



Cook

Filipino

in America

Recipes with love from
**The Robot Book
Club**

Cook Filipino in America

Everyday Filipino Home Cooking for the Modern Kitchen

The Robot Book Club

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Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Filipino Home Cooking.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

The smell. It hits you first, long before the first bite. That deep, comforting current of garlic and vinegar, or the sharp tang of tamarind, the sweet smoke of charring pork. It's a primal bell, ringing through generations, across oceans. It's the scent of Lola's kitchen, resurrected in a suburban American home. It is, unequivocally, home.

This isn't about chasing Michelin stars or impressing critics. This is about blood, memory, and the honest, unpretentious food that grounds a people. For those who grew up a world away from ancestral soil, yet carried the echoes of *Almusal* mornings and *Merienda* afternoons in their DNA, the longing is real. The problem, for so many, is time. Life moves fast. The traditional ways, while sacred, don't always fit neatly into a Tuesday night after school pick-up, miles from ancestral markets, with only a local Asian grocer for familiar solace.

Forget the watered-down versions. Forget the tourist traps. This book isn't interested in polite introductions to a foreign cuisine. It's a direct transmission, a culinary inheritance. These are the recipes that endure, that evolve, that stay fiercely authentic even when the ingredients come from the corner market and the cooking time needs to be cut in half. It's the resourceful spirit of the diaspora, poured into every pot, simmered into every sauce, making no apologies for its shortcuts or its bold, uncompromising flavors.

This is the quiet revolution happening in kitchens just like yours. It's the wisdom gleaned from countless family tables, now distilled, adapted, and ready for your weeknight. From the restorative bowls of *Sabaw* for the soul to the robust *Ulam* that demands a second helping of rice, and the sprawling *Kamayán*

feasts that unite *pamilya*, these are the rhythms of Filipino life. This is the way it's cooked, the way it's eaten. No embellishment. No apology. Just the food. Your food.

Welcome to the table. Let's eat.



Almusal at Any Hour (The Silog Rhythms)

Hearty Filipino breakfast staples centered around the iconic silog, adapted for quick weeknight prep and all-day comfort.

The beautiful, chaotic truth of the Filipino breakfast is that it refuses to obey the clock. The silog—that holy trinity of aggressively garlicky fried rice, a fried egg with crispy edges, and whatever cured, salty meat is at hand—is a survival

mechanism disguised as comfort food. It is the meal of the weary nursing a late-night hangover, the hospital nurse coming off a brutal twelve-hour shift, and the homesick kid seeking their Lola's kitchen on a frantic Tuesday night.

There is zero room for pretension here, only deep, unabashed resourcefulness. Day-old rice finds second life in screaming-hot oil. Thinly sliced beef and sweet pork sizzle until they hit that perfect, sticky char, and even the post-war miracle of canned Spam gets its unapologetic moment in the pan. Stripped of all-day fuss and engineered for the modern hustle, these are the rhythms of almusal. Smash the garlic, crack an egg, and let the grease pop.





Sinangag at Itlog

see-NAH-ngag aht it-LOG

Growing up, weekend mornings didn't smell like maple syrup or pancakes; they smelled like heavily roasted garlic hitting warm oil. Sinangag at Itlog is the beating heart of the Filipino breakfast, a masterclass in making profound, working-class magic out of absolutely nothing. The secret relies on total restraint: just day-old rice, a mountain of garlic, salt, and the patience to let the oil coax out every drop of flavor. Topped with an egg fried to lacy, crispy perfection with a yolk that bleeds into the loose grains, it takes fifteen minutes to make on a busy Tuesday night and tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

3 cup	cooked white rice <i>chilled overnight</i>	3/4 tsp	kosher salt
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 pinch	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
6 large cloves	fresh garlic <i>finely minced</i>	3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>reserved for frying eggs</i>
		2 large	large eggs

PREPARATION

- **Break apart the clumps of cold rice by hand before it goes into the pan.**
Dampen your hands slightly with water and gently rub the rice between your fingers to separate every single grain so they fry up loose and perfectly coated.
- **Avoid using pre-minced jarred garlic.**
Jarred garlic lacks the necessary moisture and flavor profile to crisp properly in the oil; taking the time to mince fresh cloves is non-negotiable here.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Place a large wok or skillet over medium-low heat, add three tablespoons of oil, and immediately stir in the minced garlic while the oil is still cool.**
Let the garlic slowly toast for 4 to 6 minutes until it turns a pale golden-brown and smells intoxicating, watching closely to ensure it doesn't burn and turn bitter.
- 2. Use a slotted spoon to scoop out about half of the crispy garlic bits, leaving the remaining garlic and all the infused oil in the pan.**
- 3. Crank the heat to medium-high, add the separated cold rice, and toss vigorously to coat every grain in the aromatic oil.**
Sprinkle in the salt and pepper, and stir-fry for 5 to 7 minutes, letting the rice rest undisturbed occasionally to build a slightly toasted crust on the bottom.
- 4. Taste for seasoning, turn off the heat, fold the reserved crispy garlic back in, and transfer the rice to a serving platter.**

- 1. In a separate skillet over medium-high heat, warm the remaining three tablespoons of oil until shimmering and crack the eggs directly into the pan.**
As the edges bubble and crisp, carefully tilt the pan toward you and use a spoon to baste the hot pooled oil over the whites for 1 to 2 minutes, cooking them through while leaving the yolk perfectly runny.
- 2. Scoop a generous mound of the garlicky rice onto a plate, top with the crispy fried egg, and break the yolk.**

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Rice Emergency.**

If you forgot to make rice the night before, cook a fresh batch, spread it out in a thin layer on a baking sheet, and place it in the freezer for 30 minutes to artificially dry out the grains.

- **The Umami Hack.**

Authentic recipes rely purely on salt and garlic, but if you grew up with a diaspora shortcut, feel free to add a splash of soy sauce, liquid seasoning, or a tablespoon of butter right before pulling the rice off the heat.



Tapsilog

In the 1980s, a Manila street-food vendor named Vivian del Rosario took three unapologetic staples—cured beef, garlic rice, and a fried egg—and smashed them together to create cheap, fast fuel for local drivers. It accidentally became the undisputed king of the Filipino morning. This is the real deal: tender, caramelized meat using the canonical boil-and-fry method, sitting next to rice steeped in garlic oil extracted with a slow, deliberate guisa. It's a plate of profound comfort, heavily spiked with cane vinegar and chilies, proving that the best taste of home doesn't require exotic maneuvers, just respect for the technique.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	cane vinegar	1 1/2 tbsp	brown sugar
1 small	shallot <i>finely diced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
2 small	clove garlic <i>smashed</i>	2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
2 small	Thai bird chilies <i>chopped</i>	4 cup	cooked jasmine rice <i>chilled overnight</i>
1/4 tsp	kosher salt	3 tbsp	neutral oil
1/4 tsp	black pepper	8 med	clove garlic <i>finely minced</i>
1 1/2 lb	hot pot beef <i>thinly sliced</i>	1/2 med	chicken bouillon cube <i>crushed</i>
1/4 cup	soy sauce	4 large	eggs
3 tbsp	calamansi juice	1 med	tomato <i>sliced</i>
1 med	head garlic <i>peeled and minced</i>	1 med	cucumber <i>sliced</i>

PREPARATION

- **Cook the jasmine rice a day ahead.**

The non-negotiable foundation of sinangag is bahaw—day-old cooked rice stored in the refrigerator so the starches retrograde and the grains separate during frying.

- **Marinate the beef in advance.**

While a one-hour soak works in a pinch, letting the thinly sliced beef sit in the marinade overnight yields a profoundly savory result.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Massage the soy sauce, calamansi juice, minced garlic, brown sugar, and black pepper into the beef.**

In a large bowl, ensure every thin slice is coated with the marinade, then cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or ideally overnight.

- 1. Mix the vinegar, shallot, smashed garlic, chilies, salt, and pepper in a small jar to create the sawsawan.**

Let this heavily spiced dipping sauce sit so the aromatics aggressively infuse the vinegar while you cook.

- 2. Extract the garlic oil for the sinangag using a cold-pan start.**

Break apart the chilled rice with damp hands so there are no clumps. Place a large wok on the stove, add the 3 tablespoons of neutral oil and the 8 cloves of minced garlic, and turn the heat to medium-low to coax out the essential oils without burning.

- 3. Toss the chilled rice into the golden, fragrant garlic oil.**

Once the garlic turns golden brown, crank the heat to medium-high. Add the rice and crushed bouillon cube, stirring vigorously for about 5 minutes until heated through and slightly toasted, then transfer to a platter.

- 4. Execute the canonical boil-and-fry method for the tapa.**

Place a wide skillet over medium-high heat, add the beef with all its residual marinade and 1/4 cup of water, and simmer until the liquid completely evaporates.

- 5. Fry the beef in its rendered fat and the remaining neutral oil.**

Once the pan is dry, push the beef to the side, pour in the 2 tablespoons of oil, and fry for 3 to 4 minutes until the edges are beautifully caramelized and deeply savory.

- 6. Fry the eggs sunny-side up until the edges are crispy and lace-like.**

The yolk must remain completely runny to spill over the dry grains of the garlic rice and coat the salty beef.

- 7. Assemble the tapsilog with the rice, beef, and egg.**

Serve immediately with the sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, and the spiced vinegar dipping sauce on the side.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Pre-sliced hotpot beef is the ultimate weeknight savior.**

Attempting butcher-quality, paper-thin slices on a Tuesday is tedious; grabbing pre-sliced ribeye or sirloin from the freezer aisle of an Asian market allows the marinade to penetrate instantly and skips the butchery entirely.

- **The acid component of the tapa is highly adaptable.**

If fresh or frozen calamansi is unavailable, lemon juice, lime juice, or cane vinegar are all deeply authentic substitutes that provide the necessary tang to tenderize the meat.



Tocilog

toh-see-log

If you grew up in a Filipino household, the smell of sweet pork caramelizing in a pan on a Saturday morning is practically hardwired into your DNA. But turn over a packet of frozen supermarket tocino, and you'll find a science experiment of chemical preservatives and artificial red dye. This is how the grandmothers did it—the true *lutong bahay* way. A natural tenderizer of pineapple juice, real annatto for that deep red stain, and a slow, patient cure in the fridge. Toss it together on a Sunday night, and by Wednesday, you're rewarded with a plate of intensely sticky, charred pork, pungent garlic rice, and a runny egg that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	pork shoulder <i>sliced against the grain into 1/4-inch thick strips</i>	1/2 cup	water
1/2 cup	dark brown sugar	1/2 cup	cane vinegar
1/4 cup	100% pineapple juice	2 med	garlic cloves <i>smashed</i>
1 tbsp	soy sauce	1/4 small	red onion <i>finely diced</i>
1 tbsp	coarse kosher salt	2 med	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>sliced</i>
5 med	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>	1/4 tsp	salt
1 tsp	ground black pepper	1/4 tsp	sugar
1 tsp	annatto powder	4 large	large eggs <i>fried sunny-side up</i>
2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	4 cup	prepared garlic fried rice <i>kept warm</i>

PREPARATION

- **Freeze the pork briefly before slicing.**

Pork shoulder can be unruly to slice evenly. Place the whole roast in the freezer for about 30 minutes before taking a knife to it; the firmed-up fat will allow for perfect, uniform quarter-inch strips.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Massage the cure into the pork.**

In a large bowl, whisk together the brown sugar, pineapple juice, soy sauce, kosher salt, minced garlic, black pepper, and annatto powder until mostly dissolved. Add the sliced pork, put on a kitchen glove, and aggressively massage the marinade into the meat for a few minutes before sealing it in a bag to refrigerate for at least 24 hours, or up to three days.

1. Steep the spiced vinegar dip.

Combine the cane vinegar, smashed garlic, diced onion, chilies, salt, sugar, and a pinch of black pepper in a small bowl. Let it sit on the counter to meld while you cook.

2. Simmer the pork until tender.

Do not drop sugary meat into hot oil. Instead, place the cured pork, any residual marinade, and the water into a wide skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat to medium, cover, and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes.

3. Fry the meat in its own rendered fat.

Remove the lid and let the water evaporate until a bubbling syrup of fat and sugar remains, turning the heat down to medium-low. Stir continuously for 5 to 8 minutes as the pork fries in its own fat—adding a splash of neutral oil if the meat is too lean—until deeply caramelized, sticky, and charred at the edges.

4. Assemble the silog.

Serve the hot tocino alongside a generous mound of garlic fried rice, top with a runny sunny-side-up egg, and use the sharp, spiced vinegar to cut right through the glorious fat.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Choose the right cut of pork.**

Standard American supermarket 'stir-fry pork' is typically loin, which is far too lean and will dry out immediately when cooked with sugar. Buy a small pork butt (shoulder) and slice it yourself for the essential balance of connective tissue, meat, and fat.

● **Respect the simmer-to-fry transition.**

Dropping sugar-cured meat directly into hot oil guarantees a burnt, bitter mess. Simmering in water first tenderizes the tough pork shoulder and ensures a perfect, sticky caramelization once the liquid naturally evaporates.

- **Don't skip the vinegar.**

The sawsawan (spiced vinegar dip) is not optional. The acidic bite is a necessary palate cleanser that cuts directly through the intense sweetness and heavy richness of the pork and egg yolk.



Longsilog

There is no breakfast on earth quite like a silog—a masterclass in fat, acid, and carbohydrate. This is the canonical longsilog. No casing-stuffing nonsense or esoteric gear; just aggressively seasoned, sweet and garlicky pork formed into skinless logs, boiled in water to gently cook the meat before frying in its own rendered fat. Paired with day-old rice spiked with a late-night diner secret and a runny egg, you've got a plate that tastes exactly like home, whether it's seven in the morning or two in the morning.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb ground pork (80/20 mix)

6 clove fresh garlic
smashed and finely minced

1/4 cup dark brown sugar
packed

2 tbsp cane or apple cider vinegar

1 1/2 tbsp	soy sauce	2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
1 tbsp	cornstarch	1/4 small	chicken or beef bouillon cube <i>crushed</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	4 large	eggs
1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	1/2 cup	cane or apple cider vinegar
1 tsp	smoked paprika or annatto powder	2 clove	garlic <i>crushed</i>
3 cup	day-old white rice <i>refrigerated overnight</i>	1 med	bird's eye chili <i>chopped</i>
6 clove	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	1 pinch	salt
		1 pinch	sugar

PREPARATION

- **Mix and knead the meat.**

In a large bowl, combine the ground pork, smashed and minced garlic, brown sugar, 2 tablespoons of vinegar, soy sauce, cornstarch, kosher salt, black pepper, and paprika. Aggressively mix and knead for 2 to 3 minutes until the meat is sticky and cohesive—this develops the proteins so the skinless sausage won't disintegrate later.

- **Mold the longganisa.**

Tear off 5-inch squares of wax paper or plastic wrap. Scoop about 3 tablespoons of the pork mixture onto each square, rolling the paper over the meat and pressing it into a tight 3-inch log. Twist the ends to seal.

- **Chill to set.**

Place the wrapped sausages in the freezer for at least 1 to 2 hours, or refrigerate overnight, to firm up before cooking.

- **Make the sawsawan.**

Combine the 1/2 cup of vinegar, crushed garlic, chili, pinch of salt, and pinch of sugar in a small bowl. Set aside to let the flavors mingle.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Perform the boil-to-fry technique.**

Unwrap the firm longganisa logs and place them naked into a wide, cold, non-stick skillet. Pour in exactly 1/2 cup of water, cover, and bring to a simmer over medium-low heat. Let them cook for 10 to 15 minutes. This safely cooks the pork through without prematurely burning the sugars.

