in Thailand among the Thais. It is not enough to understand with one's brain the things that Thai people share: one must also understand through the heart. Spending time inside the country certainly helps in this regard, but it is not quite the same as being Thai.

Still, there are some things that non-Thais can comprehend roughly. For instance, Thais are very diplomatic in the way they treat others and are tolerant of others' ways. They are very unlikely to criticize someone openly; and while they might not agree with the way others do things, they understand that cultures differ. Still, they are fiercely patriotic and, like many others, think their way is the best.

Still, it is a mistake to assume that Thais acquiesce when they do not speak up. Many Westerners feel that disagreement is best dealt with through discussion, but they often make the mistake of ascribing this trait to the Thais, as well. By extension, they feel that the Thais must either agree or surrender to (what they believe to be) a superior outlook on something, when in actuality a Thai is simply trying to avoid conflict. It's not that Thais eschew all potential disagreements, but it is much more in their nature to understand that many positions are either intractable or that the reward is simply not as valuable as it is to maintain decorum.

Thailand is called "The Land of Smiles," and this is what is meant by that phrase. It is not so much that the Thais are friendly- although many of them most decidedly are- but that maintaining civility is more important to them than arguing to determine what is "right." But, in the right circumstance, they will do what they must if being pushed to do something with which they do not agree.



ไทย THAI



Another very important aspect to the Thai culture is the nature of community. Thais are much more likely to view their lives within the context of their communities. This is not to say that Thais don't think of themselves, or that Westerners don't consider their own communities-at-large, but Thai people weigh decisions more through a lens of how it will impact society as a whole, whereas in the West it is more of an individual calculus.

And this is something that permeates everything- it is not at all a conscious decision where someone thinks about how his or her decision will impact society, but, rather, it just happens. The culture is built upon this, and so the people are that way.

Ask most Thais, and they will say their society is built upon three pillars: country, religion (Buddhism), and monarchy. Each of the colors in the Thai flag represents one of these.

Thais are fiercely patriotic. Anyone who has spent any amount of time around Thais knows they believe their country to be the best.

It is hard to overstate the importance of Buddhism. The practice of religion is far more deeply intertwined within the fabric of Thai society than almost anywhere in the West. It's not that people are more devout, but small acts occur many times throughout an ordinary day that display how Buddhism continues to center people and keep them thinking good thoughts and doing good things.



The monarchy has existed within Thailand for centuries, and many Thais feel it to be the single most important unifying factor for their nation. Whatever one might feel about democracy, monarchy, or any other ruling style, there are many examples of the Thai monarchy having kept the country together throughout the centuries. And while the monarchy no longer rules Thailand in any meaningful sense, the Thais still look to it as something that binds them to each other.

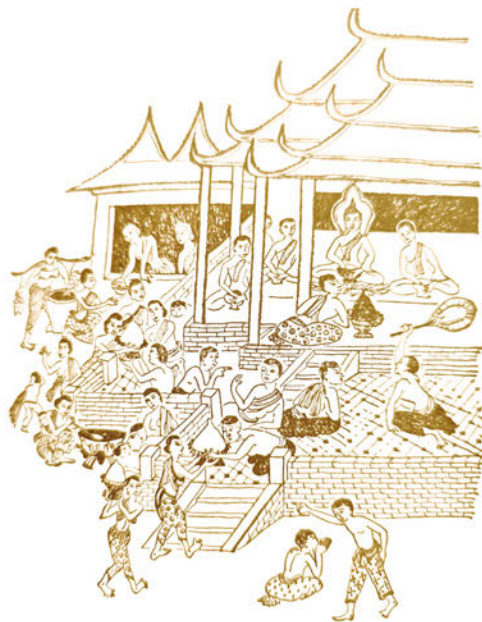
The Thais and Thailand are fascinating and wonderful. It is always worthwhile to try to understand others, and I hope this has helped a little in one's understanding.

By Ralph Schatzki. who lived in Thailand for 13 years.





Kitchen setup guidelines





Defining Thai and “Farang” Kitchens

Krua Thai คริวไทย
Krua Farang คริวฝรั่ง





A replica of Ratanakosin (Bangkok) Period Thai house

Don't be surprised when you go to an open house in Thailand and find 2 kitchens

The one inside the house looks like any home kitchen we recognize today. For Thai people, this kitchen is called, "farang kitchen," aka "krua farang" in Thai. (ครัวฝรั่ง)

Its uses for most households are strictly reserved for light, more "refined," and smellless, fumeless - anything that would not stink up the house - type of cooking: fried eggs, ham, sausage, perhaps macaroni with premade sauce, and heating frozen "farang" meals, etc.

Farang means pretty much any foreigner from European origins. To most Thais, Farang are lighter from skin color to their cooking methods. Compared to Thai cooking, the Farang way is as I described above: smellless, fumeless, the "light" kind of cooking.

To put it plainly, in some households back when I was young, krua farang was a new concept, and for show. In some kitchens, the owners didn't unwrap the appliances. I used to laugh, but some adults would give me a warning, telling me it was impolite and I would be punished if I didn't stop.

