

Thai Green Curry

Serves 2

Of all the curries I cook this is my wife's favourite (which is a bit frustrating after I have written a whole book on Indian Restaurant curries but there you are).

The inspiration for my recipe came from the kitchen of Thai chef Muoi Khuntilanont's and her recipe appears in the public area of The Curry House if you want to take a look at it. I have, however, made extensive changes to Muoi's recipe to make it more like the curries we Westerners are used to and to account for the sort of ingredients you can find easily in the average British supermarket.

Muoi's original recipe uses the small, round green Thai eggplants. They certainly aren't easily available in British supermarkets so I have taken the advice of Muoi's late husband, "The Colonel", who wrote up all her recipes. He suggested substituting large marrowfat peas for the baby eggplants. You can omit them if you like but I think they add a good contrasting texture.

The other significant substitution I have made is to omit lemongrass and replace it with extra lime zest and juice. Now, it's not that you can't find lemongrass in British supermarkets, you can. But I find it too coarse in texture. You end up with little bits of tough lemongrass in the curry even if you have puréed it up with the coriander stalks and chillies. Maybe we just get tough, old lemongrass here, I don't know, but I have dispensed with it. If you want a more authentic curry you can add it back into the recipe if you like and reduce the lime accordingly.

My final substitution is to use anchovy paste instead of Thai fish sauce. You can certainly find bottles of Thai fish sauce in British supermarkets but the commonly available ones are, in my opinion, mediocre at best. Better to use a consistent product like anchovy paste. The other advantage of using anchovy paste is that it helps thicken the curry and so gives a more familiar consistency to the sauce. The sauce in authentic Thai curries is a lot more soup-like.

So my Thai Green Curry is probably not terribly authentic but it is wonderfully fresh and fragrant and, not surprisingly, green!

ingredients

4 × 15ml spoons tinned marrowfat peas (optional)
either... 6 thin green chillies (Cayenne type – hot)
or... 4 fat green chillies (Fresno type – milder)
a bunch of fresh coriander stalks (bunch = about 20mm wide × 100mm long)
about 200ml water to blend
2 chicken breasts (300g – 350g) – cut into pieces
2 × 15ml spoons groundnut oil
1 × 5ml spoon finely grated ginger
2 cloves garlic – crushed to a pulp in a garlic press
1 × 5ml spoon ground coriander
1 × 2.5ml spoon ground cumin
200ml tinned coconut milk
1 × 5ml spoon anchovy paste
zest of 1 lime
5 grinds black peppercorns
1 × 2.5ml spoon sugar
1 × 5ml spoon lime juice *plus* a little more to taste
an additional 4 × 15ml spoons coconut milk
1 × 5ml spoon finely chopped coriander leaf
basil leaves – sliced into thin ribbons – for garnish

method

1. If you are using the marrowfat peas then drain the peas in a sieve and wash under cold running water. Then place the peas in a bowl and soak for 1 hour in clean cold water. This removes some of the colouring, salt and flavouring they use in tinned peas.
2. Remove the stalks from the chillies and slice in half lengthways. Remove the seeds and white pith with the point of a sharp knife.
3. Blend the coriander stalks and chillies in about 200ml water until you get a smooth, green liquid. Set aside.
4. Remove any skin from the chicken breasts and chop them into largish pieces. About 14 to 18 pieces is fine.
5. Heat 2 × 15ml spoons groundnut oil in a 20cm heavy bottomed pan over a low heat. When the oil is hot add the grated ginger (don't forget to pour in any leftover ginger juice) and the crushed garlic. Fry the ginger and garlic gently for 2 to 3 minutes until everything has softened. Make sure the heat is low so nothing burns.
6. Now add the ground coriander and cumin and stir fry for about 30 seconds or until the spices are nicely aromatic.
7. Add and the blended green liquid to the pan, raise the heat to medium and bring the liquid to the boil. Boil off most of the liquid until oil starts appearing on the surface and the texture has become a thick paste. At this point it all looks a bit like a swamp but stick with it!

8. Slide the chicken pieces into the pan and gently stir to coat the chicken with the green paste. Stir fry until the chicken pieces are beginning to turn white.
9. Add 200ml coconut milk and the anchovy paste, lime zest, black pepper and sugar. Stir to mix and so the anchovy paste is completely dissolved. Don't worry about the "fishy" smell that will be coming from the warmed anchovy paste. The smell soon fades and eventually becomes a pleasant salty flavour.
10. Bring the liquid to the boil and boil gently for 20 minutes. At the end of the 20 minutes the sauce should now be starting to thicken.
11. Now add the lime juice, additional coconut milk, chopped coriander leaf and the peas (if using) and bring the sauce back to a simmer.
12. Simmer gently for a further 10 minutes.
13. Towards the end of the simmering period taste the sauce and add a little more lime juice if the curry appears too "heavy". The sauce should now be thick but still fluid.
14. Serve the curry in a warmed serving dish garnished with thin ribbons of basil leaves. Leave the basil ribbons on the top of the curry long enough for them to heat up a little and start giving off a wonderful aroma.



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Thai Green Curry
[Index](#)