2. **Caramelize the sausage.**

Once the water completely evaporates, the pork fat will render and sizzle. Fry the sausages in their own fat, turning frequently, for 3 to 5 minutes until they develop a dark, sticky, lacquered crust. Remove and set aside, leaving the glorious fat in the pan.

3. **Fry the essential egg.**

Crack your eggs directly into that same skillet, utilizing the residual sweet and garlicky pork fat. Fry them sunny-side up until the whites have crispy, lacy edges but the yolks remain wonderfully runny. Remove, set aside, and wipe the pan.

4. **Infuse the garlic oil.**

Heat the neutral oil in the skillet over medium-low. Add the minced garlic to the cold oil, letting it slowly heat and turn golden brown. Scoop out half the crispy garlic to garnish later.

5. **Build the sinangag.**

Crush the bouillon cube into the hot garlic oil and stir to dissolve—this is the street-food secret for massive umami. Crumble in the cold rice, breaking up clumps, then crank the heat to medium-high. Toss vigorously for 3 to 5 minutes until every grain is coated, toasted, and piping hot.

6. **Plate the silog.**

Mound a generous portion of garlic rice, lay the caramelized sausages alongside, and drape the fried egg over the top. Serve immediately with the sawsawan dip to cut the richness.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **A note on the meat.**

Authentic longganisa is not health food. Do not use lean pork. Ask your butcher for an 80/20 mix of pork shoulder and fatback; otherwise, you'll end up with a dry, crumbly sausage.

- **Rice requires patience.**

You cannot make proper sinangag with fresh rice. It must be refrigerated overnight so the starches retrograde, preventing a gummy, mushy mess when it hits the hot oil.



Adobosilog

ah-doh-boh-SEE-log

Growing up in the diaspora, the smell of sharp vinegar and blistering garlic hitting a hot wok meant one thing: Saturday morning. Adobosilog isn't just breakfast; it's a testament to the working-class genius of leftovers. Adobo—the indigenous method of braising meat in vinegar, soy, and aromatics—tastes infinitely better on day two, once the acid mellows and permeates the bone. The secret your Lola knew relies on two things: sangkutsa, letting the meat fry in its own rendered fat before finishing the sauce, and kaning lamig, using day-old cold rice for the garlic fried rice. Make the braise the night before, let the vinegar do the heavy lifting, and the result is exactly what home tastes like.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	boneless skinless chicken thighs <i>cut into halves</i>	3 med	dried bay leaves
1 lb	pork shoulder <i>cut into 1.5-inch cubes</i>	1 tsp	brown sugar
1/2 cup	cane vinegar	1 cup	water
1/2 cup	dark soy sauce	3 cup	cooked white jasmine rice <i>chilled in the refrigerator overnight</i>
1 large	garlic <i>cloves peeled and aggressively smashed</i>	5 med	garlic <i>finely minced</i>
1 tbsp	whole black peppercorns	2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
		1/2 tsp	salt
		2 large	eggs

PREPARATION

- **Plan for a two-day cook.**

The adobo must rest overnight in the fridge for the flavors to properly meld and the acid to round out.

- **Cook the rice a day ahead.**

Fresh hot rice makes for mushy fried rice. You need the starch to retrograde in the fridge overnight.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the meat and aromatics in a heavy-bottomed pot.**

Toss the chicken, pork, soy sauce, vinegar, smashed garlic, peppercorns, and bay leaves together but do not stir it yet.

- 2. Bring the mixture to a hard boil for five minutes.**

Letting the raw vinegar boil off before stirring prevents the sharp, metallic taste that grandmothers always warn about.

- 1. Add the water and gently simmer until the pork is fork-tender.**
Lower the heat, cover the pot, and let it go for about 35 to 40 minutes.
- 2. Execute the sangkutsa by uncovering the pot and cranking the heat.**
Boil away the excess liquid until the fat from the pork renders out. Let the meat fry in its own fat and the caramelized soy sauce for 3 to 5 minutes to exponentially deepen the umami.
- 3. Deglaze the pan with a splash of water and stir in the brown sugar.**
Turn off the heat, let it cool, and stash it in the fridge overnight.
- 4. The next morning, break apart the chilled rice with wet hands.**
Using cold, day-old rice ensures the grains are dry enough to absorb the garlic oil without turning into mush.
- 5. Fry the eggs sunny-side up in a wok or large skillet.**
Get the edges crispy in a little hot oil while keeping the yolks delightfully runny, then set them aside.
- 6. Toast the minced garlic in the remaining oil over medium-low heat.**
Cook it until deeply golden brown and incredibly fragrant, pulling it before it turns black and bitter.
- 7. Add the cold rice and salt to the wok and toss aggressively.**
Crank the heat to medium-high and keep it moving for 5 to 7 minutes until every grain is toasted and coated in garlic oil.
- 8. Reheat the leftover adobo in a separate pan.**
If you want a textural upgrade, shred the cold meat with a fork and fry it hard in oil until crispy to make Adobo Flakes.
- 9. Plate the garlic fried rice alongside the hot adobo and top with the fried egg.**
Spoon some of that dark, tangy adobo sauce right over the edge of the rice, break the yolk, and dig in.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The secret of Sangkutsa.**

Frying the meat in its own rendered fat before finalizing the sauce is the crucial step separating authentic Filipino adobo from internet approximations.

- **Vinegar substitutions.**

If you cannot find Datu Puti cane vinegar at your local Asian market, a 50/50 mix of distilled white and apple cider vinegar mimics the sharp, unadulterated acidity perfectly.



Tortang Talong

Growing up in the diaspora, you learn that authenticity isn't always about cooking over an open wood fire in the province; it's about the feeling a dish gives you when you are tired after a long day and just want the taste of home. Tortang Talong is the ultimate Filipino comfort food, a smoky, custardy, crispy-edged eggplant omelet that demands no pretense. The secret to this dish is a deep, smoky char on the eggplant. Since most of us are cooking in suburban American kitchens with electric stoves and sensitive smoke detectors, a high-heat broiler hack delivers all the authentic smokiness with a fraction of the mess. Serve this cheap, simple, beautiful thing with a mountain of garlic rice and a heavy squeeze of banana ketchup.

INGREDIENTS

4 med	Chinese or Japanese eggplants	1/4 tsp	freshly ground black pepper
4 large	eggs	1 tsp	fish sauce
1/2 tsp	kosher salt	4 tbsp	neutral cooking oil

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Char the eggplants under a high broiler.**

Preheat the oven broiler to high and position the top rack about six inches from the heat. Line a baking sheet with aluminum foil, prick each eggplant four to five times with a fork to prevent bursting, and broil for fifteen to twenty minutes, turning occasionally until the skins are completely blackened and blistered.
- 2. Steam the eggplants to loosen their skins.**

Transfer the hot eggplants to a plate and cover them immediately with a large bowl to trap the steam for five to ten minutes. Once cool enough to handle, carefully peel away the blackened skin using your fingers, leaving the stems entirely intact to use as handles.
- 3. Gently mash the peeled eggplants into a flat paddle shape.**

Place the peeled eggplants on a cutting board and use the back of a fork to gently press down on the flesh, fanning it out into a wide teardrop shape without breaking it apart.
- 4. Vigorously beat the eggs and seasonings.**

In a wide, shallow bowl, crack the eggs and add the salt, pepper, and fish sauce. Beat vigorously with a fork until the mixture is very frothy, which creates the omelet's signature crispy, lacy edges.

1. Coat the eggplants in the egg mixture and fry in hot oil.

Heat two tablespoons of oil in a large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat.

Holding an eggplant by its stem, dip it into the beaten eggs to coat completely, let the excess drip off, and lay it into the hot oil, spooning a little extra egg mixture over the top to fill in any gaps.

2. Fry until deeply golden brown and flip using the stem.

Fry for two to three minutes until the bottom is deeply golden and crispy, then grab the stem with one hand, slide a spatula underneath with the other, and confidently flip it over. Cook for another two minutes until the egg is cooked through, transfer to a paper towel, and repeat with the remaining eggplants.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not substitute with globe eggplants.**

Stick to the slender Asian varieties. American globe eggplants hold too much water, refuse to hold their shape, and will ruin the texture of the dish.

● **Upgrade with leftover ground meat.**

If you have leftover cooked ground meat, like Filipino giniling or sautéed ground pork, press a few spoonfuls into the wet egg mixture facing up just before flipping the eggplant in the pan.

● **The essential condiments.**

Tortang talong is best eaten hot, right out of the skillet, with garlic rice and a heavy squeeze of banana ketchup.



Cornsilog

It is the ultimate expression of Filipino culinary pragmatism: taking canned rations and transforming them into a savory, garlic-laced masterpiece. Cornsilog—a portmanteau of corned beef, garlic fried rice, and a fried egg—is a foundational staple of the working-class breakfast and the late-night diner. This is not the mushy, boiled hash of the Midwest. Sourced right, the beef is stringy, fatty, and deeply savory. Fried alongside day-old rice and an unapologetic mountain of garlic, it conjures the exact olfactory markers of a childhood home in a matter of minutes.

INGREDIENTS

15 oz premium chunky corned beef **1 med** baking potato
peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice

1 med	yellow or red onion <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>	1 large	garlic <i>peeled and finely minced</i>
3 small	garlic <i>minced</i>	head	
clove		3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	3/4 tsp	kosher salt
1/4 cup	water or beef broth	2 large	eggs
3 cup	cooked long-grain white rice <i>strictly a day old, refrigerated, and broken up by hand</i>	1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
		1/4 tsp	black pepper

PREPARATION

- **Break apart the rice.**

Before any heat hits the pan, slightly wet your hands and physically massage the cold rice in a bowl to eliminate clumps. Ensuring separated grains is the secret to light, fluffy sinangag that toasts rather than steams.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Fry the garlic for the sinangag.**

Place a large wok or wide skillet over medium-low heat, add 3 tablespoons of oil, and immediately add the minced whole head of garlic. Starting the garlic in cold oil allows it to slowly release its aromatics without burning; stir continuously until pale and crispy, about 3 to 5 minutes.

- 2. Toast the rice.**

Increase the heat to medium-high and add the loosened cold rice. Toss quickly to coat the grains, then press the rice firmly against the hot pan with a spatula, letting it sit for 30 seconds to toast before scraping and repeating. Season with the kosher salt, toss until heated through and slightly crisp on the edges, then transfer to a platter.

1. Fry the potatoes.

Wipe the pan clean, set over medium-high heat, and add 2 tablespoons of oil. Add the diced potatoes in a single layer and fry until golden-brown and fork-tender, about 4 to 5 minutes, ensuring they develop a crust so they won't turn to mush later.

2. Sauté the corned beef.

Add the sliced onion and 3 cloves of minced garlic to the potatoes, sautéing for 2 minutes until translucent. Fold in the canned corned beef, breaking it apart, and cook for 3 to 5 minutes until it crisps slightly on the edges. For a saucier texture, pour in the 1/4 cup of water, simmer until reduced by half, and season generously with black pepper.

3. Fry the eggs.

In a separate non-stick pan, heat the remaining tablespoon of oil over medium heat. Crack the eggs and fry them sunny-side up until the whites are fully set with lacy edges, but the yolks remain soft and runny.

4. Assemble the cornsilog.

Plate a generous mound of the garlic fried rice alongside a hearty scoop of the sautéed corned beef. Crown with the sunny-side-up egg, breaking the yolk immediately upon eating so it cascades over the savory beef and rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Source the right can.**

The soul of this dish lives in the texture of the beef. Mainstream American corned beef is ground like a hash; seek out Philippine brands like Purefoods or New Zealand's Palm brand at a local Asian market for the authentic, long, stringy, pulled-beef texture that makes this dish sing.

● **The fast rice hack.**

If you forgot to make rice the night before, do not use steaming hot rice—you will end up with savory oatmeal. Spread freshly cooked rice on a sheet pan and freeze for 15 to 20 minutes to rapidly dry out the surface moisture before frying.

- **Cut the richness.**

Cornsilog is unapologetically rich and fatty. Serve it alongside sliced raw tomatoes, cucumbers, or a small saucer of white vinegar spiked with chilies and garlic to balance the palate between bites.



Bangsilog

bahng-see-log

Silog isn't just a meal; it's a structural way of life born in the working-class canteens of 1980s Manila. Bangsilog represents the pinnacle of Filipino flavor balancing: the sharp, acidic bite of a vinegar marinade cutting through the luscious, fatty belly of the milkfish, all mellowed by a river of liquid egg yolk running through a mountain of salty garlic rice. This is the unadulterated, magical alchemy of vinegar, garlic, and hot oil, keeping things strictly canonical for the American weeknight kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

1 large	boneless milkfish <i>frozen, thawed, and butterflied with scales on</i>	2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
3/4 cup	white cane vinegar	6 med	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>
6 med	garlic cloves <i>peeled and aggressively smashed flat</i>	1/2 tsp	coarse sea salt
1 tsp	whole black peppercorns <i>roughly cracked</i>	1 tbsp	butter
1 tsp	coarse sea salt	2 large	eggs
1/2 cup	neutral cooking oil	1 med	tomato <i>sliced</i>
3 cup	long-grain white rice <i>cooked, day-old, and cold</i>	1 med	cucumber <i>sliced</i>
		3 tbsp	spicy vinegar dipping sauce

PREPARATION

- **Preserve the scale shield.**

Do not ask the fishmonger to scale your milkfish. The scales act as a protective barrier against the intense heat of the frying pan, keeping the delicate meat inside tender while providing a shattering crunch.

- **Hand-knead the cold rice.**

Before the rice ever touches the pan, wet your hands slightly and massage it in a bowl to break up every single clump.

- **Start the garlic in cold oil.**

Infuse the oil completely by starting the minced garlic in cold or barely warm oil and letting the temperature rise together.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Submerge and marinate the milkfish.**

Whisk the vinegar, smashed garlic, peppercorns, and salt in a shallow dish. Lay the milkfish flesh-side down to submerge it fully, cover tightly, and refrigerate for 4 to 24 hours. Do not exceed 24 hours or the acid will turn the flesh mushy.

2. **Dry the fish completely.**

Remove the milkfish from the marinade and pat it completely dry with paper towels. Brush off any stray garlic or peppercorn bits to prevent them from burning bitterly in the hot oil.

3. **Fry the fish flesh-side down.**

Heat a half cup of oil in a wide skillet over medium-high. Slide the fish in flesh-side down and stand back as it spits. Fry undisturbed for 4 to 5 minutes until deeply golden brown.

4. **Crisp the scales.**

Carefully flip the fish using two spatulas so the scale-side is down. Cook another 4 to 5 minutes until the scales shatteringly crisp, then remove to a wire rack or paper towels.

5. **Toast the garlic for the sinangag.**

In a clean wok over medium-low heat, add two tablespoons of oil and the finely minced garlic. Let the temperature rise together and stir slowly until the garlic hits a perfect, nutty golden-brown.

6. **Fry the cold rice.**

Turn the heat to medium-high and dump in the declumped, cold rice. Toss vigorously for 5 minutes, pressing it into the pan to coat every grain in the garlic oil. Season with salt and remove from the heat.

