



Photo by Sarah West

Chives



EATER'S DIGEST
SARAH WEST

Alliums: The essence of savory

Whether they know it or not, most cooks are familiar with the virtues of the allium family, one that includes garlic, onions, shallots and leeks. The alliums are a tribe of powerful flavors that provide the backbone of countless soups, sautés, sauces, roasts, salads, and stews. They are the definition of savory: pungently aromatic, acidic and spicy when fresh, oozing with deep, often sweet, meaty flavor when roasted. Rather than steal the show, they harmonize with the other flavors, providing a song nearly anything can dance to.

In the garden, as on the tongue, alliums are lingering guests. Leeks, onions, garlic, and shallots all have long maturation periods, occupying valuable garden real estate for up to nine months. Garlic, leeks, and shallots accomplish much of their extended growth period over winter, when little else is growing, while most onions require early spring planting and a long, luxurious soak in the sun to reach their bulbing stage.

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DORY'S DIARY

DOROTHY SWART FLESHMAN

When milk bottles rattled

One day I was rummaging around in my garage and ran across a wire cage holding a dozen clear glass milk bottles.

How long had it been, I wondered, since we had poured milk onto our morning cereal from such a bottle with a narrowed neck and capped with a cardboard seal? Or even from one of these quart milk bottles into a glass for drinking at mealtime?

At what age would a person now be who had never had this experience, or for that matter, even have known to what I was referring?

Would they be 30 or 40 years old now that had never purchased milk from the grocery store in such a bottle that now gathered dust along with its mates in the wire cage and sitting unused for long years?

Did they ever pour cream from the top part of the bottle for their coffee?

Had they ever experienced the rattle of milk bottles as the delivery milkman brought them to the doorstep before the family's arising? Or did they ever walk to the distant neighbor to get a pail of milk directly from the cow, unpasteurized or homogenized?

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GIVING THAI A TRY

By Daniel Neman
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

If you think about Thai food — which is something I do with alarming regularity — the Thai food you think about first is probably Pad Thai.

That is as it should be. Pad Thai is probably most Americans' introduction to Thai cuisine, an authentic street food that is easily accessible to the American palate.

It's got noodles, it's got shrimp (or chicken or pork or tofu), it's got peanuts and eggs. It's a little bit tart, a little bit sweet. It can be spicy, too, but it doesn't have to be.

It's basically everything you want on a single plate, topped off with a squeeze or two of lime.

In Thailand, it started as a street food that was popular at stalls from Hat Yai all the way up to Mae Sai. In recent years, though, it has also been embraced in Thai restaurants, too, though it remains as popular as ever on the street.

The Pad Thai you will find in Thailand is similar to the American version, with a few notable differences. It is likely to be sweeter than we typically like in an entree; Thais love their food to be sweet. It will probably be spicier than the neutral American version, too. And if it is made with shrimp, the shrimp may well still have their heads attached.

When I was at an Asian market a couple of weeks ago buying a few ingredients to make this dish, a woman asked why I was buying shrimp with the heads removed rather than un-decapitated shrimp.

"Because I'm cooking for other people," I said.

Despite my insatiable fondness for Pad Thai, I had never made it before. And so I set out to look for a recipe that matched the perfect combination of tastes and textures that I had in my head.

The quest was actually harder than I thought. Some recipes had ketchup in them. Some were way too involved, with more ingredients than you'd want to put together in a week of cooking, much less a single dish commonly made by street vendors. Others had so few ingredients that the taste could not possibly approach true Pad Thai.

One cooked the shrimp first and kept it in the wok or skillet the entire time the other ingredients were cooking. That's fine, if you like rubbery shrimp.

So I took a little bit from one



Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS
Pad Thai with shrimp

recipe, a dash from another and maybe a technique from a third to create my own version.

But first, a word about a couple of the ingredients: Pad Thai has a subtle undertone of tartness. That comes primarily from tamarind, which you can find at international markets. I bought it in concentrated paste form, but you can also get it already mixed with water, sold either on the shelf or frozen.

Tamarind pulp is also available dried and vacuum packed. You can reconstitute this yourself with water if you want to go through a lot of effort.

The noodles used for Pad Thai are also available at international markets, although some well-stocked grocery stores with a strong international selection may also carry them. They should be flat rice noodles, about the width of linguine. These are not boiled: just soften them by soaking them in warm water for several minutes.

And while you are at the international store buying tamarind paste and rice noodles, you may as well look for sweet or pickled radish. This brings a salty-sweet flavor to the dish, kind of like sweet pickles. It is by no means necessary for Pad Thai, but it is inexpensive (I bought a large package for \$1.69) and will give you an authentic Thai flavor.

Pad Thai is a stir-fry, which means it all comes together quickly. For that reason, it is imperative to have all of your ingredients at hand before you begin.

Mine probably took less than 15 minutes to cook. It had just enough egg, just enough tamarind, just enough shrimp, just enough noodles and possibly not quite enough garlic.

