

Sesame Noodles with Sweet Peppers and Cucumbers - Cook's Illustrated

We prefer the flavor and texture of chunky peanut butter in the sauce; in particular, we like conventional chunky peanut butter because it tends to be sweeter than natural or old-fashioned versions.

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

- 1 medium red bell pepper
- 1 medium cucumber
- 1/4 cup sesame seeds
- 1/4 cup chunky peanut butter
- 2 medium cloves garlic , minced or pressed through garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 5 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce (such as Tabasco)
- My addition: or Thai Hot Spicy Chili Sauce, and reduce sugar accordingly*
- 2 tablespoons light brown sugar lightly packed
- water, hot
- 1 tablespoon table salt
- 1 pound fresh Asian noodles or 12 ounces dried spaghetti
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 4 scallions, sliced thin on diagonal
- 1 medium carrot, grated
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh cilantro leaves

My addition: 1 lime - to squeeze on top!

1. Core, seed, and cut into 1/4-inch slices 1 medium red bell pepper; peel, halve lengthwise, seed, and cut crosswise into 1/8-inch slices 1 medium cucumber. Toast sesame seeds in medium skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently, until golden and fragrant, about 10 minutes. Reserve 1 tablespoon sesame seeds in small bowl. In blender or food processor, puree remaining 3 tablespoons sesame seeds, peanut butter, garlic, ginger, soy sauce, vinegar, hot sauce, and sugar until smooth, about 30 seconds. With machine running, add hot water 1 tablespoon at time until sauce has consistency of heavy cream, about 5 tablespoons; set blender jar or workbowl aside.

2. Bring 6 quarts water to boil in stockpot over high heat. Add salt and noodles to boiling water; boil noodles until tender, about 4 minutes for fresh and 10 minutes for dried. Drain, then rinse with cold running tap water until cool to touch; drain again. In large bowl, toss noodles with sesame oil until evenly coated. Add bell pepper, cucumber, scallions, carrot, and sauce; toss to combine. Divide among individual bowls, sprinkle each bowl with portion of reserved sesame seeds and chopped fresh cilantro, and serve.

Sesame Noodles with Shredded Chicken - Cook's Illustrated

We prefer the flavor and texture of chunky peanut butter in the sauce; in particular, we like conventional chunky peanut butter because it tends to be sweeter than natural or old-fashioned versions.

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

- 1/4 cup sesame seeds
- 1/4 cup chunky peanut butter
- 2 medium cloves garlic, minced or pressed through garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger
- 5 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon hot pepper sauce (such as Tabasco)
- 2 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
- water (hot)
- 1 1/2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
- 1 tablespoon table salt
- 1 pound fresh Asian noodles or 12 ounces dried spaghetti
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- 4 scallions, sliced thin on diagonal
- 1 medium carrot, grated

1. Toast sesame seeds in medium skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently, until golden and fragrant, about 10 minutes. Reserve 1 tablespoon sesame seeds in small bowl. In blender or food processor, puree remaining 3 tablespoons sesame seeds, peanut butter, garlic, ginger, soy sauce, vinegar, hot sauce, and sugar until smooth, about 30 seconds. With machine running, add hot water 1 tablespoon at a time until sauce has consistency of heavy cream, about 5 tablespoons; set blender jar or workbowl aside.

2. Bring 6 quarts water to boil in stockpot over high heat. Meanwhile, adjust oven rack to 6 inches from broiler element; heat broiler. Spray broiler pan top with vegetable cooking spray; place chicken breasts on top and broil chicken until lightly browned, 4 to 8 minutes. Using tongs, flip chicken over and continue to broil until thickest part is no longer pink when cut into and registers about 160 degrees on instant-read thermometer, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer to cutting board and let rest 5 minutes. Using 2 forks, shred chicken into bite-size pieces and set aside. Add salt and noodles to boiling water; boil noodles until tender, about 4 minutes for fresh and 10 minutes for dried. Drain, then rinse with cold running tap water until cool to touch; drain again. In large bowl, toss noodles with sesame oil until evenly coated. Add shredded chicken, scallions, carrot, and sauce; toss to combine. Divide among individual bowls, sprinkle each bowl with portion of reserved sesame seeds, and serve.