As far as Thai cooking goes, some people still prefer to do their frying, stir-frying that involves garlic, chili, and other strong smelling ingredients, in their "krua Thai," (ครัวไทย) aka Thai kitchen, which is usually located outside in a separate building, or in the servant quarters. It used to be that servants were not allowed to use "krua farang" or any of the farang ingredients in the pantry.

In some housing communities in Thailand today, 2 kitchens, and servant quarters still exist. However, in large cities such as Bangkok, and in large regional cities, most condominiums, apartments, townhomes and some single homes offer only one kitchen per unit/house,

I grew up with one large outdoor Thai kitchen, and only when my parents built our first home away from my grandparents' residence did we have large working indoor and outdoor kitchens.



Thai tools for your kitchen

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Stone mortar & pestle



Although we end up throwing herbs and spices in either an electric blender or a food processor, I still would recommend that you get yourself to a Thai store and buy one each of a stone mortar-pestle set and a clay set.



This is when you want to pound herbs and spices as bases for fried- and stir-fried dishes.

When I was growing up, the stone mortar set also played a big role in grinding and mixing curry pastes.

Day-in and day-out the pounding would start around 3 in the afternoon. I would hear the sound from every house in my neighborhood, and soon after would come the curry aroma.



It would smell so good that I dropped everything I was doing just to run to our outdoor kitchen so I could ask to "sample" the food.

Stone mortar & pestle



Nowadays, the practice still exists, but is very rare.

When you get to the curry milestone, I will go over the good, the bad, and the ugly of making curry paste with mortar & pestle versus with an electric hand blender.

I also use a food processor.



At the end, you get to make a choice of which way you want to go with it.

You also use stone mortar set when you want to make fine mixtures of meat and spices. Stone mortar and pestle also softens up meat.



It does the job many times better than a blender or a food processor, so a set of mortar and pestle is very useful to have around the kitchen.

Clay mortar & pestle



A clay mortar comes with a wooden pestle. It's meant for gentle pounding.



Somtum is an excellent example.

Green chili dipping sauce is another example. When all the herb and vegetable ingredients are roasted until they're cooked to the point they've become soft, that's when you will use a clay mortar set to gently break them down and mix.



Clay mortar is not as durable as wooden mortar. When I still had my wooden set, grinding and mixing shredded papaya for somtum was perfect. I lost it, and for years I'm still searching for its replacement.

Round-bottom pan or a wok, or a deep frying pan

I suspect that you might have either a wok or a deep bottom pan already in your kitchen, but if you don't, this is the time to invest in one.



Spaghetti kana-plakem
Featured in the book "From Gaprow To Keemao And Recipes In Between"

A wok or a large deep bottom pan - whether with a round bottom or not - surely gets good use in a Thai kitchen.

It's there for all frying and stir-frying dishes. The deeper its bottom the better!

As far as its bottom-roundness, although I'm not picky, it does help tremendously, especially when you need to get oil to the top of the food.

If you have - or get - a round bottom wok/pan, you may want to get a stand for it. You don't want a flying, extremely hot wok and risk hurting yourself while you're cooking!



Gaprow fried rice

From Gaprow To Keema And Recipes In Between



Cleavers

When I buy meat, I get a big chunk that comes with bones and separate the meat, bones, and fat with my two cleavers.

Meat bones are for broth, fat is for extracting its oil, and I'd slice meat into portions.

When I want to make puddgaprowmoosubb, the "subb" part is done with two cleavers rapidly and consistently, chopping and grinding the meat until it breaks into a million pieces.

I do the same when I make "gangjeud," or clear soup.



"Moosubb" aka "moobashaw" for gangjeud - clear soup



To "subb" - chop - the meat instead of buying ground meat is my preferred choice.

It gives a beautiful texture that will mix really well with other ingredients; therefore, it will produce great flavors in the dish.

It's been the Thai way for a long, long time, up until someone invented the meat grinding machine.

While I love to save my strength and time with many kitchen devices, I still "subb" - chop - the meat with cleavers.

If you're not yet a proud owner of cleavers, here's a little tip: get them from an Asian store. They're a better fit and more practical for your Thai kitchen use.

“Zebra” spoons



One thing I missed from Thailand is a short spoon - a common utensil that pairs with chopsticks whenever I ordered a noodle bowl at any shophouse in Bangkok

This spoon is made of stainless steel. It's strong, and thin enough to break any slippery, round Chinese meatballs in half easily.

It also is a necessity in any household that scrapes, peels, even cuts and cooks.

So, imagine the thrill of spotting the spoon at a local Asian store. I even squealed once or twice out of surprise and joy.

I use this spoon for just about everything, from informal dining of just rice with some stir-fried/fried toppings in a bowl, to having desserts - Thai, and a birthday cake (in a bowl, also!) - to scooping ice-cream, all the way to tasting somtum right out of a clay mortar, and wait for it...

Wait for it!



Use it to peel galangal, turmeric and ginger. Yep, yep, yep! It peels, too! And without losing so much that you would if you use a knife!



You can buy Zebra spoons from most Asian stores.

Peeling fresh turmeric with a Zebra spoon

2-edged peelers



And last, but not least, is a two-edge peeler. I don't need to preach to the choir, right? We know what it's for.

However, if you can put your hand on a larger one it will help with peeling papaya, squash, pumpkin, and other large fruits and vegetables.