7. **Fry the eggs.**

Melt butter in a non-stick pan over medium heat. Crack the eggs, season with salt, and fry until the whites are set with crispy, laced edges and the yolks remain bright and runny.

1. **Plate the symphony.**

Mound the garlic rice, nestle the crispy fish beside it, and slide the egg on top.

Garnish with sliced tomatoes and cucumbers, serving immediately with a side of spicy dipping vinegar.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not debone your own fish.**

Modern Filipino home cooks buy frozen, pre-butterflied, and pre-deboned milkfish from Asian markets. It saves hours of tweezer work and yields a perfect result.

- **Vinegar substitutions are perfectly acceptable.**

If native cane vinegar like Datu Puti is unavailable, standard American distilled white vinegar works perfectly to mimic the sharp, clean bite.

- **Hack the leftover rice rule if needed.**

If you forgot to make rice the night before, cook a fresh batch with slightly less water, spread it on a baking sheet, and freeze for 20 minutes to rapidly cool and dehydrate the grains.



Merienda & The After-School Hustle

Savory and sweet afternoon snacks representing the mid-day bridge meal, utilizing batch-prep and freezer-friendly methods perfect for the after-school rush.

Merienda isn't a casual snack; it is a vital, grease-stained bridge between the afternoon school bell and the dinner table. For a Filipino kid walking through the front door, the smell of hot oil and garlic is a profound, immediate comfort.

But behind that plate of golden, crackling salvation is a pragmatic hustle. It is the tactical brilliance of a freezer loaded with tightly rolled Lumpiang Shanghai, waiting to be dropped into the fryer at a moment's notice.

These aren't precious, ceremonial dishes. This is arsenal building. It is turning cheap plantains and brown sugar into blistering, sticky Turon, or taking whatever abandoned vegetables are lingering in the crisper drawer and resurrecting them in a screaming hot wok for Pancit Canton. It is unapologetic, deeply satisfying food built for the afternoon rush—demanding to be eaten right out of the pan, burnt fingertips be damned.





Lumpiang Shanghai

loom-pyang shahng-hai

If there is a scent that defines a Filipino-American childhood, it is the smell of garlic, pork, and hot oil wafting through the house on a Saturday afternoon. Lumpiang Shanghai is the undisputed king of the party table and the ultimate after-school snack. Forget the thick, doughy egg roll wrappers or generic cabbage fillings; this is the canonical version, relying on secrets passed down from generations of Filipino grandmothers. The trick lies in using fish sauce for depth, a hit of celery for that unmistakable aromatic punch, and the golden rule of air-drying the rolls to guarantee a shatteringly crisp crust that stays crunchy long after leaving the oil.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	ground pork <i>kept cold</i>	1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>peeled and quartered</i>	1 tbsp	soy sauce
4 med	cloves garlic <i>peeled</i>	1 tbsp	oyster sauce
1 med	carrot <i>peeled and roughly chopped</i>	1 tbsp	fish sauce
1/2 med	celery stalk <i>roughly chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	ground black pepper
2 tbsp	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>roughly chopped</i>	1 tsp	chicken bouillon powder
8 oz	water chestnuts <i>drained and minced</i>	30 med	frozen spring roll wrappers <i>thawed and kept under a damp paper towel</i>
2 med	scallions <i>roughly chopped</i>	1 qt	canola oil
		2 tbsp	water

PREPARATION

- **Pulse the aromatics in a food processor.**

Place the onion, garlic, carrot, celery, parsley, and scallions into a food processor. Pulse until finely minced, stopping before it turns into a watery paste.

- **Mix the filling gently.**

In a large bowl, combine the cold ground pork, minced vegetable mixture, water chestnuts, beaten egg, soy sauce, oyster sauce, fish sauce, black pepper, and bouillon powder. Use your hands to mix just until combined, taking care not to overmix or heat the meat.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Portion the meat onto the wrapper.**

Lay one spring roll wrapper flat on the counter like a diamond, with one point facing you. Scoop exactly one heaping tablespoon of the meat mixture onto the lower half, shaping it with your fingers into a thin, horizontal log about three-quarters of an inch thick.

2. **Roll and seal tightly.**

Fold the bottom point over the meat, tucking it tight. Fold the left and right corners in like an envelope, then roll tightly away from you. Dab a little water on the top point and roll to seal it shut, repeating until the filling is gone.

3. **Air-dry the rolls.**

Place the finished rolls on a wire rack and let them sit in the open air for 15 to 20 minutes. This secret dehydration step is the absolute key to a shatteringly crisp crust that will not get soggy after frying.

4. **Fry to a deep golden brown.**

Heat about two inches of canola oil in a heavy-bottomed pot to 350°F. Carefully lower the lumpia into the oil in batches of five or six so you don't crowd the pan, and fry for 3 to 5 minutes, turning occasionally, until the wrappers are deeply browned and the pork is cooked through.

5. **Drain in the open air.**

Remove the lumpia with tongs and place them vertically in a paper-towel-lined colander, or flat on a wire rack. Never cover them while hot, or the trapped steam will instantly ruin the crust.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The wrapper is everything.**

Do not buy the thick, doughy egg roll wrappers from the produce section. Look in the freezer aisle for paper-thin wheat wrappers, typically labeled Spring Roll Pastry.

- **The weeknight freezer hustle.**

To freeze, place the uncooked rolls on a parchment-lined baking sheet until rock solid, then transfer to a ziplock bag. You can fry them straight from frozen on a busy weeknight by just adding an extra minute or two to the frying time.

- **The celery substitution.**

The canonical recipe uses Kinchay, a pungent Chinese celery. To hack this from a standard American grocery store, we combine standard celery for crunch with flat-leaf parsley for that essential herbaceous punch.



Turon

too-rohn

If you walked the streets of Manila at three in the afternoon, or stepped into an immigrant kitchen in Ohio right as the school bus pulled up, the smell is exactly the same: warm, melting brown sugar, frying pastry, and the floral aroma of ripe banana and jackfruit. Turon is the undisputed king of Filipino after-school snacks. There are no complicated batters and no fake restaurant flourishes here. It relies entirely on a street-level technique called *asukal sa mantika*, where brown sugar is dropped directly into hot oil to fuse with the wrapper, creating a shatteringly crisp, lacquered shell that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

6 large	frozen Saba bananas <i>thawed, peeled, and sliced in half lengthwise</i>	12 med	square spring roll wrappers <i>thawed and kept covered by a damp towel</i>
1/2 cup	dark brown sugar <i>divided</i>	2 cup	neutral frying oil
1/2 cup	canned jackfruit strips in syrup <i>thoroughly drained</i>	2 tbsp	water

PREPARATION

- **Set up a wrapping station.**

Arrange the sliced bananas, 1/4 cup of the brown sugar on a plate, the drained jackfruit, a small bowl of water, and the damp towel-covered wrappers within easy reach so you can roll quickly.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Generously coat the bananas.**

Roll each banana half in the plate of brown sugar until thoroughly coated, which creates a rich internal syrup as it fries from the inside out.

- 2. Wrap the fruit tightly in a diamond fold.**

Lay one wrapper flat like a diamond with a corner pointing toward your stomach. Place a sugared banana horizontally across the lower third and top with two or three jackfruit strips. Fold the bottom point tightly over the fruit, fold the left and right points sharply inward like an envelope, and roll tightly upward. Dab the top point with water and press down to form an impermeable seal.

- 3. Melt the sugar directly into the hot oil.**

In a wide skillet, heat about an inch of oil over medium heat until it reaches 350°F, being careful not to let it smoke. Sprinkle one tablespoon of the remaining brown sugar directly into the hot oil and wait a few seconds for the sugar to melt and float toward the surface.

1. Fry and lacquer the rolls.

Carefully lay three to four wrapped rolls into the pan seam-side down without crowding. Fry for two to three minutes per side, actively dragging the rolls through the melting sugar with your tongs so the caramel adheres to the crisping pastry.

2. Cool on a wire rack to set the candy shell.

Transfer the fried turon to a wire cooling rack set over a baking sheet. Avoid using paper towels, which will permanently fuse to the cooling caramel. Let them rest for at least five minutes before serving warm.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the wrapper and the banana.**

Do not substitute thick egg roll wrappers, and avoid standard American Cavendish bananas at all costs; they will turn to mush in the fryer. Frozen Saba bananas from your local Asian market are the authentic, structural backbone of this dish.



Pancit Canton

In the Philippines, a birthday mandates Pancit Canton, but you hardly need an excuse to eat it. The golden egg noodles symbolize a long and prosperous life—meaning the cardinal rule of the kitchen is to never, ever cut them. This is the dish stripped of restaurant pretension, cooked the way a true Filipino matriarch handles a busy weeknight. The secret isn't fancy equipment, but technique. Meats render their fat to coat the wok, vegetables are flash-cooked to stay crisp, and the dry noodles are simmered directly in an umami-heavy broth, absorbing every drop of flavor rather than just wearing it.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp

vegetable oil

1/2 lb

pork belly

thinly sliced into strips

2 med	Chinese sausage <i>thinly sliced on a bias</i>	2 cup	green cabbage <i>shredded</i>
1/4 lb	chicken liver <i>roughly chopped</i>	2 1/2 cup	warm water <i>whisked with 1 chicken or pork bouillon cube</i>
1/2 lb	medium shrimp <i>peeled and deveined</i>	3 tbsp	soy sauce
1 med	yellow onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	2 tbsp	oyster sauce
5 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 tbsp	fish sauce
1 large	carrot <i>julienned</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 stalk	celery <i>thinly sliced on a bias, including the leafy tops</i>	8 oz	Pancit Canton noodles
1 cup	snow peas <i>ends trimmed</i>	1 tsp	sesame oil
		1 med	calamansi <i>halved (or substitute lemon/lime wedges)</i>
		2 stalk	green onions <i>finely chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Pre-slice all meats and vegetables before turning on the stove.**

The actual cooking is a lightning-fast stir-fry that takes under 15 minutes. The time-sink is the chopping, so having your mise en place ready is essential. Pre-shredded coleslaw mix is a highly acceptable, completely forgivable shortcut for a busy weeknight.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the pork, sausage, liver, and shrimp to render the fat and build a savory base.**

Heat a large wok or deep skillet over medium-high heat with the vegetable oil. Cook the pork until it releases its fat, then add the sausage and liver. Finish with the shrimp until just pink, then remove all meats to a bowl, leaving the flavorful oils behind.

1. Sauté the aromatics and vegetables in the residual fat until just tender-crisp.

Cook the garlic and onion until soft, scraping up any browned bits. Toss in the carrot, celery, and snow peas, followed briefly by the cabbage. Remove the vegetables before they overcook and add them to the bowl with the meats.

2. Combine the broth, soy sauce, oyster sauce, fish sauce, and black pepper in the empty wok and bring to a rolling boil.

This highly seasoned liquid is the braising base that gives the dish its authentic flavor.

3. Lay the dry block of noodles directly into the boiling liquid without breaking them.

Let them sit for a minute to soften the bottom, then gently separate the strands with tongs. Toss continuously for 3 to 5 minutes over medium heat until the noodles drink up the broth and soften, adding a splash of water if the pan dries out too quickly.

4. Fold the cooked meats and vegetables back into the wok once the liquid is nearly absorbed.

Toss everything together gently to rewarm the components and distribute the ingredients evenly among the glossy noodles.

5. Remove from the heat, drizzle with sesame oil, and serve immediately with citrus halves.

Instruct everyone to squeeze the calamansi over their portion right before eating—the sharp acid cuts right through the richness and wakes up the entire plate.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the liver.**

If the family is squeamish, do not skip the liver entirely. Mince a small amount very finely so it dissolves into the sauce during the sauté; it acts as an umami binder and adds the iron-heavy depth crucial to an authentic pancit.

- **Navigating the noodle aisle.**

Look for bags labeled "Pancit Canton" or "Flour Sticks" in the dried noodle section of your local Asian market. Do not substitute "Bihon" (rice sticks) or "Sotanghon" (glass noodles) as the liquid ratios and cooking times will completely fail.

- **Scale carefully for a crowd.**

Pancit wants to be a feast, but overcrowding a standard skillet will cause the noodles to steam unevenly and turn to mush. If doubling the recipe for a party, cook it in two distinct batches.



Quick-Fix Champorado

If you grew up in a Filipino household, you know the smell of champorado. It is the ultimate rainy-day comfort food and the greatest after-school snack ever invented. While traditional recipes demand standing over a stove stirring raw sticky rice for forty-five minutes, any real Lola will tell you the secret to a fast weeknight merienda is bahaw—leftover, cold rice straight from the fridge. Aggressively boiling leftover rice with a precise blend of cocoa and dark chocolate mimics the rich, fatty bite of traditional Philippine tablea in just fifteen minutes. It is a brilliant display of domestic frugality that demands no specialized trip to the market.

INGREDIENTS

4 cup	water	1/3 cup	dark brown sugar <i>packed</i>
3 cup	cooked white rice <i>cold, day-old (Jasmine or medium-grain preferred)</i>	1 pinch	kosher salt
1/3 cup	Dutch-processed unsweetened cocoa powder	1/4 cup	evaporated milk or sweetened condensed milk
3 oz	dark chocolate <i>roughly chopped (75% cacao or higher)</i>	4 strips	bacon <i>cooked until crispy and chopped</i>
		1 pinch	flaky sea salt

PREPARATION

- **Save your rice.**

This recipe relies entirely on bahaw (leftover rice). Make sure it has spent at least one night in the fridge so the grains are firm and cold before boiling.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bring the water to a rolling boil in a medium heavy-bottomed pot and add the cold leftover rice.**

- 2. Lower the heat to medium and stir the rice vigorously, mashing some of the grains against the side of the pot.**

Because we aren't using traditional sticky rice, this aggressive mechanical stirring forces the leftover grains to release their starches, thickening the water into a creamy porridge.

- 3. Drop the heat to low and fold in the cocoa powder, dark chocolate, brown sugar, and kosher salt.**

Stir continuously until the chocolate is completely melted and glossy, taking on a deep, dark brown color.

- 1. Simmer until the champorado is thick but pourable, keeping in mind it will tighten up significantly as it cools.**

If it is too thick, splash in a little extra hot water; if it is too thin, let it simmer for another two minutes.

- 2. Ladle the hot porridge into bowls, hit it with a heavy, swirling drizzle of milk, and serve immediately alongside the crispy bacon.**

Take alternating bites of the sweet, rich chocolate porridge and the salty, smoky bacon—that contrast is the true magic of the dish.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The savory contrast is non-negotiable.**

The genius of Filipino champorado is its pairing with tuyo—dried, heavily salted fish. For the first-generation American cooking on a Tuesday night, crispy bacon provides the exact same salty-smoky-umami punch without perfuming your entire apartment.



