



DORY'S DIARY

DOROTHY SWART FLESHMAN

Old toaster on hearth sparks memories

I don't like sentences without endings because they were too long to fit the available space but there is no help for it. For those interested, last Monday's ending line should have read: Another part of our history destined for later regret.

Today, though, I'm thinking of when I was shifting things around in our old barn years ago and found a rusty tin metal piece with small slits in its four-sided 5-inch tall tower that stood on a flat surface.

The sight of it touched something in my memory and I gathered it in to preserve it for further study.

Today it sits on my hearth among other such treasures and I happened to glance at it this morning with the thought that it is a really old item that connects us to the past and yet young folks would have no notion of its previous use. It might be worth talking about it.

The item is rusted and I've never worked with it to clean it or the thin wires that stand against the face of each side so it's hard to demonstrate its previous use. Actually, it is a bread toaster.

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BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

Visiting a nursery on the coast

On a recent trip to the coast when I was leaving Seaside to drive home, I saw a huge nursery and garden center. Of course I had to make a U-turn and go back to it and check it out. There was a list of plants I was looking for, and it would be nice to be able to find a few of them.

On the sales desk at the nursery there was a huge blossom in a glass of water. It was a white blossom with a large bright yellow knot of stamens and pistils in the middle of the flower. The cashier called it a flower from the "fried egg plant." Actually the flower did look like a fried egg.

The gorgeous poppy blossom reminded me of some tall flowering plants I had seen growing close to where I lived in east San Diego county in Southern California. Those were called Matilija poppies, and it turned out (after a few more questions) that the fried egg flower was actually a Matilija poppy. A plant that the nursery grows and carries, so even though it was not on my shopping list, I really needed one; so a matilija poppy rode home with me.

Later I realized that I should have purchased three or four more plants of that beautiful poppy. Even though there is no guarantee that it would be hardy in La Grande or Baker City, it is the type of beautiful and attention-getting plant that is worth taking a chance on. This plant surviving and even possibly thriving here would be a great thing for gardeners in our area.

Matilija poppy, (*Romneya coulteri*), perennial. Zones 5-10. Native to southern California and Mexico. Spectacular plant growing to 8 feet or more. Stems and deeply cut leaves are gray-green.

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Authentic Singapore Noodles



Hilary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch/TNS

Singapore noodles, a curried thin noodle dish with chicken and shrimp and egg and vegetables.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE NOODLE

By Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Some people claim that Singapore noodles aren't authentic.

That's nonsense, of course. They are plenty authentic. They just aren't authentically from Singapore.

French toast was not invented in France, but a version of it can be eaten there. It's like that for Singapore noodles, only Singapore noodles are almost completely unknown in Singapore.

Often found on the menus of Chinese restaurants in this country and elsewhere, Singapore noodles are a diner's delight: lightly curried, thin, dry noodles tossed with a selection of Asian-appropriate vegetables and a meat, such as chicken or shrimp, or a vegetarian protein such as tofu.

At its heart, it is a street food, although it doesn't seem to be sold on the street anywhere. It is a restaurant food that ought to be sold on the street — and someone could make a good living doing it.

Singapore noodles is a popular dish in Cantonese carry-out restaurants in China — and especially in Hong Kong, where many proud residents claim it was invented. That assertion makes sense, because the dish relies on curry powder, and curry powder is a British invention (they were trying to re-create the complex flavors of India in a single spice mix).

England colonized Hong Kong and brought curry powder with them. Let's give Hong Kong tentative credit for creating it.

I'm glad they did. I am such a fan, I decided to make Singapore noodles for myself. I perused several recipes, took the best ideas from a few of them (two in particular) and mashed them together to create Singapore noodles so good that even people in Singapore would eat them.

Obviously, you begin with the noodles themselves. The dish calls for rice vermicelli, which is probably easiest to find at an international food store (though many grocery stores carry it on their international shelves). Vermicelli made from wheat — pasta vermicelli — is always very thin; the word is Italian for "little worms." But for some inexplicable reason, Asian vermicelli comes in a variety of widths.

You want the thin kind. If possible, get a kind that has not been packed too tightly into the package; this will make it easier to soak.

I used shrimp, which is always good in Singapore noodles and basically everything else. Traditionally, sliced Chinese barbecue pork called char siu is also used, but I didn't want to go to the considerable effort to make it, so I got ground chicken instead.