Bottled and jarred sauces

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Nampla

If I were stranded on a desert island and could have only two food items with me to survive, guess which two I'd bring with me?

You're looking at my item #1.

Before nampla manufacturing became an industry, Thais had several things for food flavoring.

The obvious would be salt. In fact, it was salt and pepper. Those have been around since the earlier times of Siam.

Although Thai locals would make preserved salty sauce by adding salt to baby-sized shrimp, then extract its juice and cook it, the first industrial nampla product started in 1913.

Tiparos is the brand (pronounced ti-pah-rod - the s is silent and treated as a d)



Tiparos is not only the first nampla brand, it is also the longest running nampla, a multi-million dollar industry.

I prefer Tiparos for its aroma over other brands. I also find the flavor more consistent.



Story time: How my dad helped make nampla

My dad was from Phitsanulok ("H" is silent, so it's pronounced pidd-sa-nu-loak). He told me that when he was young he'd catch tiny fish "plasoy" from the big two rivers (song-kwae), Nan and Kwaenoi that ran through town.

(Pla = fish, soy = here is a proper noun, however, literally it means necklace.)

He'd bring home a lot of plasoy and would help his mom clean them.

My grandmother would add salt, and my dad would help her pack the salt-added fish into their giant size clay container, "oong mung-gawn."

(Oong = container, and mung-gawn means dragon, but in this case it's the proper noun for these containers which the oong makers would artistically paint dragons around them)

Oong mung-gawn often sat half-buried in cool, wet soil.



Phra Buddha Chinnarat inside Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat, founded in 1357 by King Lithai of Sukhothai.



Nan and Kwaenoi Rivers



Plasoy



Oong mung-gawn



Story time: How my dad helped make nampla



A lid would then be placed, and a year later my grandmother would take out a few spatulas-ful at a time and boil the excretion, then strain with what we know today as cheese cloth.

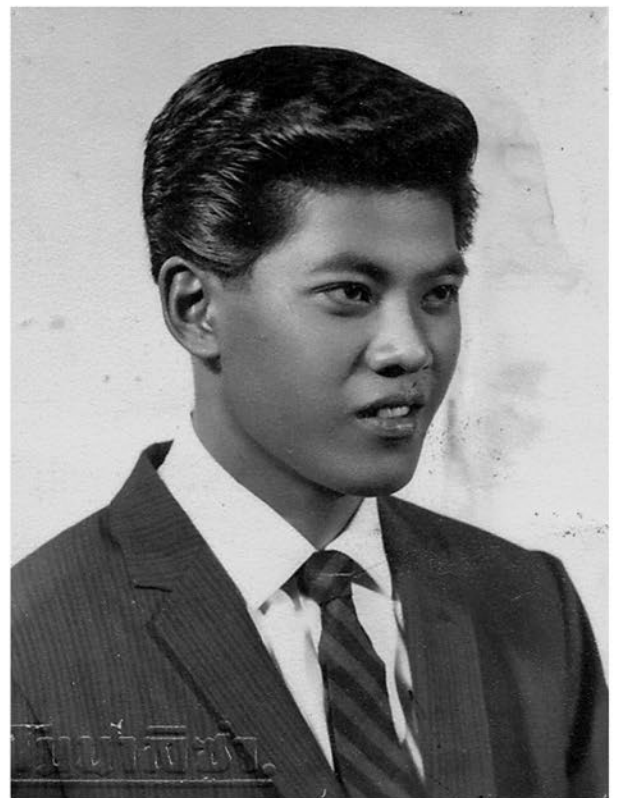
My dad said that if there was a smell of the divine heaven, then his mother's homemade nampla was it.

I wished I was born in time to taste her nampla - which was totally impossible, so I'll settle with Tiparos.

Other Southeast Asian countries have their own versions of nampla. Naturally, all say that theirs is the best.

At Cook Like A Thai Academy we cook like a Thai, so I'd suggest that you should stick with not only Thai nampla, but the best nampla out there.

Me and “khunya” - my paternal grandmother



The younger version of my dad

Nammunnhoy

Oyster sauce

This is a sauce originating in China. It was said that Cantonese fishermen gathered all oysters, then realized that a certain kind came with a special aroma.

They cooked and tried different processes to bring out this aroma.

They kept tweaking their ingredients until oyster sauce became marketable.

It was introduced among Thai-Chinese decades ago, and soon enough nammunnhoy had its place in a Thai kitchen.

When I was younger, I felt that nammunnhoy had a very nice smell and loved it when my mom made a simple "puddkana in nammunnhoy," which is basically gai lan (Chinese kale) cooked with oyster sauce.

As time went by and I started cooking on my own, nammunnhoy didn't make as much of an impression as it used to.



Nammunnhoy

Oyster sauce

My mom explained to me that original nammunnhoy was made with real oysters, salt, and sugar as its base. Today, oysters have been replaced with "oyster extract," along with a bunch of other things.

Nammunnhoy is used mainly in stir-fried dishes and in marinating. It's not used in soup or curry - like, never ever.

Unless a dish is to be prepped or cooked specifically with oyster sauce, I don't use it.

Nonetheless, you should have it handy. There will be times when you want to add that "umami" factor, or when you encounter not-so fresh, yet still-okay seafood.