Lola's Cheese Pimiento Spread

Growing up, you probably thought pimiento cheese was a purely Southern American invention. You were wrong. In the Philippines, it's an institution—a beautiful, working-class relic of a complex colonial history where Spanish Edam met American processed convenience. If you've been trying to recreate your Lola's afternoon merienda by aggressively stirring raw cheddar into a jar of Hellmann's, you're missing the point. The secret to that glossy, slightly sweet nostalgia isn't cold-mixed; it's cooked. Gently melting the cheese in butter and binding it with a hit of sweetened condensed milk turns basic

American supermarket staples into the exact taste of coming home, dropping your backpack by the door, and biting into a warm pan de sal.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup	salted butter	1/2 cup	Velveeta or block cream cheese <i>grated or cut into small cubes</i>
4 oz	jarred diced pimientos <i>thoroughly drained and patted aggressively dry</i>	3 tbsp	sweetened condensed milk
1 1/2 cup	sharp cheddar cheese <i>freshly grated from a block</i>	1 pinch	salt
		1 pinch	white pepper

PREPARATION

- **Dry the pimientos like your life depends on it.**

Excess water from the jarred pimientos is the enemy of a stable emulsion. Drain them well and pat them dry with paper towels before they ever see the inside of your saucepan.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Melt the butter and sauté the pimientos.**

Place a small saucepan over medium-low heat and melt the salted butter until foamy. Add the drained pimientos and sauté for two to three minutes to cook off any lingering water and infuse the fat with a sweet, smoky aroma.

- 2. Lower the heat and gently melt the cheeses.**

Drop the heat to the lowest possible setting. Add the grated cheddar and Velveeta directly into the warm butter, stirring continuously with a spatula to coax the cheese into a melt without letting the fats separate.

1. Emulsify the mixture with condensed milk.

As the cheese begins to soften and clump, pour in the sweetened condensed milk while stirring constantly. The milk acts as a binder, transforming the potentially greasy clumps into a smooth, glossy, velvet-like sauce.

2. Season, cool, and refrigerate to set.

Remove the pan from the heat immediately and stir in a pinch of salt and white pepper. Pour the hot liquid into a sterilized glass jar, leave the lid off until it hits room temperature, then seal and chill until it solidifies into a thick paste.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The cheese blend is entirely non-negotiable for the right texture.**

Pure sharp cheddar will break and turn oily when melted on a stovetop. Blending it with a little Velveeta or cream cheese mimics the highly-processed melting salts found in Kraft Eden, the cheese most Filipino home cooks actually use.

● **Respect the low heat.**

Rushing the melting process over high heat will cause the dairy proteins to seize and the butter to completely separate, leaving you with a greasy, unspreadable mess.



Tusok-Tusok Basket with "Manong" Sauce

too-sok too-sok

The Filipino after-school special. On the streets of Manila, vendors push wooden carts equipped with bubbling woks, selling skewers of fishballs and vibrant orange kwek-kwek. You point, poke, and dunk heavily into a communal jar of sweet, garlicky sauce. We can't endorse the double-dip anymore, but we can nail that hyper-authentic flavor on a Tuesday night. The street vendor's secret isn't a complex technique; it's respecting the exact ratio of starches in the cold slurry. Keep a freezer stash of fishballs, and this becomes the most visceral, nostalgic weeknight merienda imaginable.

INGREDIENTS

3 cup	cold water <i>for the sauce</i>	24	quail eggs <i>hard-boiled, peeled, and patted completely dry</i>
3/4 cup	dark brown sugar <i>packed</i>	1/4 cup	cornstarch <i>for dredging</i>
1/4 cup	soy sauce	1 cup	all-purpose flour <i>for the batter</i>
2 tbsp	all-purpose flour <i>for the sauce</i>	3 tbsp	cornstarch <i>for the batter</i>
2 tbsp	cornstarch <i>for the sauce</i>	1 tsp	baking powder
1/2 tsp	kosher salt <i>for the sauce</i>	1 tbsp	annatto powder
1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt <i>for the batter</i>
4 cloves	garlic <i>very finely minced</i>	3/4 cup	cold water <i>for the batter</i>
1 small	red onion <i>very finely minced</i>	1 qt	neutral oil <i>for deep frying</i>
2	bird's eye chilies <i>finely chopped (optional)</i>	1 bag	frozen fishballs
		1 bag	frozen squid balls
		1 bag	frozen kikiam

PREPARATION

- **Boil the quail eggs.**

If using fresh quail eggs instead of canned, boil them for exactly 4 to 5 minutes, then plunge immediately into an ice-water bath to halt the cooking before peeling.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Brew the cold slurry.**

Off the heat, whisk the 3 cups of cold water, brown sugar, soy sauce, 2 tablespoons of flour, 2 tablespoons of cornstarch, 1/2 teaspoon of salt, and black pepper until completely smooth; adding starches to hot liquid will create an unfixable, lumpy disaster.

2. **Simmer to a glossy glaze.**

Stir in the minced garlic, red onion, and chilies, then place over medium-low heat, whisking continuously for 4 to 6 minutes until the sauce bubbles and suddenly transforms into a thick, syrupy glaze that coats the back of a spoon.

3. **Dredge the quail eggs.**

Roll the thoroughly dried, peeled quail eggs in the 1/4 cup of dredging cornstarch until lightly coated; this dry layer is the essential primer that prevents the wet batter from slipping off in the fryer.

4. **Mix the neon orange batter.**

Whisk the 1 cup of flour, 3 tablespoons of cornstarch, baking powder, annatto powder, and remaining 1/2 teaspoon of salt, then gradually pour in the 3/4 cup of cold water until you have a smooth, vibrant batter resembling pancake mix.

5. **Fry the commercial basket.**

In a heavy pot with 2 inches of 350°F neutral oil, fry the frozen fishballs, squid balls, and kikiam for 3 to 5 minutes until they puff dramatically and float to the surface, then transfer to a wire rack.

6. **Fry the kwek-kwek.**

Drop the cornstarch-dredged eggs into the orange batter, lift them out to let excess drip off, and gently drop into the hot oil for 2 to 3 minutes until crispy and slightly puffed.

7. **Serve the tusok-tusok way.**

Pile everything onto a massive platter, hand everyone a bamboo skewer to poke their chosen street food, and dip heavily into the Manong sauce.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The sauce gets thicker as it cools.**

If it sits in the fridge and becomes too gelatinous to dip, a quick 30-second burst in the microwave or a gentle reheat on the stove with a splash of water will return it to a viscous, flowing state.

- **Annatto powder sourcing.**

Achiote molido can be easily found in the Hispanic aisle of most American supermarkets; if absolutely necessary, substitute with a few drops of liquid orange food coloring in the batter's water.



30-Minute Creamy Chicken Sopas

so-pas

Sopas translates simply to 'soup,' but in a Filipino household, it means absolute comfort. Born from the introduction of American canned goods in the early 1900s, grandmothers across the diaspora transformed a basic chicken noodle soup into a masterpiece using evaporated milk and a heavy dash of fish sauce. Traditionally, the broth demands an hour of boiling bones. This weeknight version hacks the process with rotisserie chicken and quality stock, but retains the old-school secrets—sautéing aromatics in butter and blooming the fish

sauce in a hot pan—to deliver that deeply savory, milky, hug-in-a-bowl flavor in exactly thirty minutes. Eat it immediately; the macaroni loves to drink up the broth.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp	butter	3 med	hotdogs <i>sliced diagonally into 1/4-inch ovals</i>
1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 1/2 tbsp	fish sauce
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
4 med	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 med	chicken bouillon cube <i>crumbled</i>
1 large	carrot <i>finely diced</i>	6 cup	low-sodium chicken broth
2 med	celery <i>finely diced</i>	2 cup	dry elbow macaroni
2 cup	cooked chicken <i>shredded</i>	12 oz	evaporated milk
		2 cup	green cabbage <i>roughly chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Prep the aromatics and meats.**

Chop the vegetables, shred the rotisserie chicken, and slice the hotdogs before you turn on the stove. This recipe moves fast once the butter hits the pan.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the flavor base.**

Heat the butter and oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high. Add the onion, garlic, carrot, and celery, and sauté until the onions are soft and translucent, about 3 to 4 minutes. Do not let the garlic brown.

1. Sauté the proteins and extract the umami.

Add the shredded chicken and sliced hotdogs to the pot, sautéing for 2 minutes to render the fat from the hotdogs. Pour the fish sauce and black pepper directly over the meats and stir continuously for 1 to 2 minutes to burn off the harsh aroma and leave behind a concentrated, savory umami base.

2. Bring the broth to a boil.

Pour in the chicken broth and add the bouillon cube, scraping the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon to release any browned bits. Bring to a rolling boil over high heat.

3. Cook the macaroni directly in the soup.

Stir in the dry elbow macaroni, then reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Cook uncovered for 8 to 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. The pasta should become wonderfully soft, not al dente, naturally thickening the broth as it expels starch.

4. Finish with milk and cabbage.

Lower the heat to its lowest setting and slowly stir in the evaporated milk, taking care not to let the soup hard boil or it may separate. Fold in the chopped cabbage, turn off the heat, and cover the pot for 2 minutes so the residual heat cooks the cabbage until just tender-crisp. Taste for seasoning and serve.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The "Naubos ang Sabaw" Warning.**

Macaroni is a sponge. Serve the soup immediately or the pasta will relentlessly drink all the broth. If you are reheating leftovers the next day, simply add a splash of chicken broth or water to loosen the soup back to its creamy glory.



Express Palitaw

pah-lee-TAW

When the four o'clock school bus brakes screech in an American suburb, the craving for the after-school comfort of the motherland hits hard. Palitaw—literally translated as "to float"—is the quintessential Filipino merienda, a beautifully elemental sweet rice dumpling traditionally made from overnight-soaked, stone-ground sticky rice. For the busy diaspora kitchen, high-quality sweet rice flour flawlessly replicates that soft, chewy bite of home in exactly ten minutes. Bathed in rich, mature coconut and dusted with toasted sesame and sugar at the absolute last second, it is an unembellished, perfect taste of a Manila afternoon.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	glutinous rice flour	1 1/2 cup	frozen grated coconut <i>thawed and squeezed of excess moisture</i>
3/4 cup	water <i>at room temperature, plus up to 1/4 cup extra if needed</i>	1/2 cup	granulated white sugar
		1/4 cup	white sesame seeds

PREPARATION

- **Thaw and squeeze the frozen coconut.**

Freezing ruptures the cell walls of the coconut meat, releasing excess water. You must place the completely thawed coconut in a fine-mesh strainer and gently press it dry, or it will turn your dumplings into a soggy mess.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the sesame seeds to a golden brown.**

Place a dry skillet over medium-low heat and toast the sesame seeds until they are light golden and smell wonderfully nutty, about 2 to 3 minutes. Immediately transfer them to a small bowl to cool, then mix them thoroughly with the granulated sugar and set aside.

- 2. Prepare the coconut station and the boiling water.**

Spread the thawed, squeezed grated coconut onto a wide, shallow plate. Meanwhile, fill a wide pot with about 3 to 4 inches of water and bring it to a rolling boil over medium-high heat.

- 3. Knead the sweet rice dough.**

In a large mixing bowl, combine the glutinous rice flour with three-quarters of a cup of water. Mix with your hands until it forms a smooth, pliable dough that pulls cleanly from the sides of the bowl. If it feels dry or crumbly, add the remaining water a single tablespoon at a time.

1. Shape and flatten the dumplings.

Pinch off pieces of dough about the size of a golf ball, roughly one and a half tablespoons each. Roll them smooth between your palms, then gently press them flat to form oval discs about a quarter-inch thick.

2. Boil the dumplings until they float.

Carefully drop the flattened discs into the boiling water in small batches so you don't lower the water temperature. Wait two to three minutes; when the starch gelatinizes, the dumplings will magically float to the surface. Let them bob there for another 30 to 45 seconds to ensure the very center is perfectly chewy.

3. Coat the dumplings in coconut and serve immediately.

Scoop the floating dumplings out with a slotted spoon, letting the excess water drip off for just a second—you want a little residual moisture to act as glue. Drop them immediately into the grated coconut, turning gently to coat both sides. Serve them warm with the sesame-sugar mixture in a separate bowl, to be generously spooned over the top right before taking a bite.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing the right coconut is completely non-negotiable.**

Avoid American sweetened flaked baking coconut at all costs. Frozen grated mature coconut from the freezer aisle of an Asian market is the only acceptable substitute for fresh *niyog*.

● **Do not substitute regular rice flour.**

It must be glutinous or sweet rice flour (like *Mochiko* or *Erawan*). Regular white rice flour lacks the necessary starch structure and will yield a hard, gritty, inedible puck.

● **Never pre-sugar the *palitaw*.**

If you sprinkle the sesame-sugar mixture onto the warm, moist dumplings while they sit on the platter, it will rapidly melt into an unappealing, weeping syrup. The sugar must hit the rice cake at the table.



Sabaw for the Soul (What Lola Made When We Were Sick)

Deeply comforting broths and soups associated with caregiving and cultural retention, utilizing accessible ingredients and modern shortcuts for authentic flavors.

There is a universal language of sickness and care, and in the Filipino diaspora, it speaks exclusively in broth. When the fever hits, or the winter feels too long, you don't want a salad. You want the deep, restorative magic of ginger,

bone marrow, and sour tamarind pulling you back from the brink. It's a primal comfort, the kind that steams up the windows and tells you, definitively, that you are looked after.

These are the soups that kept the culture intact in cramped suburban kitchens. We've stripped the all-day simmering down to fit a Tuesday night, but the soul of the thing remains untouched. Here is the arroz caldo that coats the ribs, the sinigang that jolts the senses, and the nilaga that quietly puts you back together.





Arroz Caldo

When Midwestern winters hit hard, or someone in the house caught a cold, this was the pot bubbling on the stove. Arroz Caldo is the Filipino answer to chicken noodle soup—a deeply savory, fiercely gingery porridge born from Chinese congee and crowned with a Spanish name. The secret to recreating that exact, visceral taste of home isn't an obscure ingredient; it's technique. By rendering chicken fat and toasting the raw grains in the aromatic oils before adding broth, you lock in an incredibly rich, nutty flavor. It's practical, profound comfort in a bowl.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp

neutral oil

8 cloves

garlic
finely minced

1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1/2 cup	glutinous rice <i>rinsed until water runs clear and drained</i>
3-inch piece	fresh ginger <i>peeled and sliced into thin matchsticks</i>	6 cup	low-sodium chicken broth
1 1/2 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs	1/4 tsp	ground turmeric
2 tbsps	fish sauce	1/2 tsp	black pepper
1/2 cup	jasmine rice <i>rinsed until water runs clear and drained</i>	4 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
		4 large	eggs <i>hard-boiled or soft-boiled, halved</i>
		1 med	lemon or lime <i>cut into wedges</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create the garlic oil foundation.

Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium-low heat and add the minced garlic. Cook slowly until golden brown and crispy, about 3 to 5 minutes, then remove the toasted garlic with a slotted spoon to drain on paper towels, leaving the highly flavored oil in the pot.

2. Sauté the aromatics and render the chicken fat.

Turn the heat up to medium, add the diced onion and julienned ginger, and sweat until highly fragrant. Add the chicken thighs, skin-side down, and cook for 4 to 5 minutes to brown the skin and release the schmaltz, then flip and cook for 2 more minutes.

3. Deglaze the pot with fish sauce.

Pour in the fish sauce, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom, and let it cook for 1 minute to reduce slightly and amplify its umami.

4. Toast the rice in the rendered fats.

Add the drained jasmine and glutinous rice along with the turmeric. Stir constantly for 1 to 2 minutes so every grain is coated in the chicken fat and aromatics, ensuring the porridge becomes creamy rather than mushy later.

1. Simmer the porridge and stir frequently.

Pour in the chicken broth and black pepper, bring to a rolling boil, then drop the heat to low and cover. You must return to the pot every 5 to 8 minutes to thoroughly scrape the bottom, as glutinous rice loves to stick and burn.

