

MAEM JENNY JAENGHAN PHONGSAVATH

Jenny enters the demonstration kitchen in traditional Thai attire worn on special occasions. Geometric and organic designs stitched in metallic thread border a royal blue brocade wrap dress. Traditional Thai gold jewelry twinkles in the kitchen light as she unpacks and explains the kitchen equipment and ingredients for Thai



Papaya Salad. She calmly explains the name and purpose of each piece of cooking equipment her native language of Thai. She emphasizes the importance of using fresh ingredients that are organic whenever possible. Her mother instilled the value of consuming food grown with minimal chemicals and artificial additives, as that is how food was produced when she was a child growing up in Thailand. When Jenny cannot source organic ingredients, she soaks her produce in a solution of salt and vinegar for 30 minutes to remove as much chemical residue as possible.

Salads are very popular in Thai cuisine and are made up of hearty shredded vegetables accompanied by an ever-present punch from chili peppers. This salad is more of a main course instead of a side dish and is always served with sticky rice and meat at least once a week in her home. As she begins the task, she explains the traditional versus modern food preparation methods. After removing the green skin from the papaya, she demonstrates the traditional and modern ways to prepare the fruit. On one half, she aggressively hacks vertical cuts into the papaya, then stands the fruit upright and shaves off the match stick thin pieces. On the other half, she scrapes the slivers off with a peeler in a manner that appears much less risky. Traditional Thai cooks, such as her mother-in-law and mother, claim foods prepared in the traditional ways without modern tools taste better.



Despite time-saving utensils that make the task appear more efficient and safe, she does not allude to which method yields tastier results.

She recounts waking up early as a child to prepare food every morning for monks who would come by homes and collect food prepared by loved ones for the deceased. In this way, those who have passed could still enjoy earthly flavors and nourishment. Jenny came to the U.S. when she was fifteen years old. During our interview, she expressed gratitude and pride in being a U.S. citizen but loves to travel “home.” She described her most recent trip

to Thailand, where she spoke with an elderly woman selling large bunches of water lilies at a market. Jenny respectfully asked the woman in Thai, “Granny, why do you work so hard” to which the woman replied, “I have to.” A working wife, mother of four children, and one grandchild, she offers people three pieces of advice, “work hard, save for a rainy day...and be a good person.” Jenny completes all produce preparation without the use of a cutting board. Her hands skillfully wield a knife that she occasionally sharpens on the side of the mortar. Perfectly sized chunks of tomato tumble into the mortar, along with dangerously vivid whole Thai chilis. Seasonings are estimated and she suggests the chef cooks to the unique preferences of their family. She carefully macerates the ingredients with the pestle, cautioning about the liquids that can splash up from the mortar basin and burn your eyes if there’s too much liquid or the force behind the pestle isn’t graded properly.



An ancient kitchen essential, the mortar and pestle doubles as a knife sharpener and food processor.

PREP TIME: 30 min

SERVES: 8

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 green papaya; ensure it is unripe
- 1 package cherry tomatoes
- 2 limes
- Thai chilis (optional)
- 1 Tsp Mushroom seasoning, such as Po Lo Ku Mushroom Seasoning
- 1 Tbsp Fish sauce
- 1 Tbsp Anchovy sauce
- 1 Tsp Sugar

EQUIPMENT:

- Large mortar and pestle; placing ingredients in a plastic bag, layering with a dish towel and hammering with a heavy pan is an alternative method to forcefully mix the ingredients
- Sharp long knife
- Vegetable peeler with smooth and graded attachments

ส้มตำ

Thai Papaya Salad



-KEEP IN MIND-

- This refreshing dish can vary in spice intensity- add as much or as little chili as you like.
- Vegetables such as cabbage, long beans, and carrots can be added.
- This dish is traditionally served with steamed sticky rice and a protein, such as roasted pork. Soak the rice in water the night before, then steamed about 1 hour before serving.

ส้มตำ

Thai Papaya Salad

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Peel all green rind from papaya.
2. Use a peeler or traditional method (see narrative) to finely slice papaya flesh into long thin strips.
3. Roughly chop tomatoes and add to mortar.
4. Add destemmed whole Thai chilies, lime juice, liquid, and powdered seasonings into the mortar.
5. Carefully hammer the ingredients with the pestle or alternative method mentioned in the notes.
6. Once combined, add half of the papaya into the mortar and continue to incorporate.
7. Taste and adjust seasonings as needed.
8. Enjoy with warm rice.