Kana - Chinese kale, aka gai lan

See-ew dumm

(Black/sweet soy sauce)

Wherever there are stir-fried large flat noodles, it's likely that see-ew dumm is involved.

See-ew dumm - black sauce, aka see-ew waan (long ah) - sweet sauce is - as its names suggest - black and sweet.

Be on the lookout: if you use it too much the sweetness will become bitter - bitter sweet! :D :D :D

Why should you have it in your Thai pantry?

Because with the right amount on large flat noodles at the right temperature, and for the right amount of time, it infuses and enhances your noodles.

This results in perfect puddsee-ew and puddradna!

Puddsee-ew in-making



Taojiew

Preserved - or, fermented soy bean - soy bean paste.

It came to Thailand from China, and it's a must when you make "senyai-" or "guoitiew-" radna.

It also is an important ingredient in chicken rice dipping sauce. And, when you want to be fancy and cook soup base that has a Japanese soup flare, you use taojiew.

It's a common find in Thai and Asian stores.

Taojiew



Chicken rice



Taojiew & Radna
Cooking



Maggi



I love Maggi sauce. It's great to drizzle on eggs - omelets, fried eggs, scrambled, poached and boiled eggs.

Not only does it have a unique taste, it also has a wonderful aroma.

Many Thai college students have been known for eating steamed jasmine rice with just Maggi drizzled on top as their "end of the month" meal, to tide them over until they get their new month stipend from their parents.

It also helps in bringing down the otherwise too spicy stir-fried and curry dishes for children's plates.

This includes some of us who can't handle true Thai heat. (Not chili, although Maggi also cuts down chili heat.)

Original Maggi comes from Switzerland. Thais use it extensively in one particular stir-fried noodle dish, and also a Thai version of macaroni dish.

Now you can buy Maggi from any Asian store.

Most are imports from Switzerland, Germany and Italy.

The less expensive version is Maggi from China.



**Guoitewnuasubb
from the book, FROM
GAPROW TO KEEMAO
AND RECIPES IN
BETWEEN**



Maggi is that good!

The Grand Mountain inside Saket Temple in Bangkok, Thailand

There's a Thai brand that has been manufacturing flavoring sauce similar to Maggi along with several other sauces. In fact, the owner was the son of the man who invented the original Sriracha Dipping Sauce. (Later, it became Sriracha Chili Sauce.)

The Maggi-like sauce is called "Grand Mountain Sauce." Named after the Golden Mountain from Saket Temple in Bangkok, the brand name later became Golden Mountain. "Sauce Poukaotong" indeed brought good flavors to Thai folks who couldn't afford to buy the imported Maggi.



Neither Maggi nor Golden Mountain contains MSG.

The owner of Golden Mountain brand also produced Sriracha Sauce with the same recipe as the other original Sriracha Panich (the words were spelled a little differently in English, although in Thai it's spelled the same - after a district in Chonburi province).

You can buy it in most Asian stores in the US, also.

Sriracha

The Original

There are two original Sriracha/Sriraja brand owners. Both learned the recipe directly from the same person: his father and her uncle.

The son started Grand Mountain (later, Golden Mountain) brand and produced several types of sauces; however, the niece concentrated on producing Sriracha Chili Sauce. (Today, it's spelled Sriraja to separate itself from the Vietnamese brand in the US.)

The man who created this delicious sauce started bottling to sell it in 1935, due to the pressure from his relatives and friends. Why not, because it was so, so good.



Would you like the recipe?

The real Sriracha/Sriraja Panich sauces are made with goat peppers (red, equally sized, with glossy and smooth skin, and aged for at least three months), 7-day pickled Thai garlic, sugar, vinegar and sea salt.

That's it. Now go make some. =D
=D =D

Both Golden Mountain Sriracha Chili Sauce and Sriraja Panich were bought by a large company, and it continues to maintain Sriracha/ja legacy.

Story time: My first time

.....experiencing Sriraja sauce was when we visited a seaside town, “Sriracha” in Chonburi province, at a corner restaurant. One of the dishes was oyster omelet - the catch of the day. The owner brought a bowl of red sauce to our table and invited us to dip the oysters in it.

I've loved spicy food for as long as I can remember, so my parents didn't have to warn me. As I bit into it, the juice from the oyster came squirting out and filled up my mouth.

Within a microsecond it mixed with the red sauce that already smelled so good.

Then the inside of my mouth did the two nearly impossible things. It first exploded, and just when I thought the food would spill out of my mouth it imploded.

Sriracha can turn plain, old kaijiew - aka omelette - into something marvelous





Do go with real Sriraja/Sriracha, and not others. It's worth it!

The flavors that filled my mouth were beyond words.

It wasn't just me. Both my parents said something out loud.

The three of us were hooked since that day. Only in later years would my mom cook us a great dish of oyster omelette every now and then, but in those years prior we would stop to eat there until the restaurant closed permanently. (At that point the owner probably got busy manufacturing Sriraja sauce and didn't have time to tend to her restaurant!)

Not a bad first impression at all.



Rice, white, or distilled vinegar

Vinegar is used often when making sauces. I'd recommend rice, white, or distilled vinegar.

The key is to have clean vinegar without any aroma and taste; they will alter the Thai character when used in any Thai dish.