2. Shred the chicken and finish the dish.

After 30 to 40 minutes, when the rice has burst and the broth is thick and velvety, turn off the heat. Pull the chicken out, discard the skin and bones, shred the meat, and return it to the pot.

3. Garnish generously and serve hot.

Ladle the porridge into deep bowls and top with the reserved toasted garlic, scallions, a halved egg, and a heavy squeeze of citrus to cut the richness.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The rice ratio is non-negotiable.**

Don't skip the glutinous (sweet) rice. A half-and-half blend with standard jasmine rice is the absolute secret to achieving that velvety, comforting texture without the dish turning into a solid, gummy brick.

● **A note on the colorant.**

Traditional recipes in the homeland use kasubha, or dried safflower, to achieve the dish's signature cheerful yellow hue. If you don't have access to an Asian market, a tiny pinch of turmeric does the job beautifully without altering the ancestral flavor profile.



Sinigang na Baboy

see-nee-GANG nah BAH-boy

When a Midwestern winter drags on, or a long shift leaves the soul ragged, nothing cures the chill quite like the sharp, mouth-watering tang of tamarind. This is the undisputed king of Filipino comfort food. Purists might demand pounding fresh green tamarind pods for hours, but any honest Lola will hand you a yellow packet of Knorr soup mix—it is the great equalizer of the diaspora kitchen. The true ancient secret lies elsewhere: *hugas bigas*. Using the starchy, cloudy water saved from washing your dinner rice thickens the soup, tempering the blistering sourness with a subtle, velvety sweetness.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 packet	Knorr Tamarind Soup Mix
2 lb	pork spare ribs or pork belly <i>cut into 1 1/2-inch pieces</i>	1 small bunch	yardlong beans or green beans <i>cut into 2-inch pieces</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>diced</i>	1 med	Chinese or Japanese eggplant <i>sliced on a bias</i>
3 med	Roma tomatoes <i>quartered</i>	8 med	fresh okra <i>ends trimmed</i>
2 tbsp	fish sauce	1 whole	jalapeño or long green chili <i>left intact</i>
8 cup	rice wash <i>reserved from the second rinse of white rice</i>	1 large bunch	fresh spinach or baby bok choy <i>rinsed</i>
2 med	taro root <i>peeled and quartered</i>		
1 med	daikon radish <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch rounds</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Harvesting the Hugas Bigas.**

When preparing your white rice for dinner, discard the first cloudy rinse. Add fresh water, swish vigorously until milky white, and reserve 8 cups of this second wash to act as the base for your soup.

- **Source the right cut.**

Ask your butcher to cut pork spare ribs across the bone into 1 1/2-inch pieces. Mixing these ribs with chunks of pork belly provides the perfect balance of marrow-infused broth and rich fat.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the pork in batches to build a savory foundation.**

Heat the oil in a large heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Pat the pork dry and sear until beautifully browned on all sides, about 5 to 7 minutes. Leave the rendered fat in the pot.

1. Sweat the aromatics in the rendered pork fat.

Lower the heat to medium. Add the diced onion and quartered tomatoes, sautéing for 3 to 4 minutes. Use a wooden spoon to slightly smash the tomatoes as they soften, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom. Stir in the fish sauce and let it bubble for 30 seconds.

2. Execute the long simmer using the rice wash.

Return the pork to the pot and pour in the rice wash. Bring to a rolling boil, skimming off any gray foam that rises to the surface to keep the broth clean. Lower the heat, cover, and gently simmer for 45 to 60 minutes until the pork is fork-tender.

3. Stagger the root vegetables.

Do not dump all the vegetables in at once. Add the taro and daikon radish first. Cover and simmer for 10 minutes. If you prefer a thicker soup, let a piece or two of the taro overcook and mash it into the broth.

4. Introduce the souring agent and remaining hearty vegetables.

Stir in the tamarind soup mix until fully dissolved. Add the beans, eggplant, okra, and the whole chili. Simmer uncovered for 5 to 7 minutes until the beans are tender but retain a slight snap.

5. Wilt the greens with residual heat to preserve their color.

Taste the broth—it should make your jaw tingle from the sourness. Adjust with more fish sauce if needed. Submerge the spinach or bok choy into the hot liquid, then immediately turn off the heat. Cover and let sit for 2 minutes before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Sawsawan Ritual.**

Never serve sinigang without a small saucer of fish sauce and a crushed chili pepper on the side. Dipping the tender pieces of pork into this salty, spicy mixture before eating it with your rice is non-negotiable.



Beef Nilaga

nee-lah-gang bah-kah

In the Philippines, soup isn't a starter; it's the main event, poured generously over rice to warm the bones. Nilaga is the ultimate expression of this—a brutally simple, profoundly comforting boil of cheap, bone-in beef cuts, onions, and whole peppercorns. It refuses to hide behind heavy spice blends or a roasted mirepoix. The magic lies entirely in your technique: a meticulous skimming of the broth to achieve crystal clarity, and a careful staggering of the vegetables so nothing turns to mush. It is restorative, entirely unpretentious, and tastes exactly like the kitchen you grew up in.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	bone-in beef shanks or neck bones	2 med	ears sweet corn <i>husked and cut into thirds</i>
8 cup	cold water	2 med	saba bananas or firm plantains <i>peeled and cut in half diagonally</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>peeled and quartered</i>	1/2 small	head green cabbage <i>cored and cut into thick wedges</i>
1 tbsp	whole black peppercorns	4 small	heads baby bok choy <i>ends trimmed and leaves separated</i>
3 tbsp	fish sauce (patis) <i>divided</i>	1/2 lb	fresh green beans <i>ends trimmed</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt		
2 large	Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled and quartered</i>		

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bring the beef and cold water to a rolling boil using the pressure cooker's sauté function.**

Do not walk away. As the water boils, a grayish foam will rise to the surface.

Meticulously skim and discard this scum for about 5 minutes. This is the non-negotiable secret to a beautifully clear, clean-tasting broth.

- 2. Cancel the sauté function and add the onion, whole peppercorns, salt, and 1 tablespoon of the fish sauce.**

Secure the lid, seal the valve, and cook on High Pressure for 40 minutes to break down the tough connective tissue into meltingly tender collagen.

- 3. Quick-release the pressure, skim any excess fat, and add the potatoes, sweet corn, and saba bananas.**

Reseal the lid and cook on High Pressure for 4 minutes. This two-stage cooking process ensures the hard root vegetables cook through without turning to mush.

- 1. Perform a second quick release, turn off the heat entirely, and adjust the seasoning with the remaining fish sauce.**

Layer the cabbage, baby bok choy, and green beans over the hot soup without stirring. Place the lid back on and let the residual heat gently steam the greens for 3 to 5 minutes so they remain crisp-tender.

- 2. Transfer the soup to a large communal bowl and serve immediately alongside steaming white rice.**

Provide small saucers of fish sauce mixed with a squeeze of fresh lime or calamansi and crushed chili. Dip a piece of tender beef into the sauce, and eat it with a spoonful of broth-soaked rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Never substitute ground pepper for whole black peppercorns.**

The whole peppercorns provide a steady, slow-releasing heat. Ground pepper will cloud your carefully skimmed broth and introduce an overly pungent, muddy flavor.

- **Resist the urge to sear the beef.**

While Western stews rely on searing for depth, authentic Nilaga celebrates the pure, unroasted essence of boiled meat. Browning the beef will push the flavor profile away from the canonical dish.



Tinolang Manok

tee-NOH-lahng mah-NOK

Tinola is the ultimate Filipino remedy, the soup mothers and lolas instinctively put on the stove at the first sign of a sniffle. It isn't a thick, heavy Western chicken noodle soup; it's a clear, light, incredibly aromatic broth powered by the soothing heat of fresh ginger. For years, the diaspora tried to replicate this comfort by merely boiling chicken in water, and it never quite tasted like home. The secret to that deeply savory, silky perfection lies in two non-negotiable techniques: aggressively searing the chicken in ginger and fish sauce to force flavor into the meat, and binding the broth together with the starchy water left over from washing the evening's rice.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	avocado oil	2 tbsp	Filipino fish sauce
1 med	fresh ginger <i>peeled and sliced into thin matchsticks</i>	5 cup	rice washing liquid
1 med	yellow onion <i>chopped</i>	1 small	chicken bouillon cube
4 small	garlic <i>smashed and roughly chopped</i>	2 med	chayote <i>peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch wedges</i>
2 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs and drumsticks <i>thighs cut in half through the bone</i>	4 cup	fresh baby spinach
		1 small	jalapeno pepper <i>left whole</i>

PREPARATION

- **Save the starchy liquid from washing your dinner rice.**

When making a side of white rice, discard the dusty first wash. Add fresh water, massage the grains until the liquid is cloudy and milky, and reserve 5 to 6 cups of this second wash to use as your broth base.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the oil in a heavy-bottomed soup pot over medium-high heat to sauté the ginger, onion, and garlic.**
Cook constantly until the onions are soft and translucent, and the kitchen smells intensely of ginger and garlic, about 3 to 4 minutes.
- 2. Sear the chicken skin-side down, pour the fish sauce directly over the meat, and cover the pot.**
Let the chicken sweat in the aromatics for 5 to 7 minutes. Do not skip this process, known as *sangkutsa*; it forces the chicken to absorb the savory flavors while rendering its natural fats.
- 3. Pour in the reserved rice wash, drop in the bouillon cube and jalapeño, and bring the pot to a rolling boil.**
The chicken should have changed color on the outside before you add the liquid.

- 1. Skim the greyish foam from the surface, reduce the heat, and simmer gently.**
Use a spoon or fine mesh strainer to discard the scum to ensure a clean, clear broth. Cover with the lid slightly ajar and cook for 20 minutes, or until the chicken is tender.
- 2. Drop the chayote wedges into the simmering broth and cook until just tender.**
Cover and cook for another 8 to 10 minutes until easily pierced with a fork but retaining a slight bite. Do not overcook into mush.
- 3. Turn off the heat, taste the broth for seasoning, and stir in the fresh spinach.**
Cover the pot for exactly 1 minute. The residual heat will perfectly wilt the greens without turning them brown.
- 4. Serve piping hot in deep bowls alongside freshly steamed white rice.**
Provide a small saucer of extra fish sauce mixed with a squeeze of lemon or calamansi on the side as a dipping sauce for the chicken meat.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use bone-in, skin-on dark meat.**
Standard boneless skinless breasts will dry out and lack the necessary fat and collagen to enrich the broth. You need the bones and skin to build the soup's backbone.
- **Substituting chayote and spinach works perfectly for the American kitchen.**
Traditional tinola utilizes hard, unripe green papaya and malunggay leaves. However, chayote and baby spinach are universally accepted, highly accessible diaspora alternatives that perfectly replicate the texture and visual appeal.



Ginisang Monggo

gee-nee-SANG mong-GO

In the Philippines, the smell of garlic, tomatoes, and earthy beans simmering on a Friday means one thing: Ginisang Monggo. It is the ultimate egalitarian comfort food, the stew grandmothers default to when the weather turns cold or the kids are home sick. This is the unpretentious, real-deal bowl—built on the alchemy of melting tomatoes into a jammy paste and mashing the beans just enough to organically thicken the broth. We swap hard-to-find bitter melon leaves for standard supermarket spinach, leaning on rendered pork fat, fish sauce, and a humble bouillon cube to deliver that undeniable, soul-restoring taste of home.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	whole green mung beans <i>rinsed</i>	2 med	Roma tomatoes <i>chopped</i>
4 cup	water	2 tbsp	fish sauce
1 tbsp	neutral oil	1 small	pork bouillon cube <i>crushed</i>
1/4 lb	pork belly <i>cut into small, thin strips</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely chopped</i>	3 cup	fresh spinach
5 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1/2 cup	pork rinds <i>roughly crushed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Soak the beans.**

Place the rinsed mung beans in a bowl, cover with an inch of cold water, and soak for at least 1 hour, or ideally all day on the counter while you are at work. This ensures they cook evenly and rapidly on a busy weeknight.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil and mash the beans.**

Drain the soaked beans, combine them in a pot with the 4 cups of fresh water, and simmer over medium-low heat for 20 to 25 minutes until the skins burst. To achieve that authentically thick, creamy texture, use the back of a spoon to physically mash a quarter of the beans against the side of the pot, then turn off the heat and set aside.

- 2. Render the pork.**

In a separate Dutch oven or heavy-bottomed pot, heat the oil over medium heat and cook the pork belly strips for 5 to 7 minutes until the fat renders and the edges crisp.

1. Build the aromatic base.

Toss the onion and garlic into the rendered pork fat, cooking until fragrant and translucent. Add the tomatoes and do not rush them; cook and press them with your spoon for about 5 minutes until they break down completely into a soft, caramelized paste.

2. Simmer the stew.

Pour the mashed beans and their starchy cooking liquid directly into the Dutch oven. Stir in the bouillon cube, fish sauce, and black pepper, then simmer gently for 10 minutes to meld the flavors.

3. Wilt the greens and garnish.

Taste the broth, add more fish sauce if it needs more savory punch, and turn off the heat. Fold in the fresh spinach to wilt, and serve immediately alongside steamed white rice, stirring in the crushed pork rinds at the table to preserve their crunch.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Embrace the bouillon.**

While high-end adaptations might scoff, a commercial pork bouillon cube is the nostalgic secret to the savory depth found in modern Filipino home cooking.

● **Vegetarian adaptation.**

Omit the pork belly, bouillon, and fish sauce. Use vegetable broth, soy sauce, and finish the bowls with crispy fried garlic and fried tofu cubes instead of pork rinds.



Chicken Sotanghon Soup

so-TANG-hon

This bright orange, garlicky bowl of glass noodles is the ultimate Filipino panacea, the exact thing a Lola summons at the first sign of a sniffle. The secret to making it taste exactly like home isn't found in hours of toil, but in the gisa—taking five minutes to sauté shredded rotisserie chicken in garlic, onions, and fish sauce to lock in a deep, caramelized umami. Colored brilliantly with annatto and assembled in under thirty minutes, it's a masterclass in everyday comfort that refuses to compromise on its soul.

INGREDIENTS

3 1/2 oz mung bean thread noodles **2 tbsp** canola oil

6 clove garlic
finely minced

1 med yellow onion
finely diced

2 tbsp fish sauce

2 1/2 cup cooked chicken
shredded

6 cup chicken broth

1 1/2 tsp annatto powder

1 large carrot
peeled and julienned

2 cup green cabbage
shredded

2 stalk celery
finely chopped

1/2 tsp black pepper
freshly ground

2 med scallions
thinly sliced

2 large eggs
hard-boiled and halved

1 med lemon
cut into wedges

PREPARATION

- **Hydrate the noodles.**

Place the dried sotanghon in a bowl of warm tap water for 10 to 15 minutes until pliable, then drain and cut in half with kitchen shears.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the garlic.**

Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-low heat, add the minced garlic, and stir until light golden brown. Use a slotted spoon to remove half of the crispy garlic to a paper towel for your garnish, leaving the rest and the flavored oil in the pot.

- 2. Execute the gisa.**

Increase the heat to medium, add the diced onions, and sauté until soft. Stir in the celery, shredded chicken, and fish sauce, letting it sizzle for a few minutes so the fish sauce caramelizes and absorbs deeply into the meat.

- 3. Build the broth.**

Pour in the chicken broth, annatto powder, and black pepper, stirring well until the powder dissolves and the liquid turns a fiery orange, then bring to a gentle boil.

