

String Puller

THE versatile noodles have the knack to win over food lovers through hot and cold dishes

THE night life of Mumbai buzzes with activities as the stalls around toss vegetables and noodles in high flame. Not to miss the soy sauce and the strong ginger garlic flavour that tickles the nostrils. It is fun to watch the way hands work swiftly with noodles. Noodles have had the knack to pull the strings with food lovers through hot and cold dishes.

The Chinese savour them long and slippery, the Japanese like to have it in soups and salads while Indians enjoy it non saucy served as a main course, stir-fried especially with cabbage, carrots and French beans. And although they are often associated with Asian cooking, in particular

Chicken And Noodle Salad With Cashews

Prep time: 20 min + 2 hrs marinating, Cooking time: 20 min
Serves 4

Ingredients

2 Cloves garlic, peeled
1/4 cup (60ml) Fish sauce
1/4 cup (60ml) Lime juice
2tsp Chilli paste
2tbsp Soft brown sugar
2 cups (60g) Fresh coriander leaves
1 cup (155g) Unsalted roasted cashews, chopped
3tbsp Vegetable oil
650g Chicken thigh fillets or breast fillets
375g Rice noodle sticks
200g Tomatoes, diced
1/4 cup (7g) Fresh coriander leaves, extra

Method

Combine garlic, fish sauce, lime juice, chilli paste, brown sugar, coriander and half the cashews in a food processor until smooth. Add oil and blend until combined. Place the chicken in a bowl with 1/2 cup of the dressing. Cover and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours. Heat a grill or nonstick frying pan. Add chicken. Cook on each side until cooked. Rest for 5 minutes, then cut into thin strips. Cook noodles in a saucepan of boiling water for 3-5 minutes, or until just tender. Rinse and drain. Toss with the tomato and the remaining dressing. Place the noodles on a serving platter and top it with chicken, the remaining cashews and extra coriander leaves. Serve warm.



Chinese and Thai, the term “noodle” covers a multitude of items.

In fact, a noodle is a thin strip of pasta, usually cut or extruded from some kind of dough. It is the basic unit in dishes like spaghetti and linguine (Italian), and soba and udon (Japanese). The term often refers to moist, cooked pasta, since it has connotations of curviness and slipperiness, but also to dried noodles that must be reconstituted by boiling or soaking in water.

The variants of noodles, with or without egg, are amazing as are its soaking time. For instance, Dried Rice



Teriyaki Chicken And Udon Noodles

Prep time: 20 min + 30 min marinating, Cooking time: 20 min
Serves 4

Ingredients

450g Chicken breast fillets
1 clove Garlic, crushed
1 1/2tbsp Fresh ginger, grated
1/3 cup (80ml) Light soy sauce
1tbsp Sake
1/4 cup (60ml) Mirin
2tbsp Peanut oil
1tsp Sesame oil
1 Onion, cut into thin wedges
2tsp Sugar
6 Spring onions, thinly sliced on the diagonal
400g Fresh udon noodles
2tsp Toasted black sesame seeds
1tbsp Toasted sesame seeds

Method

Cut chicken into cubes and combine it with garlic, ginger, soy sauce, sake and mirin in a large bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes. Drain the chicken and reserve the marinade. Combine peanut and sesame oil. Heat half the oil in a wok, stir-fry the chicken in batches until browned. Remove from the heat. In the remaining oil stir-fry onions until softened. Meanwhile bring to boil the reserved marinade and sugar in a saucepan. Simmer until slightly syrupy, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat. Toss chicken along with spring onion and udon noodles. Cook for 2 minutes before pouring in the reserved heated marinade. Cook for another minute. Sprinkle the dish with black and white toasted sesame seeds and serve immediately.



Orange Sweet Potato And Fried Noodle Salad

Prep time: 20 min, Cooking time: 35 min

Serves 4-6

Ingredients

1.25kg Orange sweet potato, peeled and cut into 2 cm chunks
2 tbsp Light oil
200g Roasted unsalted cashews
1 cup (50g) Fresh coriander leaves, finely chopped
100g packet Fried noodles dressing
3/4tbsp Red curry paste
90ml Coconut milk
2tbsp Lime juice
1 1/2tbsp Soft brown sugar
2tbsp Light oil
4 cloves Garlic, finely chopped
1tbsp Fresh ginger, finely chopped

Method

Preheat the oven to moderately hot 200°C. Place sweet potato and oil in a bowl, and season lightly with salt and pepper. Toss together until well coated. Place on a baking tray and bake for 30 minutes, or until tender. Drain on crumpled paper towels.