Singapore noodles are made in two parts, a sauce and a stir-fry. Relatively little sauce is needed, because the overall effect should be dry noodles. However, because you are using so little of it, the sauce has to be packed full of flavor: curry powder, sesame oil, dry sherry (or shaoxing wine), pepper, a little sugar to temper it and some turmeric to give it the familiar yellow color.

The stir-fry is not unlike many other stir-fries: onions, garlic, ginger, carrots, bell peppers (I used both red and green to add color), beansprouts. I used Chinese chives because there is an international market near me; if you don't happen to be going to one, scallions will do just fine.

I used peanut oil to cook it all in because peanut oil can stand up to the high heat necessary for stir-frying. It also adds a nice hint of peanut flavor to the dish. Vegetable oil, grapeseed oil, safflower oil and sunflower oil are also good choices, but never use an oil with a low smoke point, such as olive oil, because it will quickly burn and irredeemably ruin your dish.

One unusual addition, but absolutely necessary (more or less) for Singapore noodles is an egg, scrambled into the stir-fry.

One final word about the technique: This version of Singapore noodles requires stir-frying many of the ingredients individually. The idea is to let the ingredients release their moisture, which will keep the delicate noodles from becoming mushy.

The result is perfect Singapore noodles. They may not recognize it in Singapore, but the rest of the world will love it.

SINGAPORE NOODLES

Yield: 4 servings

6 ounces dried vermicelli rice noodles
2 tablespoons dry sherry or Shaoxing wine
1 tablespoon curry powder
1 teaspoon salt
½ teaspoon sesame oil
½ teaspoon granulated sugar
¼ teaspoon white pepper
¼ teaspoon ground turmeric
2 tablespoons peanut oil, or corn, safflower, grapeseed, sunflower or vegetable oil, divided
2 large eggs, beaten well
½ pound ground chicken or thinly sliced Chinese barbecue (char siu)
½ small onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
½ large carrot, thinly julienned
2 teaspoons minced ginger

½ green bell pepper, thinly sliced, see note
½ red bell pepper, thinly sliced, see note
3 ounces beansprouts
3 Chinese chives or scallions, cut into 2-inch pieces
½ pound shrimp, peeled and deveined

Note: Using red and green peppers adds color, but use one whole pepper of one or the other color if you wish to save the expense.

1. Cook vermicelli noodles in boiling water for 1½ minutes. Drain without rinsing, place still hot in a large bowl and cover with a towel. Let stand 10 minutes. Pull on the noodles with tongs, chopsticks or your impeccably clean hands to separate them. If the noodles are too long for easy eating, cut them into smaller pieces. Set aside.

2. In a small bowl, combine the sherry or Shaoxing wine, curry powder, salt, sesame oil, sugar, white pepper and turmeric. Stir to mix well, and set aside.

3. Heat ½ tablespoon of the peanut oil in a wok or large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the eggs and scramble until just cooked through. Transfer to a plate.

4. Clean wok or skillet if necessary. Add ½ tablespoon of the peanut oil over medium heat. When hot, add ground chicken or sliced char siu and cook, breaking up the ground chicken, until cooked through. Transfer to the plate with the eggs.

5. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon peanut oil. When hot, stir in onion, garlic, carrots, ginger and green and red peppers. Stir-fry until the vegetables have just softened, about 3 or 4 minutes. Stir in the beansprouts and Chinese chives or scallions and cook until they are heated through and beginning to take on some color, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove to a plate.

6. Add shrimp and stir-fry until firm and thoroughly cooked (the time will depend on the size of the shrimp). Remove to a plate.

7. In quick succession, add the reserved sauce, 1/3 cup water and the noodles. Cook, stirring, until the noodles have absorbed all of the sauce and are uniform in color. If some of the sauce sticks to the bottom of the pan, add a little more water. Add the eggs, chicken, vegetables and shrimp all back to the pan and mix everything together with chopsticks or tongs. Serve immediately.

Per serving: 416 calories; 16 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 232 mg cholesterol; 25 g protein; 42 g carbohydrate; 4 g sugar; 3 g fiber; 677 mg sodium; 81 mg calcium

— Recipe by Daniel Neman