1. Simmer the vegetables.

Reduce the heat, add the julienned carrots, and simmer for 3 minutes until they just begin to soften.

2. Finish with noodles and cabbage.

Push the drained, soaked glass noodles into the broth to cook for 2 minutes until perfectly clear and slippery. Stir in the shredded cabbage until barely wilted, and immediately remove from the heat so the noodles don't turn to mush.

3. Garnish and serve.

Ladle the hot soup into deep bowls and crown generously with the reserved toasted garlic, scallions, a halved hard-boiled egg, and a squeeze of fresh citrus.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **A note on annatto.**

Do not skip the annatto powder. While its flavor is mild, the iconic golden-orange hue is psychologically essential to the authentic Filipino experience of this dish.

● **Manage your noodles.**

Mung bean noodles are aggressively thirsty. If making the soup ahead of time, store the broth and soaked noodles separately, combining them only right before serving so they don't bloat and drink all your soup.



Pancit Molo

pahn-SIT MOH-loh

It's the ultimate sleight of hand: a dish called pancit that contains no noodles at all. Instead, plump pork and shrimp dumplings swim in a deeply savory, garlic-laced chicken broth tinted slightly orange from a rapid infusion of shrimp shells. Tracing its lineage back to the Chinese merchants of Iloilo City, this is exactly the restorative, soul-warming bowl a Filipino grandmother conjures on a cold Tuesday night when you are feeling under the weather. We streamline the multi-day stock into a weeknight hack by blistering those shrimp shells straight into store-bought broth, retaining all the authentic, cooked-all-day umami with a fraction of the sweat.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 small	yellow onion <i>grated or minced to a paste</i>
1/2 cup	shrimp shells <i>reserved from the raw shrimp</i>	3 med cloves	garlic <i>finely minced</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>quartered</i>	1 large	egg
3 med cloves	garlic <i>smashed</i>	1 tbsp	cornstarch
6 cup	low-sodium chicken broth	1 tbsp	soy sauce
2 cup	water	1 tsp	sesame oil
2 tbsp	fish sauce	1/2 tsp	ground black pepper
1/2 tsp	whole black peppercorns	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1/2 lb	ground pork	14 oz	Hong Kong-style wonton wrappers
1/2 lb	raw shrimp <i>peeled, deveined, and finely chopped by hand</i>	1 1/2 cup	cooked chicken breast <i>shredded</i>
1/2 cup	canned water chestnuts <i>finely minced</i>	1/4 cup	toasted garlic bits
1/3 cup	chives <i>finely minced</i>	1/4 cup	chives <i>chopped</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Extract the shrimp essence to build the broth.

Heat the oil in a large pot over medium-high heat, then add the reserved shrimp shells and heads, sautéing for about four minutes until they turn bright orange and fragrant. Toss in the quartered onion and smashed garlic for a minute, then pour in the chicken broth, water, fish sauce, and peppercorns. Bring it to a boil, drop the heat to low, cover, and let it simmer gently for twenty minutes while you build the dumplings.

1. Mix the pork and shrimp filling aggressively.

In a large bowl, combine the ground pork, hand-chopped shrimp, water chestnuts, minced chives, grated onion, minced garlic, egg, cornstarch, soy sauce, sesame oil, pepper, and salt. Stir the mixture continuously in one direction for a solid minute to bind the proteins together, ensuring the dumpling will not crumble when you bite into it.

2. Fold the dumplings into traditional peaked bonnets.

Lay a square wrapper out like a diamond and place one heaping teaspoon of filling in the lower center. Moisten the edges with a wet finger, fold the bottom point up to form a triangle, and press firmly to expel any air. Pull the two bottom corners of the triangle together over the belly of the filling, dab with water, and pinch them tight to form a nun's hat shape, repeating until the filling is gone.

3. Strain the broth and bring it back to a boil.

Using a slotted spoon or fine-mesh strainer, fish out and discard the shrimp shells, aromatics, and peppercorns. You are left with a clear, golden-orange broth infused with deep seafood umami, which you should bring back to a medium boil.

4. Boil the dumplings until they float.

Drop the folded dumplings into the bubbling broth along with any leftover empty wrappers sliced into thick strips, which act as the literal noodles of the dish. Cook for five to seven minutes until the wrappers are translucent and the dumplings bob to the surface.

5. Stir in the chicken and serve immediately.

In the final minute, add the shredded rotisserie chicken just to warm it through, tasting the broth and adjusting with a splash more fish sauce if necessary. Ladle the soup into deep bowls and garnish aggressively with toasted garlic and fresh chives.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Freeze the excess for a rainy day.**

This recipe makes about 35 to 40 dumplings. If you are cooking for a smaller crowd, you can freeze half of the uncooked dumplings right on a baking sheet; they will boil perfectly straight from the freezer later.



The Weeknight Ulam (Fast, Unapologetic Dinners)

High-impact, fast-cooking main dishes designed to be eaten with steamed rice, delivering bold and uncompromising traditional flavors in under an hour.

The weeknight grind is universal, but the Filipino American remedy is distinctly its own. There is no time to hover over a simmering pot for hours the way Lola did back in the province, but the craving remains: the sharp bite of cane vinegar, the dark slick of soy, the lush comfort of coconut milk pooling into

a mountain of steaming white rice. This is the realm of the weeknight ulam. It is fast, uncompromising, and entirely devoid of pretense. It is everyday survival food that tastes like absolute salvation.

Here, tradition doesn't mean standing at the stove until your feet ache. It means adapting. A streamlined adobo braised in forty minutes that still generously coats the back of a spoon. A fifteen-minute bistek that spills its savory, citrus-laced juices across the plate. A rich, earthy ginataan that demands nothing more than a tired Tuesday evening and a heavy hand with the rice spoon. Fast, bold, and exactly what is needed.





Adobo

ah-DOH-bong BAH-boy aht mah-NOK

Adobo isn't just a recipe; it's a brilliant, centuries-old indigenous preservation technology built for sweltering tropical heat. It's the ultimate survival food—cheap cuts of meat rendered down into a glorious, intensely savory masterpiece. For the first-generation kid in an Ohio suburb, this is the unmistakable smell of home. The secret to getting it exactly right? Two cardinal rules: *huwag haluin*—never stir the vinegar until it boils off its harsh edge—and *nagmamantika*, letting the sauce reduce until the pork and chicken literally fry in their own magnificent, rendered fat.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1/2 cup	Filipino soy sauce
1 large head	garlic <i>smashed and peeled</i>	1 cup	water or low-sodium chicken broth
1 tbsp	whole black peppercorns <i>left whole or roughly crushed</i>	1 tbsp	dark brown sugar
1 lb	pork belly or pork shoulder <i>cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes</i>	4 med	dried bay leaves
1 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs	1/2 cup	cane vinegar or white distilled vinegar

PREPARATION

- **Source fatty cuts of meat.**

Do not attempt this with boneless, skinless chicken breasts or extra-lean pork chops. The final frying stage requires the natural rendered fat of pork belly, shoulder, or chicken skin to achieve the authentic texture.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sauté the aromatics.**

Place a wide, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven or large skillet over medium-high heat with the neutral oil. Toss in the smashed garlic and peppercorns, sautéing for about 30 seconds until the garlic becomes fragrant and takes on a golden color.

- 2. Coat the meat.**

Add the pork cubes and chicken thighs to the pot. Stir them around for 2 to 3 minutes just to coat them in the garlic oil and lightly brown the edges.

- 3. Add the braising liquids.**

Pour in the soy sauce, water, and brown sugar, then toss in the bay leaves and bring the mixture to a rolling boil.

1. Pour in the vinegar and step away.

Pour the vinegar evenly over the meat, drop your spoon, and do not stir the pot.

Let the vinegar boil vigorously and completely uncovered for exactly 5 minutes to cook off the raw, sharp acetic acid vapor.

2. Simmer until yielding.

After 5 minutes, give the pot a gentle stir. Lower the heat to medium-low, place the lid on the pot, and let it simmer for 30 to 40 minutes until the pork is fork-tender and the chicken pulls away from the bone.

3. Render the fat.

Once the meat is tender, remove the lid entirely and crank the heat up to medium-high. Let the liquid rapidly boil and reduce into a dark, glossy syrup until the natural fats render out, allowing the meat to fry and sizzle in its own oil for 3 to 5 minutes before serving over massive mounds of white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The next day rule.**

Adobo is famous for tasting profoundly better the day after it is cooked. As it cools in the fridge, the proteins reabsorb the concentrated liquid and the vinegar continues to mellow.

● **A note on soy sauce substitutions.**

If you cannot find a Filipino soy sauce like Datu Puti or Silver Swan, use equal parts regular Kikkoman and a splash of dark soy sauce to achieve that classic deep brown color.



Bistek Tagalog

bis-TEK tah-GAH-log

If there is a smell that defines a Filipino-American household on a weeknight, it's the sharp, intoxicating hit of soy sauce, citrus, and onions hitting a screaming hot pan. Bistek Tagalog is the ultimate *lutong bahay*—home cooking. Forget complicated braises; this is an unapologetic, salty, acidic punch to the jaw that demands a mountain of white rice. The secret isn't some rare ingredient, it's treating the beef with respect. Slice it against the grain, sear it lightning-fast, and get it out of the pan before you build the sauce. Boil the beef in its own marinade, and you'll be chewing on rubber.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	beef sirloin or flank steak <i>placed in the freezer for 30 minutes</i>	1 tsp	granulated sugar
1/3 cup	Filipino soy sauce	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1/4 cup	fresh lemon juice	3 tbsp	neutral oil
1 tbsp	fresh lime juice	1 large	white or yellow onion <i>sliced into thick rings</i>
5 med	garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	1/2 cup	water or low-sodium beef broth
1/2 small	yellow onion <i>minced</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Chill the beef before slicing.**

Throw the steak into the freezer for 20 to 30 minutes. It firms up the meat, making it infinitely easier to slice thinly.

- **Slice strictly against the grain.**

Identify the direction the muscle fibers are running and slice perpendicular to them, about 1/4-inch thick. This mechanically shortens the fibers, ensuring a tender chew.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Marinate the beef.**

In a large bowl, combine the soy sauce, lemon juice, lime juice, minced garlic, minced onion, sugar, and black pepper. Toss the sliced beef in the liquid, massaging it in with your hands. Let it sit on the counter for at least 30 minutes.

- 2. Squeeze and separate the meat.**

Lift the beef from the bowl, gently squeezing the excess liquid back in. Do not throw the marinade away—this is the foundation of your sauce. Set the beef aside on a plate.

1. Sauté the onion rings.

Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a large skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Add the thick onion rings and cook for 2 to 3 minutes until slightly softened but still holding a crunch. Remove them to a plate.

2. Sear the beef.

Add another tablespoon of oil to the screaming hot pan. Lay the beef slices flat in a single layer, working in batches so you don't crowd the pan. Sear for 1 to 2 minutes per side until beautifully browned, then remove to a plate. It does not need to be cooked through at this stage.

3. Build the sauce.

Pour the reserved marinade into the hot, empty pan, scraping up all the browned bits of fond from the bottom. Add the water or beef broth. Bring to a rolling boil for 2 to 3 minutes to cook the raw garlic and reduce the liquid into a rich, glossy gravy.

4. Reunite and serve.

Lower the heat and slide the beef, along with any resting juices, back into the bubbling sauce. Simmer for just 2 to 3 minutes until the meat is cooked through. Transfer to a platter, top with the reserved onion rings, and serve immediately with copious amounts of white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Calamansi Conundrum.**

Authentic bistek relies entirely on calamansi, a floral native citrus. Our lemon-lime mix perfectly mimics its tart, aromatic profile using standard American grocery staples. Do not use bottled juice.

● **Soy Sauce Variations.**

Filipino soy sauce (like Datu Puti or Silver Swan) is saltier and less sweet than Japanese brands. If you're using Kikkoman, you may need a final pinch of salt to balance the sharp acidity of the lemon.

- **The Velveting Hack.**

Stuck using a tough, cheap cut of chuck or stew meat? Dissolve 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda in 2 tablespoons of water, toss with the sliced beef, and let it sit for 15 minutes. Rinse thoroughly and pat dry before marinating. It alters the pH, guaranteeing a melt-in-the-mouth texture.



Ginataang Kalabasa at Sitaw

gee-nah-tah-AHNG kah-lah-BAH-sah aht SEE-taw

If there is a dish that teleports a first-generation kid straight back to the Formica kitchen table of their youth, it is this one. Sweet, dense squash and crisp long beans swim in a deeply savory, shrimp-paste-laced coconut broth that practically begs to be flooded over a mountain of white rice. There is no tedious grating of fresh coconut here; just the pure, unfiltered comfort of a Filipino home, built on rendered pork fat and a clever weeknight hack that saves your fingers from a notoriously stubborn squash.

INGREDIENTS

1 med	kabocha squash <i>seeded, unpeeled, and cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes</i>	1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
1/2 lb	yardlong beans or green beans <i>ends trimmed and cut into 2-inch lengths</i>	1/2 lb	pork belly <i>cut into thin, bite-sized strips</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>chopped</i>	2 tbsp	jarred sautéed shrimp paste
4 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 can	full-fat coconut milk
1 small piece	fresh ginger <i>peeled and cut into thin matchsticks</i>	1/2 cup	water or pork broth
2 small	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>left whole or sliced</i>	1/2 lb	medium shrimp <i>peeled and deveined, tails left on</i>
		1 pinch	black pepper
		4 cup	cooked white rice <i>for serving</i>

PREPARATION

- **Par-cook the squash.**

Kabocha squash has a famously stubborn exterior. Before you try to cut it, pierce the whole squash with a fork a few times and microwave it on high for 3 to 4 minutes. This slightly softens the tough skin, saving both prep time and your fingers. The skin is entirely edible, so there is no need to peel it.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the pork fat.**

Heat the oil in a large, deep skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat, adding the pork belly strips in a single layer to brown and crisp for 4 to 5 minutes before stirring to release their savory fat.

- 2. Build the flavor base.**

Lower the heat to medium, toss in the onion, garlic, and ginger matchsticks, and sauté in the rendered pork fat until the onions soften and turn translucent.

1. Awaken the bagoong.

Push the aromatics aside, add the shrimp paste directly to the hot pan, and vigorously fry it for a minute or two to kill the raw fishiness and unlock a deep, caramelized umami before stirring everything together.

2. Simmer the squash.

Pour in the coconut milk and water, scraping up any browned bits from the pan. Bring the liquid to a gentle, bubbling simmer—never a rolling boil, or the rich coconut cream will curdle—then fold in the cubed squash, cover, and cook until tender, about 10 to 12 minutes.

3. Finish with the beans and shrimp.

Stir in the green beans and shrimp, cover, and cook for another 3 to 5 minutes just until the beans are bright and crisp-tender and the shrimp turn perfectly opaque.

4. Season and serve.

Remove the pan from the heat, hit the stew with a pinch of black pepper, and ladle it immediately alongside massive plates of hot steamed white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The magic of ginger.**

Do not omit the ginger matchsticks. They provide a sharp, aromatic lift that cuts through the intense richness of the coconut milk and pork fat, perfectly neutralizing any gaminess.

● **Sourcing shrimp paste.**

Bagoong alamang (sautéed shrimp paste) is the undeniable backbone of this dish. You can find it in jars in the Filipino aisle of your local Asian market. If you absolutely must, substitute one and a half tablespoons of high-quality fish sauce, but know you are trading away a bit of the soul of the dish.