Pad Thai - Cook's Illustrated

A wok might be the implement of choice in restaurants and the old country, but a large 12-inch skillet (nonstick makes cleanup easy) is more practical for home cooks. Although pad thai cooks very quickly, the ingredient list is long, and everything must be prepared and within easy reach at the stovetop when you begin cooking. For maximum efficiency, use the time during which the tamarind and noodles soak to prepare the other ingredients. Tofu is a good and common addition to pad thai. If you like, add 4 ounces of extra-firm tofu or pressed tofu (available in Asian markets) cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 1 cup) to the noodles along with the bean sprouts.

Serves 4 as a main dish

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons tamarind paste or substitute (see Tamarind options in related articles)
- 3/4 cup water (boiling)
- 3 tablespoons fish sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 4 tablespoons peanut oil or vegetable oil
- 8 ounces dried rice stick noodles, about 1/8 inch wide (the width of linguine)
- 2 large eggs
- 1/4 teaspoon table salt
- 12 ounces medium shrimp (31/35 count), peeled and deveined, if desired
- 3 cloves garlic, pressed through garlic press or minced (1 tablespoon)
- 1 medium shallot, minced (about 3 tablespoons)
- 2 tablespoons dried shrimp, chopped fine (optional)
- 2 tablespoons Thai salted preserved radish (optional)
- 6 tablespoons chopped unsalted roasted peanuts
- 3 cups bean sprouts (6 ounces)
- 5 medium scallions, green parts only, sliced thin on sharp bias
- 1/4 cup fresh cilantro leaves (optional)
- lime wedges

1. Soak tamarind paste in 3/4 cup boiling water for about 10 minutes, then push it through a mesh strainer to remove the seeds and fibers and extract as much pulp as possible. Stir fish sauce, rice vinegar, sugar, cayenne, and 2 tablespoons oil into tamarind liquid and set aside.
2. Cover rice sticks with hot tap water in large bowl; soak until softened, pliable, and limp but not fully tender, about 20 minutes. Drain noodles and set aside. Beat eggs and 1/8 teaspoon salt in small bowl; set aside.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet (preferably nonstick) over high heat until just beginning to smoke, about 2 minutes. Add shrimp and sprinkle with remaining 1/8 teaspoon salt; cook, tossing occasionally, until shrimp are opaque and browned about the edges, about 3 minutes. Transfer shrimp to plate and set aside.

4. Off heat, add remaining tablespoon oil to skillet and swirl to coat; add garlic and shallot, set skillet over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly, until light golden brown, about 1 1/2 minutes; add eggs to skillet and stir vigorously with wooden spoon until scrambled and barely moist, about 20 seconds. Add noodles, dried shrimp, and salted radish (if using) to eggs; toss with 2 wooden spoons to combine. Pour fish sauce mixture over noodles, increase heat to high, and cook, tossing constantly, until noodles are evenly coated. Scatter 1/4 cup peanuts, bean sprouts, all but 1/4 cup scallions, and cooked shrimp over noodles; continue to cook, tossing constantly, until noodles are tender, about 2 1/2 minutes (if not yet tender add 2 tablespoons water to skillet and continue to cook until tender).

5. Transfer noodles to serving platter, sprinkle with remaining scallions, 2 tablespoons peanuts, and cilantro; serve immediately, passing lime wedges separately.

Tamarind Options

Is there an acceptable alternative to real tamarind paste?

Sweet-tart, dark brownish-red tamarind is a necessary ingredient for an authentic-looking and tasting pad thai. It's commonly sold in paste (also called pulp) and in concentrate form. But don't fret if neither is available-- you can still make an excellent pad thai using the lime juice and water substitute below.

Tamarind Paste or Pulp

Tamarind paste, or pulp, is firm, sticky, and filled with seeds and fibers. We favored this product because it had the freshest, brightest flavor. To use it in the pad thai recipe, soak 2 tablespoons in 3/4 cup boiling water for about 10 minutes, then push it through a mesh strainer to remove the seeds and fibers and extract as much pulp as possible.

Tamarind Concentrate

Tamarind concentrate looks more like a scary pomade than foodstuff. It's black, thick, shiny, and goeey. Its flavor approximates that of tamarind paste, but it tastes less fruity and more "cooked," and it colors the pad thai a shade too dark. To use in the pad thai recipe, mix 1 tablespoon with 2/3 cup hot water.

Lime Juice and Water Substitute

If tamarind is out of the question, combine 1/3 cup lime juice and 1/3 cup water and use it in its place; use light brown sugar instead of granulated sugar to give the noodles some color and a faint molasses flavor. Because it will already contain a good hit of lime, do not serve this version with lime wedges.