You can buy vinegar everywhere.

If you choose rice vinegar, especially from Japanese food section/store, please make sure it doesn't contain sugar.

Do not get sushi vinegar.



King Narai Maharaj

Plara

Fermented fish

Plara today seems to be the Thai Northeastern version of food flavoring.

However, the making of plara dates back to King Narai Maharaj (reigned 1656 - 1688) during Ayutthaya period.

To preserve fish and also add aroma and great flavors to dishes, Thais put clean fresh water fish (because of low fat content) into a large jar (similar to nampla's "oong munggawn" container), added rock salt and ground roasted unmilled rice, and months later they'd get pinkish-reddish fish meat and its juice.

The fish - or its juice, depending on the use - would then be cooked to kill off germs. And finally, plara would be added to dishes.

Plara meat is great by itself when you fry and have it with hot steamed jasmine rice.

Plara juice's common use is in somtum - Isaan (Thailand North East region) or Lao style.

Other delicious dishes include plara dipping pastes, yum and curry dishes.





Some Thais in the US make their own plara, but I don't.

Because just like making nampla, I'm afraid that the smell while it's being made would send the HOA after me.

Plus, the wonderful aroma and the yummy protein may attract wild animals to our house. Yikes.

I also don't want to leave it in the garage and most definitely inside the house, as doing these could make my family move out!



'Tum plara aka 'tum Laos,' aka 'tum Osaaan'



'Tum Thai'

So for the time being, I'm better off buying plara in bottles and jars.

You can buy the meat, and also separate juice.

Certainly, Laotian stores carry plara.

At Thai stores, ask your Thai seller or any Thai person.

If they don't know they will connect you with someone who knows which plara to buy.



Stocking pantry, refrigerator & freezer



Stocking pantry, refrigerator & freezer

This category may seem large, but it's flexible, so don't let the size overwhelm you. I list these ingredients here so you can build your own setup around them.

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Stocking pantry, refrigerator & freezer

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I Pantry

1 Dried chili peppers

- Thai, Chinese, Mexican, local US grown, etc., as long as they're dried and red, you can use them in your curry dishes.

2 Tapioca flour

- Tapioca flour is used the same way corn starch is used.



3 Turmeric powder

- Or, fresh turmeric. It goes into satay, also some curry pastes. Fresh turmeric sometimes come frozen at Thai, Laotian, and sometimes Vietnamese stores.

4 Curry powder

- Satay, Thai Indian curry and other Thai-adapted Indian, Muslim dishes



5 Dried cumin seeds



6 Dried coriander seeds

Cumin and coriander seeds are used for mussamunn and dishes related to Burmese (Myanmar) and Indian - also in 'kaipalaw,' Thai children's and adults' (like me) all-time favorite.



7 Jasmine rice

Remember that desert island question? Jasmine rice is my #2 item to bring!

I remember going rice shopping with my grandfather when I was a toddler, at a store that was part of a row of shop houses facing the street.

There were aisles of gigantic-sized brown bags made of raw cotton - similar to potato sacks - except rice bags were a lot bigger.

My grandfather would scoop rice into a more or less one cup size, taking it to his nose. Then he put it under my nose.

As soon as the gentle, sweet fragrance hit my nose, I'd sniff loudly while making sure the beautiful smell filled up inside of me all the way into my lungs.

Then, one day when I was a young woman coming home during college break, my mom asked me to join her.

We stopped to test rice by smelling each bag, just how our dad and grandfather taught us. Together, we would bring home a few large bags that would last throughout my summer vacation in our Bangkok home.

Thai rice used to be the best rice in the world,

Until the age of GMO, political driven economy, when native Thai jasmine rice was experimented with those from nearby countries.



On top of that, there is a variety of rice sold in the United States, all marked 'Thai Jasmine Rice,' when it could come from any Asian country but Thailand.

Best practice for making sure you will get jasmine rice from Thailand:

Buy it from a Thai store.

Ask the seller for the best, new crop jasmine rice.

If you can't get to a Thai store, do make sure the label on the back of the rice sack says, "Product of Thailand," or "Made in Thailand." - Even in front if it says, "Thai jasmine rice" or, "Thailand jasmine rice," it's not necessarily Thai rice from Thailand; the "Thai" part in the name of the product is used as a part of the proper noun.





8 Glutinous aka sticky rice

“

**Give me sticky
rice and I will
devour it.**

--Me

”

Sticky rice is great with somtum, laab, namtok, grilled chicken aka "gaiyaang," some dipping pastes and sauces, among many things.

It's also great in desserts: sticky rice-mango, sticky rice-banana, and several more.

You can grab a bag of sticky - or, glutinous - rice at Thai and other Asian stores.



Glass noodles

Check the label to make sure these noodles are made from mung beans

I shed pounds by replacing rice with mung bean noodles! They're great in soup (gangjeud), stir-fry, "yum" salad type, puddthai, puddsee-ew, plus all noodle bowls.

If you watch your carb intake, or eat gluten-free, these yummy threads are your friend!





10 Coconut cream/milk

Coconut cream or coconut milk has been playing a major role in Thai cooking for centuries.

In the old days I'd watch the seller cut open and weigh coconut meat per order. Then, he'd put each piece through a giant shredder and bag it.