Sizzling Ground Pork Sisig

see-sig gee-nee-ling

Purists will tell you that authentic sisig demands a pig's face, hours of boiling, and an outdoor grill. They aren't wrong, but they also aren't cooking dinner on a Tuesday in Ohio. This is the diaspora's brilliant, unapologetic workaround: a furious, smoking cast-iron sear on fatty ground pork that mimics the char of a Pampanga street stall, bound together with mayonnaise and liver spread to replace the traditional pig brains. It's fast, it's resourceful, and when that sharp blast of citrus hits the sizzling pork fat, it smells exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb 80/20 ground pork

1 tbsp neutral oil

1 large	red onion <i>very finely diced, divided in half</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	Knorr liquid seasoning
4 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 tbsp	oyster sauce
1 med	ginger <i>peeled and finely minced</i>	1/2 tsp	coarse black pepper
2 med	bird's eye chilies <i>finely chopped</i>	2 tbsp	fresh calamansi juice
1 large	jalapeño <i>seeded and diced</i>	1 tbsp	unsalted butter
3 tbsp	Kewpie mayonnaise	1 large	egg
2 tbsp	Reno liver spread	1/2 cup	pork rinds <i>crushed</i>
		2 med	green onions <i>sliced</i>

PREPARATION

- **Have your ingredients staged and ready.**

This dish moves incredibly fast once the pork hits the pan. Mix your mayonnaise, liver spread, Knorr, and oyster sauce in a small bowl beforehand to avoid scrambling at the stove while your pork overcooks.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Obliterate the pork in a smoking hot skillet.

Heat a large, heavy-bottomed skillet (preferably cast-iron) over medium-high heat until lightly smoking, then add the neutral oil. Press the ground pork into an even, flat layer across the entire pan and do not touch it for 4 to 5 minutes. You want a dark, crusty brown sear on the bottom to simulate the char of an outdoor grill before breaking it apart and letting it fry in its own rendered fat until crispy.

2. Sauté the aromatics in the rendered pork fat.

Push the crisped pork to the perimeter of the pan. In the center pool of rendered fat, add the garlic, ginger, and half of the diced red onions. Sauté for 1 to 2 minutes until softened and fragrant, then toss everything together.

1. Build the emulsion to coat the meat.

Reduce the heat to low. Add the jalapeño, half of the bird's eye chilies, Kewpie mayonnaise, liver spread, Knorr liquid seasoning, oyster sauce, and black pepper. Toss continuously for 1 to 2 minutes until the mayonnaise and liver spread melt into a rich, glossy glaze that clings to the pork.

2. Blast the pan with citrus.

Push the meat aside and melt the butter directly on the hot pan. Pour the calamansi juice over the top, letting the acid hit the hot iron to create an intoxicating, sour steam. Turn off the heat.

3. Garnish aggressively and mix at the table.

While the pan is still furiously sizzling, crack the raw egg directly into the center of the meat. Scatter the remaining raw red onions, bird's eye chilies, crushed pork rinds, and green onions over the top. Serve immediately in the hot skillet on a trivet alongside steamed white rice, mixing the raw egg and fresh onions into the hot meat right before eating.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Sourcing the secret sauce ingredients.**

If you can't find Reno Liver Spread at your local Asian market, substitute with 1 1/2 tablespoons of smooth chicken liver pâté from an American deli. If fresh or frozen calamansi is unavailable, use 1 tablespoon of fresh lemon juice mixed with 1 tablespoon of distilled white vinegar.

● **The mayonnaise is non-negotiable.**

While traditionalists use boiled pig brains for the creamy binder, Kewpie mayonnaise is the accepted modern alternative. Its yolk-heavy, MSG-enhanced profile provides the crucial richness this quick weeknight version demands.



Air-Fryer Lechon Kawali

leh-chon kah-wah-lee

True lechon kawali—the kind with meat so tender it melts, capped by a golden skin that shatters like glass—is a labor of love. The secret that Filipino grandmothers know, which the internet often tries to skip, is that moisture is the absolute enemy of crispiness. You cannot rush the drying process. By boiling the pork belly on a Sunday and leaving it to dehydrate uncovered in the fridge, Tuesday night yields pure, unabashed homeland flavor from an air fryer in under forty minutes. No deep-frying splatters, no massive pots of oil to discard, just unapologetic comfort.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	skin-on pork belly	2 med	garlic <i>minced</i>
6 large	garlic <i>peeled and smashed</i>	1 small	red onion <i>finely diced</i>
4 med	dried bay leaves	2 small	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>chopped</i>
1 tbspc	whole black peppercorns	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>quartered</i>	1 pinch	sugar
3 tbspc	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	1/2 cup	bottled lechon sauce
1/2 cup	cane vinegar	2 cup	jasmine rice <i>steamed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Submerge the pork belly in a large pot with the aromatics and salt.**
Add the smashed garlic, bay leaves, whole peppercorns, quartered onion, and 2 tablespoons of kosher salt. Cover with cold water, bring to a rolling boil over medium-high heat, and skim off any foam.
- **Simmer gently until the pork is fork-tender.**
Reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook for 45 to 60 minutes. The meat should yield easily to a fork but still hold its shape. Transfer to a wire rack and pat entirely dry.
- **Pierce the skin and rub with salt to draw out moisture.**
Using a fork, poke dozens of tiny holes all over the skin, being careful not to pierce deeply into the meat. Rub the remaining 1 tablespoon of kosher salt evenly over the skin.
- **Rest the pork uncovered in the refrigerator overnight.**
Leave it on the wire rack for at least 8 hours, or up to 3 days. The cold, dry air wicks away the moisture, tightening the skin into a leathery texture. This is the non-negotiable secret to the crackle.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the air fryer to 350°F and wipe any excess moisture off the pork.

Remove the pork from the fridge. If there are heavy clumps of wet salt on the surface, dab them away quickly with a dry paper towel.

2. Air-fry the pork belly skin-side up for twenty-five minutes.

This gentle, initial heat renders out the subcutaneous fat without burning the delicate meat below.

3. Increase the heat to 400°F and blast until the skin blisters.

Cook for an additional 10 to 15 minutes. Watch it closely; the skin will bubble, crackle, and turn a deep, gorgeous golden brown.

4. Rest the meat for ten minutes before slicing.

If you cut into it immediately, the juices will run out and the meat will dry. Slice into bite-sized cubes—you should hear an audible crunch.

5. Whisk together the spiced vinegar dip.

Combine the cane vinegar, minced garlic, diced red onion, chilies, black pepper, and a pinch of salt and sugar. Serve the pork hot alongside steamed rice, the vinegar dip, and sweet liver sauce.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Repurpose the leftovers into Paksiw na Lechon Kawali.**

The skin will lose its crunch in the fridge, so do not microwave it. Simmer leftover cubes in a saucepan with a splash of beef broth, soy sauce, vinegar, a bay leaf, and leftover liver sauce until it reduces into a sweet-tart gravy.



Creamy Pininyahang Manok

pi-nin-ya-hang ma-nok

There is no shame in canned pineapple—in fact, here, it is the only correct choice. This is the ultimate 1990s diaspora lifesaver, the unapologetic, incredibly comforting dish a Filipino mother threw together after a ten-hour shift. It relies on the aggressive tenderizing magic of canned pineapple juice and the velvety weight of evaporated milk to balance a fiercely savory fish sauce backbone. It is sweet, salty, rich, and tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	boneless skinless chicken thighs <i>cut into 2-inch chunks</i>	20 oz	canned pineapple chunks in 100 percent juice <i>drained, juice reserved</i>
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2 tbsp	fish sauce	1 tbsp	ginger <i>peeled and julienned</i>
2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 med	red bell pepper <i>cored and cut into squares</i>
1 large	Russet potato <i>peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	1 med	green bell pepper <i>cored and cut into squares</i>
1 med	carrot <i>peeled and cut into thick half-moons</i>	1/2 cup	evaporated milk
1 med	yellow onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
4 clove	garlic <i>smashed and minced</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Mise en place is critical.**

This dish moves quickly once the short marination is done. Have your root vegetables chopped and your aromatics minced before the chicken ever hits the pan.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Marinate the chicken in the pineapple juice.**

Toss the chicken chunks and fish sauce into the reserved pineapple juice. Let sit at room temperature for 15 to 20 minutes while you chop the vegetables. The bromelain enzyme works astonishingly fast; do not leave it for hours or the meat will turn to mush.

- 2. Seal the root vegetables.**

Heat the oil in a deep skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Fry the potatoes and carrots for about 5 minutes until they develop a light, golden crust on the edges, then remove them with a slotted spoon. This ensures they do not disintegrate into mashed potatoes later.

1. Sauté the aromatics and brown the meat.

Lower the heat to medium. In the remaining oil, cook the ginger for 1 minute, then add the onion and garlic until translucent. Lift the chicken from its marinade with tongs, saving the liquid, and add to the pan. Cook until lightly browned, about 5 minutes.

2. Simmer the braise.

Pour the reserved pineapple juice marinade directly into the pan. Bring to a gentle boil, immediately drop the heat to a simmer, cover, and let cook for 10 minutes.

3. Bring the stew together.

Uncover and stir in the pineapple chunks, fried potatoes and carrots, and both bell peppers. Simmer uncovered for 3 to 5 minutes until the peppers are tender-crisp.

4. Incorporate the dairy off the boil.

Turn the heat down to the absolute lowest setting. Wait 30 seconds for the bubbling to completely stop, then slowly pour in the evaporated milk while stirring gently. Do not let the pot boil once the milk is added, or the acidic juice will curdle the dairy into an ugly mess. Heat gently for 1 to 2 minutes just to warm through.

5. Season and serve.

Taste for balance, adding another splash of fish sauce if needed, and finish with black pepper. Serve piping hot over a massive mound of steamed white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The ultimate dairy secret.**

Pineapple juice is highly acidic and will rapidly denature the proteins in evaporated milk if exposed to high heat. Killing the simmer before adding the dairy is the non-negotiable technique that separates a master from an amateur.

● **Use 100 percent juice, not syrup.**

Canned pineapple in heavy syrup destroys the delicate savory balance of the stew, rendering it cloyingly sweet. Check the label carefully.



Pork Giniling with Quail Eggs

gi-nee-leeng nah bah-boy

If there is one smell that universally signals dinner is ready in a Filipino household, it is the aroma of garlic, onions, and ground pork hitting a hot pan. Giniling is the unsung hero of the diaspora kitchen—pragmatic, deeply comforting, and designed to stretch a single pound of meat into a feast. It is unapologetically Filipino: aggressively savory from fish sauce, slightly sweet from a secret squeeze of banana ketchup, and crowned with tiny, joyful quail eggs. This isn't fancy weekend food; this is the unapologetic Tuesday night meal your Lola would make to heal your soul.

INGREDIENTS

1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1/2 cup	water or chicken broth
4 cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 large	Russet or Yukon Gold potato <i>peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice</i>
1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 large	carrot <i>peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice</i>
1 lb	ground pork <i>80/20 blend preferred</i>	1/4 cup	raisins
1 1/2 tbsp	fish sauce	1/2 cup	frozen green peas
1 tbsp	soy sauce	1/2 small	red bell pepper <i>finely diced</i>
1 tbsp	tomato paste	15 oz	canned quail eggs <i>drained and rinsed</i>
1 cup	canned tomato sauce	1/2 tsp	ground black pepper
1 tbsp	banana ketchup	1 tbsp	fresh lemon or lime juice

PREPARATION

- **Respect the dice.**

Your potatoes and carrots must be cut into a uniform 1/4-inch brunoise. If they are too large, they disrupt the texture, take too long to cook, and prevent you from getting a perfectly composed bite of meat, vegetable, and rice on a single spoon.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the cooking oil in a wide skillet or wok over medium-high heat and lightly brown the garlic.**

Sauté the minced garlic just until it turns a pale, fragrant golden brown before adding the diced onion. Cook until the onions are softened and translucent, about 2 to 3 minutes.

- 1. Add the ground pork and cook until it fries in its own rendered fat.**
Break the meat apart with a wooden spoon. At first, the pork will release a lot of water. You must keep cooking until that water completely evaporates and the meat begins to actively sizzle and brown in its own clear fat. This is where the flavor lives.
- 2. Push the meat aside and deglaze the hot pan with fish sauce.**
Pour the fish sauce directly onto the hot surface of the pan and let it bubble fiercely for 10 seconds. This cooks off the harshness and leaves pure umami. Stir it into the meat along with the soy sauce and black pepper.
- 3. Stir in the tomato paste, tomato sauce, banana ketchup, and broth, then bring to a gentle boil.**
Cook the tomato paste for a minute to darken it slightly before pouring in the liquids.
- 4. Fold in the diced potatoes, carrots, and raisins, simmering covered until tender.**
Turn the heat down to medium-low, cover the pan with a lid, and let it simmer for 10 to 12 minutes.
- 5. Uncover and reduce the sauce before gently folding in the peas, bell pepper, and quail eggs.**
If the sauce looks watery, let it bubble uncovered until it thickens into a rich gravy. Fold the delicate eggs carefully so they don't crush, and cook for 2 to 3 minutes until the peas are bright green and the eggs are warmed through.
- 6. Turn off the heat entirely and stir in the fresh citrus juice.**
The acid doesn't make the dish sour; it brightens the heavy, pork-fat-laden gravy and brings the complex flavors into sharp focus. Adjust seasoning and serve immediately with a massive mound of steaming white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Canned quail eggs are a diaspora lifesaver.**

Sourcing and peeling fresh quail eggs is a chore on a Tuesday night. Canned eggs are readily available at Asian markets and deliver the exact joy and texture required without the hassle.

- **Do not skip the banana ketchup or raisins.**

They provide the nostalgic, slightly sweet undertone that defines the true taste of a Filipino childhood. If you absolutely must, substitute a teaspoon of brown sugar for the ketchup.



Express Bicol Express

si-ni-li-han

Bicol Express is unapologetic—aggressively spicy, profoundly rich, and deeply funky. Originating as a tug-of-war between a legendary 1970s Manila restaurant and the indigenous kitchens of the Bicol peninsula (where it is known as Sinilihan), the soul of the dish remains unchanged. For first-generation kids raised in the American suburbs, the pungent scent of sautéing shrimp paste and coconut milk meant Lola was cooking, and you needed to load up the rice cooker. This weeknight adaptation cuts the pork small and sears it hard to render the fat quickly, bypassing the traditional hours-long braise without losing an ounce of authenticity. The only rule you cannot break is nagmamantika: you must simmer the coconut cream until it "breaks,"

letting the chili-infused oil separate from the sauce. In French cooking, a broken sauce is a mistake. In the Filipino kitchen, it is the absolute peak of flavor.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	pork belly <i>skin removed, cut into 1/2-inch cubes</i>	3 tbsp	Filipino shrimp paste <i>rinsed briefly if neon pink or overly salty</i>
1 tbsp	canola oil	13.5 oz	canned coconut milk <i>unshaken, thick cream skimmed and reserved, watery milk separated</i>
4 clove	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	8 small	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>stems removed, roughly chopped</i>
1 med	red or yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	4 med	Serrano peppers <i>sliced diagonally into 1/4-inch pieces</i>
1 med piece	fresh ginger <i>peeled and finely minced</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper
		1 tbsp	fish sauce

PREPARATION

- **Separate the coconut milk properly.**

Do not shake the can of coconut milk before opening. Carefully scoop the thick, solid cream (kakang gata) from the top into a small bowl to save for the final step. The remaining watery milk (pangalawang piga) is your braising liquid.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the pork to render the fat.**

Place a wide, heavy-bottomed skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Add the diced pork belly in a single layer, using the canola oil only if the pan is completely dry and the meat sticks. Let it sear undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes until golden brown, then toss until the pork releases its natural fat and the edges crisp up.