To make dressing, combine curry paste, coconut milk, lime juice and sugar in a food processor. Heat oil in a small frying pan. Add garlic and ginger and cook over low heat for 1-2 minutes, or until light brown. Remove and add to the dressing. Place sweet potato, cashews, coriander, dressing and the noodles in a large bowl and toss gently until combined. Serve immediately.

Vermicelli which is one of Asia's most popular noodles made from rice flour paste needs to be soaked in boiling water for 6-7 minutes before use in stir-fry or soups. When deep fried, it is likely to expand to approximately four times its original size and is often used as a garnish.

For instance, the crispy fried noodles drizzled with honey, a hot and cold combination, served with a dollop of vanilla ice-cream, gives a lip smacking dessert. If not that, sip and slurp the vermicelli from the falooda kulfi. Of course falooda, the milk-based dessert is a popular drink of India but Pakistan, Myanmar and Iraq are also not far behind on the fan list.

Likewise, Wheat Noodles available in fresh or dried forms are egg-free noodles and needs to be cooked for 2-4 minutes in boiling water and then rinsed in cold water. You can refrigerate it for up to one week, which makes your work easier. When hard pressed for time just sauté cut vegetables like carrots, beans, cabbage and capsicum with a little pepper and add the soy, chilli and tomato sauce.

The Chinese rulers were the first to enjoy the wheat based noodles. In Chinese culture noodles symbolise longevity and even today noodles is served instead of cakes at birthday parties and Chinese New Year. Its nutritious value and time saving preparation soon spread the news and was quick to adapt to other cuisines of Asia. But it was the Italians, to whom pasta has been an art form, who introduced mass production machines making it a big business gradually.

Today the noodle varieties, different sauces, aromatic herbs and ingredients have found their way into the supermarkets. The right taste can be cultivated with the right mix but if the noodles get boiled more than needed you end up with mushy, sticky lumps. The noodles should fall apart and the tried and tested method is to use a little oil while boiling them.

That is not all, it has a popular market world over as instant noodles that come with flavour packets and are easy



Chicken And Egg Noodle Soup

to make. The packet includes all the necessary ingredients, even diced vegetables, and all you need to do is pour the contents into boiling water, stir for a few minutes till cooked and voila, dinner is ready. For those who do not have the time to do even this much, another variety gives them the convenience of pouring the hot water directly into a cupful of ingredients. Leave it aside while you go for a quick shower and the magical dinner is awaiting you after a hard day.

It is not just the cooking, even eating noodles is an art. The Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese pick up noodles with their chopsticks, while Italians twirl long pastas, making a “small nest” with their fork as twirling helps capture the little pieces in the sauce, and the Thai use fork

and soup spoon to enjoy the broth and noodles. As per noodle etiquettes even slurping and making noise is permissible especially with the Chinese for practical reasons. It is a way of introducing air into your mouth to cool off the noodles and the broth if it is a noodle soup.

Noodle soup is a staple food in most of the Asian countries served with vegetable or meat stock, vegetables and other ingredients. You can vary the quality of noodles depending on your preference. It makes a complete meal by increasing the quantity of noodles and serving in large bowls. Noodles are also served chilled with dipping sauces as the Japanese do with their soba and somen noodles or with salads. Noodles are even stir fried to make the familiar dishes like

chow mein, chopseuy and pad thai. Its versatility is at its best when yummy dishes are churned out by adding noodles with other food such as rice and pasta.

Of course pasta and noodles have always had an identity crisis. But the fact is pasta which comes from Italian *pasta* is basically ‘paste’ or ‘dough’ and is reserved for Italian-style noodles in English-speaking countries. Noodles on the other hand are derived from the German *Nudel*, meaning pasta. The confusion may continue but the popularity of noodles is unaffected. “Noodle dishes vary by region, but, as far as eating is concerned, it’s all the same,” says Corinne Trang, author of *Essentials Of Asian Cuisine: Fundamentals And Favourite Recipes*. ◀