My grandfather would bring it home, add water, and hand-squeeze it through a strainer. Coconut milk has three grades: first-squeeze is the most creamy, second one is the medium quality, and third-time squeeze is the thinnest and least creamy.



Now coconut comes in boxes, and the amount of water you add to it determines its second, or third grade.

We end up using all of it, but which grade we use depends on the dish and the experience of the chef/cook.

You can buy coconut cream in most stores, but my favorite brand is carried in most Thai and also Chinese stores.



11 Coconut palm sugar

It's used in some dishes, but mostly desserts. Coconut sugar is not as sweet as refined - or even brown sugar. It gives more gentle, subtle sweetness, and is aromatic. Most Asian stores carry it.

12 Shallots

I have to add shallots to this list in case you don't have them handy. If you buy them from a Thai or Vietnamese store, it's likely you will get the small size. This is ideal for cooking Thai dishes.

The smaller they are, the better fit they are for Thai cooking - especially when you want to make curry pastes.

However, if you get them from your regular store, please select small ones. Also, avoid large red onions and white, or sweet onions.





13 Gapi

Gapi is made from shrimp and salt. It's salty, obviously, and aromatic. Think of it as you would of fine wine and cheese. You don't have to like them all.

However, gapi is one of the main components in making curry pastes. It's also widely used in many more dishes.

Plus, gapi makes the most delicious dip for young, green mangoes.



II Refrigerator



1 Gapi (opened)

Once gapi aka shrimp paste is opened, you need to put it in the fridge. It will stay around for a long, long time (in some cases 1+ year); however, when you see salt grain break out from the brown gapi color, it's when you turn it into fertilizer for your plants. (Seriously, gapi - among a few more food items - are great for planting soil.

I don't advise you to freeze gapi. It will become unusable.

2 Prikkeenoo

When you buy fresh prikkeenoo (prik-kee-noo), what you don't use should be stored in the refrigerator. However, if you buy a large quantity, do keep them in the freezer. They keep for a very long time.

Thai prikkeenoo - tiny chili - are smaller than all kinds of chili. They're hot, but they don't burn your mouth. Prikkeenoo also are aromatic. Summer is the best season for them, and most Thai stores carry them.



Larger or longer types of "prik" - or chili are usually mix-bred. In the US they even cross breed with Mexican and local US chili. They may not be as spicy as prikkeenoo, but they burn your mouth and may upset your stomach.

There are also Chinese chili and we usually see the dried version. They are used in curry paste making.

3 Goonghang – Sun-dried shrimp



Goonghang is sun-dried, roasted and salted tiny-sized shrimps. It's used in somtum, appetizers, yum - salad, dip pastes and sauces.

Although goonghang is somewhat pricey, it's good to have them in your freezer or fridge - especially if you often make somtum and yum dishes.



They're also dried shrimp - goonghang - from Taiwan and China. I grabbed it once, but found that my dip paste tasted way off. It was also lacking the usual aroma that I'm used to. Since then, I'd buy 3 bags at a time and keep them in the freezer.

4 Kaffir lime fruits

If depends on where you are, sometimes the only kinds of herbs you can get come already frozen.

If that's the case, continue keeping them in your freezer and only take out what you need each time. Again, they do keep for at least a year.

Or, if you live in a good sized city, and on the West coast, usually you can get these herbs fresh.



However, kaffir lime fruits come out only once a year in the summer. When you see them, grab several - or a lot - and freeze them for later use.

To Thais like me, stocking up on kaffir fruits is a lot more important than owning pieces of fine jewelry. Although, there are not many uses of kaffir lime; still, it's very important in curry paste making.

When you cook like a Thai, you make curry pastes from scratch, so you need kaffir lime fruits for their peels.

(Most restaurants don't use them, and this answers why most Thais in the US do not order curry dishes at Thai restaurants.)



5 Lemon grass stalks



6 Galangal roots



7 Kaffir lime leaves



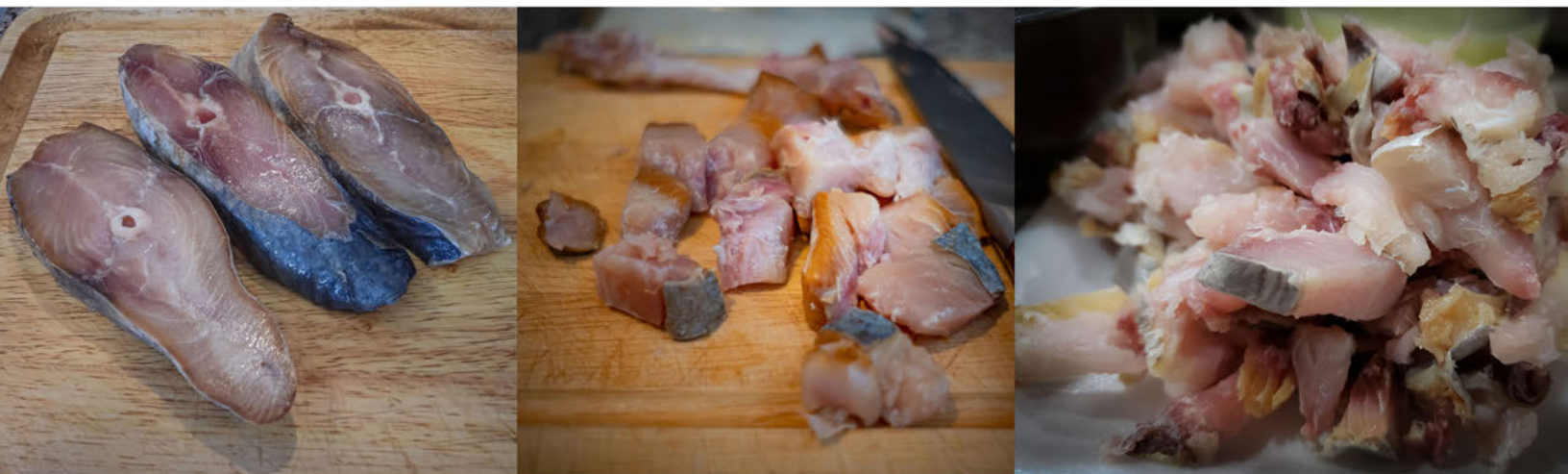
On a much more practical note, galangal, lemon grass and kaffir lime leaves are important for tomyum making.