PAD THAI

Yield: 2 servings

- 4 ounces dried flat rice noodles (or 8 ounces fresh)
- 4 ounces extra-firm tofu
- ½ small red onion, sliced thin
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon tamarind paste, see note
- 2 tablespoons fish sauce
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar
- 3½ tablespoons oil, preferably peanut oil (do not use olive oil), divided
- ¼ pound peeled and deveined shrimp or chicken or combination of both
- 1 tablespoon sweet radish, finely chopped, optional. See note
- 2 large eggs
- 3 spring onions, sliced into 2-inch lengths
- 1½ cups bean sprouts, plus more for garnish, if desired
- 3 tablespoons roasted peanuts,

crushed or finely chopped, plus more for garnish
Lime wedges
Crushed red pepper or cayenne pepper, optional

Notes: Tamarind paste is available at Asian and international markets. You can also find tamarind pulp, either frozen or not. Sweet radish is also available at Asian and international markets.

As with all stir-fries, it is vital to have all the ingredients prepared and ready before you start to cook.

1. Soak the noodles in warm water until soft, about 10 minutes. Wrap tofu in paper towels to remove excess moisture.

2. Mix together tamarind paste, fish sauce, brown sugar and ¼ cup water. If water is listed as the first ingredient of tamarind pulp, use ¼ cup of the pulp and leave out the ¼ cup of water. Stir until thoroughly dissolved. Set aside. Cut tofu into bite-sized cubes.

3. Place a wok or large skillet on high heat and add 1 tablespoon of the oil. Stir fry shrimp and/or chicken until done and remove with a slotted spoon. Add 2 tablespoons oil to the wok or skillet, allow to get hot, and add tofu cubes, sliced red onion and garlic. Stir fry until tofu is browned, 2 to 3 minutes.

4. Add noodles and reserved sauce made from tamarind paste and fish sauce. Add minced sweet radish, if using. Stir fry until noodles can be easily cut, about 2 to 3 minutes. If sauce is sticking to pan, add 2 tablespoons water at a time and stir to loosen it and incorporate it into the sauce.

5. Push mixture to one side of the wok or pan. Add the remaining ½ tablespoon oil to the cleared side of the wok or pan, if needed. Crack eggs into the cleared side of the wok or pan and allow to cook undisturbed until they are half-cooked. Then, mix together with other ingredients in the wok or pan until scrambled.

6. Return shrimp and/or chicken to the pan and stir to mix together. Add sliced spring onions, bean sprouts and the 3 tablespoons peanuts. Cook a few minutes, stirring. Serve with lime wedge. On the side of the plate, serve with more chopped peanuts, bean sprouts and small piles of crushed pepper or cayenne pepper, if desired.

— Adapted from recipes by
Cooking with Poo, Seonkyoung
Longest and Palin Chongchitnant

Bring stability, and beauty, to steep slopes

This week I thought I could summarize all or part of an article about ground covers by Denny Schrock of the University of Missouri Extension.

Steep slopes present a maintenance and landscaping problem, as anything steeper than 30% is dangerous to mow. Ground covers that need no mowing simplify our lives.

Before planting, get rid of the weeds by covering the area with black plastic for several weeks. Choose sun- and heat-tolerant species with colorful foliage or flowers to cover the slope. At the same time you are adding color you are also stabilizing the slope's soil and eliminating the need to mow.

Weeding and watering will be needed to establish your ground cover. You can leave the weeds in place that you killed before you planted the ground cover. The dead weeds will provide mulch. This will lessen your chance for erosion.

Another landscape problem that can be solved with ground covers is that of shade. Turf (lawn grass) never prefers shade to sun, and does not do well in shade. However,



BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

many ground covers prefer shade.

Ground covers do not have to lack height. On a slope where you do not have to mow, you could grow daylilies, for

instance. You don't have to limit yourself to the low-growing groundcovers if mowing is not an option.

Ground covers for shade: Ajuga (bugle weed), dwarf astilbe, lily-of-the-valley, epimedium, euonymus (winter creeper), sweet woodruff, violets, English ivy, hosta, lamiastrium (yellow archangel), liriope, pachysandra, pulmonaria, vinca minor (periwinkle), wild ginger (Asarum europeum), lamium (dead nettle), among others.

Ground covers for sun: woolly yarrow, artemisia (Silver mound or silver brocade), snow-in-summer (cerastium), pinks, mock strawberry, daylily, juniper, creeping phlox, creeping potentilla, sedum, lamb's ears, thyme, veronica (speedwell).

If you are on a budget, develop ground cover beds in stages. Closely plant only one section of the bed to start. After this first area fills in, divide the ground cover and trans-

plant it into the rest of the planned bed.

Color sets the mood in your landscape. It has a dramatic influence on the mood of outdoor living spaces. Whether the color comes from flowers, shrubs, or trees, you can set the tone by your color selection.

For a soothing, relaxing hideaway, use lots of blues, pinks, and greens. Green helps eyes recover from strain. Pink is also a soothing color. Research has shown people are less likely to argue with someone who is wearing pink! When viewing the color blue, our body's metabolism actually slows down, creating a sense of cooling calmness. So, for a relaxing setting for your deck or patio, consider planting flower gardens with blues, pinks, and greens.

To grab attention in your landscape, use red or yellow. Our eyes see these colors faster than any others and they have a great impact.

If you're only able to enjoy the garden in the evening, sprinkle in a lot of white. White is the last color to fade from sight as darkness falls (yellow and pink are also good for a twilight garden).

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