In some places, you find lemon grass and kaffir leaves in your neighborhood stores.

Galangal, on the other hand, can be purchased at Thai, Vietnam, Laotian - most Asian stores.

You will not be able to buy galangal from your regular store.

Also, please don't make this mistake: Galangal is not ginger, and any recipe that calls for galangal cannot be replaced with ginger.



8 Plakem

Plakem is treated salted fish, and you'll find them in packs from a Thai - and most Asian - store's refrigeration section. Plakem that comes in oil are packaged in a jar, and you can look for them on a Thai/Asian store's shelf.

Why plakem?

Why anchovies, cheese, or even wine?

Because when you find the kind that you like, it's so, so good.

In the book "From Gaprow To Keemao And Recipes In Between" I added a few "in between" recipes featuring plakem.

Plakem is aromatic, such fine perfume (Chanel No.5 Plakem version, anyone? =D =D) It has played a role in Thai cooking since way back when.

III Seasonal & other items

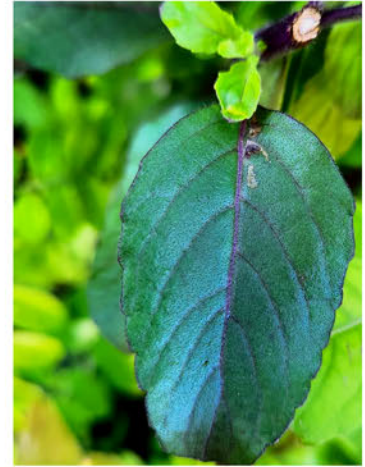
1 Baigaprow

Holy basil - baigaprow (Because in India, gaprow is found a lot around temple areas)

Gaprow leaves contain some heat similar to peppery heat, but somewhat different.

There are two kinds of gaprow: white, and red. The colors speak for themselves.

In Thailand (at least the way it was before I moved back to the US 20 years ago) white gaprow is used primarily in cooking, and red gaprow, in medicine.



Red gaprow



White gaprow



How are gaprow used in the US? They cross breed due to growing spaces, and by now Thais don't care which they cook with, as long as they have the leaves!

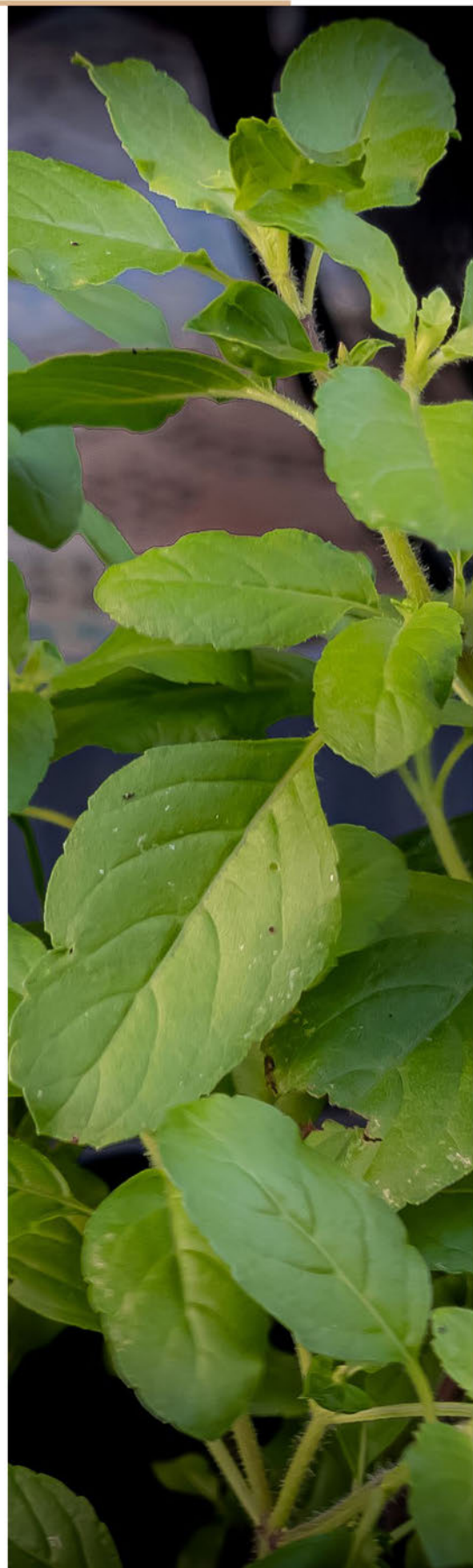
A lot of people prefer red gaprow over white.

I'm using both, but I've tried not to mix them for authenticity's sake!

When you order puddgaprow, kaopuddgaprow, gaprowmoosub or other gaprow dishes, don't be surprised if the dish you've ordered is served to you with several types of veggies, but few - to almost non-existing - gaprow leaves.

That's because unless you grow your own gaprow, it's considered a rare, valuable item just like kaffir limes. Gaprow shows up once every summer. Thai people have come up with a few ways to keep gaprow for cooking all year round.

To me, you can't go stingy on gaprow, so it's all-or-none.



2 Baihorapa

Sweet basil - baihorapa

The name says, "sweet," but horapa is not necessary sweet. It's neither hot nor bitter. If you have tried Vietnamese phở, you'll notice Vietnamese horapa as the leafy green side to add on top of the noodle soup.



Vietnamese and Thai horapa look, smell and taste different. While Vietnamese horapa leaf may be larger, more brown, smell and taste stronger, Thai horapa is everything but on the gentle side.

However, both are used in the US interchangeably.

If you wonder, they're also cross-bred. I have a few horapa plants in the pots and I'm not even sure if they're Thai, Vietnamese - or, both!

Horapa leaves in Thai cooking are used in curry, some seafood dishes, and when gaprow leaves are not in season one replaces them with horapa!



3 Baimangluck

Lemon basil - baimangluck

Mangluck leaves bring you a different experience than both gaprow and horapa. While gaprow can be hot and horapa can send your sense of smell off the chart, baimangluck is like a breath of fresh air to your palate.



These three herbs have shown up in Thailand since Sukothai era, so you can say that they're authentically, originally Thai! They were the source of heat before chili made its entrance a few hundred years later.

Baimangluck is best on top of "namya" curry (a thick sauce that's poured on top of Thai noodle - kanomjean) and also in one version of the original curry from Sukothai days, "gangliang."



4 Makuapraw

Small round Thai eggplants so delicious in curry dishes, or - when they're picked young - as a side veggie for many types of Thai dip pastes and sauces.

All Asian stores sell them. You will see some huge makuapraw at Chinese stores. Those are grown in Mexico. They're so large they don't cook very well in red and green curry. I usually stay with normal, smaller Thai makuapraw.



5 White lettuce aka napa cabbage



Locally grown vegetable which is known to represent a simple way of cooking.

Not sure what to cook tonight? Make white lettuce soup - or stir-fried.

6 Thai yard long beans (tua-fugg-yao)



A tad smaller than string beans and with rougher texture, tuoafuggyao is less watery and therefore gives a more intense, compact umami flavor.

Tuoafuggyao is used in a simple stir-fry all the way to complex curry. It also is a popular side vegetable for a number of dip pastes and sauces.



7 Pukkboong



Pukkboong (*Ipomoea aquatica*) aka water spinach or swamp morning glory.

Pukkboong can grow anywhere that has water nearby. In Thailand there's no need to buy pukkbong, as people can pick it from a pond and places with bodies of water.

In my Las Vegas home backyard, I planted five seeds of pukkbong and a few months afterwards I get an endless supply for stir-fry, noodle bowl, yum - salad, and of course, a side vegetable for my dip sauces.

Do this if you want to have pukkbong all year round:

When you buy pukkbong from a Thai or Asian store, cut what you want to use and drop those parts that you would normally throw out in a tall glass or a vase. Change water everyday and watch them grow!

At some point you'll want to plant them in a pot or in the ground.

Pukkboong will dry out when the weather gets cold and some will come back in spring, but if you plant them indoors chances are you'll have them year round.

8 Pukk kana aka Chinese gai lan, also Chinese kale



I talk about pikk kana extensively in "From Gaprow To Keemao," as it is one important vegetable used in "And recipes in between" section.

Kana is a cross between broccoli and kale, of which I'm glad. It has more flavor than broccoli, yet it's not bitter like kale. All around, kana is the "just right" vegetable.





Shopping list



- Dried chili peppers

- Tapioca flour

- Turmeric powder

- Curry powder

- Dried cumin seeds

- Dried coriander seeds

- Glutinous- or sticky- rice

- Mung bean thread/noodles aka glass noodles

- Coconut cream/milk

- Coconut palm sugar

- Shallots

- Gapi - shrimp paste

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- Baigaprow - holy basil
- Baihorapa - sweet basil
- Baimangluck - lemon basil
- Makuapraw - Thai round, small green eggplants
- white lettuce, or napa cabbage
- Thai yard long beans
- Pukkboong - water spinach, or swamp morning glory
- Pukk kana - Chinese gai lan or Chinese kale
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Pradichaya Poonyarit

*Now that you're ready,
let's cook like a Thai.*

xx

Pradichaya