1. Sauté the aromatics.

Push the pork to the edges of the pan so the rendered fat pools in the center.

Lower the heat to medium and add the onion, garlic, and ginger to the hot fat.

Sauté for about 2 minutes until translucent and highly aromatic, letting the ginger do its work to clean up the heavy pork flavor.

2. Caramelize the funk.

Stir the shrimp paste directly into the hot fat in the center of the pan. Let it fry for 1 to 2 minutes—the harsh, raw fermented smell will aggressively hit the air before mellowing into a deep, caramelized umami. Toss the pork and aromatics together until every piece is coated.

3. Execute the short braise.

Pour the reserved thin, watery portion of the coconut milk into the pan, scraping up any browned bits from the bottom. Bring the liquid to a gentle simmer, cover the pan, and turn the heat to medium-low. Braise for 20 to 25 minutes, at which point the small cubes of pork will be perfectly tender.

4. Demand the nagmamantika.

Remove the lid and pour in the reserved thick coconut cream, chopped Thai chilies, Serrano peppers, and black pepper. Increase the heat slightly to maintain a rolling simmer and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Watch as the cream reduces, thickens, and eventually "breaks," leaving clear, chili-tinted oil separated from the curd-like coconut solids.

5. Season and serve immediately.

Once the oil has separated and the sauce clings heavily to the pork, taste the dish. Add a splash of fish sauce only if it needs a salty lift. Serve blisteringly hot alongside an irresponsibly large mound of steamed white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not skip the ginger.**

In Filipino cooking, ginger is crucial for neutralizing the 'lansa'—the gamey, funky odor of heavy fats and seafood. It makes the rich stew taste surprisingly clean.



Weekend Kamayan (Sunday Feasts for the Pamilya)

Show-stopping feast recipes designed for weekend family gatherings, capturing the abundant spirit of traditional kamayan eating using modern home appliances.

Sunday in a Filipino household is a glorious, chaotic shrine to abundance. The air hangs thick with the sweet, lacquered smoke of pork skewers charring in the backyard, while inside, the rhythmic crunch of a knife works through the blistered skin of oven-roasted cebuchon. This is the weekend kamayan. It's less about eating off banana leaves—though nobody's stopping you—and more about the fierce, communal spirit of feeding your people until they can't breathe.

You don't need an open roasting pit in the province to make it happen. Armed with a standard-issue oven, a pressure cooker to beat stubborn oxtails into velvety submission for kare-kare, and whatever you hauled from the local Asian

market, the feast is yours. No compromises on flavor, no apologies. Just loud, spectacular food meant to be dragged through peanut sauce, chased with rice, and shared.





Kare-Kare

kah-reh kah-reh

True Kare-Kare isn't the cloyingly sweet, gloopy peanut butter dessert you find in sanitized modern restaurants. It is a profoundly savory, deeply comforting stew built on the unapologetic collagen of slow-cooked oxtail and the ancient alchemy of toasted rice flour. Utilizing an electric pressure cooker doesn't cheapen the tradition; it democratizes it, turning a full-day, firewood-simmered chore into an achievable Sunday triumph for the diaspora. The magic lies in the unapologetic marriage of rich beef, earthy peanuts, and the salty, funky punch of fermented shrimp paste that cuts through the richness and brings you straight home.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	oxtail <i>cut into 2-inch pieces and rinsed</i>	1 tbsp	cooking oil
1 large	yellow onion <i>quartered</i>	1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>
4 med	garlic clove <i>smashed</i>	5 med	garlic clove <i>minced</i>
1 tbsp	whole black peppercorns	14 oz	canned banana heart <i>drained and quartered</i>
2 tbsp	fish sauce	2 med	Asian eggplant <i>sliced on a bias into 1-inch thick pieces</i>
6 cup	water	1 med	yardlong beans <i>cut into 3-inch segments</i>
1/4 cup	sweet rice flour	bunch	
2 tbsp	annatto powder	3 med	baby bok choy <i>ends trimmed and leaves separated</i>
3/4 cup	natural unsweetened creamy peanut butter	head	
1/4 cup	roasted peanuts <i>finely crushed</i>	4 cup	cooked jasmine rice
		1/2 cup	sautéed shrimp paste

PREPARATION

- **Prepare an ice bath before blanching the vegetables.**

Having a large bowl of ice water ready ensures the vegetables stop cooking immediately, maintaining their crucial crunch in the rich stew.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the oxtails, quartered onion, smashed garlic, peppercorns, fish sauce, and water in an electric pressure cooker and cook on high pressure for 45 minutes.**

Allow a 10-minute natural pressure release, then manually release any remaining steam and transfer the meat to a platter.

- 1. Strain the remaining beef broth into a large bowl and skim the heavy layer of rendered fat from the surface.**
Let the broth sit for 10 minutes so the fat fully separates, skim it away, and reserve exactly four cups of the liquid gold.
- 2. Toast the sweet rice flour in a dry skillet over medium-low heat until lightly golden and nutty.**
Stir constantly for 3 to 5 minutes to prevent burning, then transfer to a small bowl and whisk in a half cup of the warm reserved broth to create a smooth slurry.
- 3. Blanch the yardlong beans, eggplant, banana heart, and bok choy individually in a pot of salted boiling water.**
Cook the green vegetables for 30 seconds to two minutes, then immediately plunge them into an ice bath to lock in their vibrant colors and crisp textures.
- 4. Sauté the diced onion and minced garlic in oil over medium heat until fragrant, then pour in the remaining three and a half cups of defatted broth.**
Whisk the annatto powder into the liquid until the broth turns a fiery, beautiful orange.
- 5. Lower the heat to medium-low and whisk the natural peanut butter and toasted rice slurry into the broth.**
Simmer gently for 5 to 8 minutes, whisking constantly until the sauce thickens to coat the back of a spoon, then stir in the crushed roasted peanuts.
- 6. Nestle the tender oxtails back into the golden peanut sauce to absorb the flavors and heat through.**
Arrange the blanched vegetables beautifully on top of the stew and serve steaming hot with jasmine rice and a mandatory side of sautéed shrimp paste.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Shrimp paste is not an optional garnish.**

The stew is intentionally under-seasoned to serve as a canvas for the salty, funky punch of bagoong. Mix a tiny dab into every single bite of rice and meat.

- **Standard green beans can perfectly substitute for yardlong beans.**

If you can't make it to an Asian market for sitaw or banana heart, use standard green beans and skip the blossom; the fundamental soul of the dish lies in the broth.



Express Rolled Cebuchon

seh-boo-CHON

There are no shortcuts for the skin, and no powdered substitutes for the aromatics. In Cebu, lechon is a religion, and the secret lies in the aggressive stuffing of fresh lemongrass, garlic, and onions—not a heavy liver sauce. For a first-generation kid in an Ohio suburb chasing the ghosts of Sunday kamayan feasts, a whole pig and a bamboo spit aren't happening. But a massive, skin-on pork belly, rolled tightly and blasted in a domestic oven? That delivers the shattering, glass-like balat and intensely perfumed meat of the homeland, using nothing but patience and a wire rack.

INGREDIENTS

4 lb	boneless skin-on pork belly <i>wiped dry</i>	1 large	garlic <i>cloves peeled and crushed</i>
1 tbsp	cane vinegar	1 med	red onion <i>finely diced</i>
3 1/2 tbsp	coarse kosher salt	5 whole	scallions
1 tbsp	black peppercorns <i>freshly cracked</i>	5 whole	dried bay leaves
1 tbsp	tamarind soup mix	1 tbsp	evaporated milk
4 large stalks	lemongrass <i>tough outer layers removed, bottom white parts heavily pounded</i>	1 tbsp	soy sauce
		1 tbsp	neutral oil

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Score the meat and mercilessly prick the skin.

Lay the pork belly skin-side down and score the flesh in a shallow half-inch cross-hatch. Flip it over and use an awl, meat tenderizer, or clean safety pin to aggressively poke thousands of tiny holes into the skin. Do not pierce through to the red meat, or the juices will steam the skin into rubber.

2. Vigorously rub the meat with salt, pepper, and tamarind powder.

Flip the belly meat-side up. Massage 1 1/2 tablespoons of the salt, the freshly cracked black pepper, and the tamarind soup mix deep into the scored crevices for that unmistakable homeland tang.

3. Layer the aromatics and tie the belly into a tight cylinder.

Scatter the crushed garlic, diced red onion, and bay leaves evenly across the flesh. Place the bruised lemongrass stalks and whole scallions horizontally across the center. Roll the belly tightly away from you, encapsulating the herbs, and secure it with butcher's twine tied in two-inch intervals.

1. Treat the skin with vinegar and air dry in the refrigerator overnight.

Brush the skin entirely with the cane vinegar, then rub with the remaining 2 tablespoons of coarse salt. Place the tied roll on a wire rack over a baking sheet and leave it completely uncovered in the fridge for 12 to 24 hours. This constant circulation of cold, dry air is the ultimate secret to a shattering crust.

2. Roast the pork slowly over a water bath.

Preheat the oven to 325°F. Wipe away any excess moisture or heavy salt clumps from the skin. Pour two cups of water into the bottom of a roasting pan to catch the rendering fat and prevent your kitchen from smoking out, then set the wire rack with the pork over it. Roast for 2 to 2.5 hours until the internal temperature hits 160°F.

3. Glaze the skin and blast it at high heat to blister.

Remove the pork and crank the oven to 475°F. Whisk the evaporated milk, soy sauce, and oil together, then brush it lightly over the hot skin. Return the belly to the oven for 30 to 45 minutes, watching very closely as the skin violently bubbles and turns a deep mahogany red.

4. Rest the meat before slicing.

Let the Cebuchon rest on a cutting board for at least 30 minutes before snipping the twine, otherwise the juices will bleed out and ruin the meat. Slice into thick rounds with a heavy cleaver and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Weeknight Air Fryer Hack.**

If a 24-hour dry brine isn't happening, pressure cook the tied belly with water, soy sauce, garlic, and bay leaves for 30 minutes. Pat the skin aggressively dry, brush with a drop of vinegar and oil, and air fry at 400°F for 30 to 40 minutes until blistered.

- **Ditch the liver sauce for spiced vinegar sawsawan.**

Cebuano lechon is infused from the inside out; heavy liver sauces mask the delicate lemongrass. Serve this with a simple dip of 1/2 cup cane vinegar, 2 tablespoons soy sauce, crushed native garlic, diced red onions, and chopped Thai bird's eye chilies.

- **Sourcing the right pork.**

You must ask the butcher for a whole, boneless pork belly with the skin left on. A skinless belly entirely defeats the architectural purpose of this dish.



7-Up Halabos na Hipon

hah-lah-BOS nah HEE-pon

Historically, fishermen would drag their boats onto the sand and families would buy the catch right off the nets, tossing shrimp into a wok over an open fire with nothing but seawater and rock salt. But Filipino home kitchens are fiercely resourceful, and a beautiful evolution took hold. Swapping water for lemon-lime soda creates a sticky, caramelized glaze that magnifies the sweet, natural brine of the catch. Paired with a frankly irresponsible amount of garlic and butter, this is an unapologetically messy, eat-with-your-hands feast—a testament to how a simple can of soda can integrate into a coastal tradition to build a modern classic.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	head-on shell-on shrimp <i>rinsed, tendrils and sharp head spikes trimmed</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 med head	garlic <i>peeled and minced</i>	1/2 tsp	red chili flakes
2 tbsp	unsalted butter	1/2 cup	white cane vinegar
1 tbsp	neutral oil	2 tbsp	fish sauce
1/2 cup	full-sugar 7-Up or Sprite	3 small	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>smashed</i>
		2 small clove	garlic <i>peeled and smashed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Trim the armor.**

Using kitchen shears, snip off the long stringy tendrils and the sharp rostrum (the spike on the head) of each shrimp. You want the shell and head intact for flavor, but trimmed so no one punctures a finger during the feast.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Melt the fats and coax out the aromatics over low heat.**

In a wide wok or large skillet, combine the butter and neutral oil over low heat. Once melted, add the minced garlic and stir gently for about 30 seconds until fragrant, taking care not to let it brown or turn bitter.

- 2. Crank the heat and sear the catch.**

Raise the heat to high. Introduce the shrimp and toss them rapidly in the garlic butter for about a minute, just until the shells begin to blush pink.

- 3. Introduce the soda and force a violent reduction.**

Immediately pour in the lemon-lime soda, kosher salt, and chili flakes. Keep the heat roaring—this is the fundamental secret to the dish. Simmering on low turns the meat to rubber and glues the shell to the shrimp.

1. Boil down to a sticky, caramelized glaze.

Let the liquid boil hard for 3 to 4 minutes, stirring continuously, until it evaporates into a savory syrup coating the bright reddish-orange shrimp. Pull it off the heat immediately.

2. Mix the sawsawan and serve immediately.

In a small bowl, combine the vinegar, fish sauce, smashed chilies, and smashed garlic cloves for your dipping sauce. Pile the hot shrimp in the center of the table with a mountain of steamed rice, ready to be eaten by hand.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Source your shrimp wisely.**

Head-on, shell-on shrimp are entirely non-negotiable here. The rich tomalley inside the heads melts into the butter to create the sauce's foundation. If you can't find them at a local Asian market, jumbo shell-on shrimp are a distant second, but never use pre-peeled.

● **Use full-sugar soda.**

Diet or zero-sugar variants lack the necessary sucrose to caramelize over high heat, leaving you with sad, boiled shrimp instead of a sticky glaze.

● **The oil protects the butter.**

Don't skip the splash of neutral oil. It stabilizes the butter fat, preventing the garlic from burning over the roaring high heat required to reduce the soda.



Aligue Seafood Fried Rice

ah-lee-geh

For the Filipino diaspora, this dish is the ultimate Sunday indulgence. Fermented crab paste—*taba ng talangka*—was once a precious commodity smuggled in luggage from Pampanga. It is unapologetically rich, briny, and stains the rice the color of a vibrant sunset. This version captures that exact fiesta feeling for an American kitchen, relying on jarred paste and the absolute necessity of day-old rice. The secret to an authentic flavor is sequencing: sear the seafood first to save its juices, deeply toast the garlic, and let a final hit of citrus cut straight through the fat.

INGREDIENTS

5 cup	Jasmine rice <i>cooked, cooled day-old, and refrigerated</i>	1 med	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>
1 lb	mixed seafood <i>thawed completely and patted completely dry</i>	1/2 cup	jarred crab paste
2 tbsp	canola oil	1 tbsp	fish sauce
2 tbsp	unsalted butter	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
6 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 med	lemon <i>cut into wedges</i>
		1/4 cup	scallions <i>chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Faking Day-Old Rice**

If you don't have day-old rice, cook a fresh batch of Jasmine rice, spread it out in a thin, even layer on a large baking sheet, and place it in the freezer for 15 to 20 minutes to rapidly dry out the exterior of the grains.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Break apart the cold rice with wet hands.**

You want zero clumps before the grains hit the hot pan, ensuring every single grain gets perfectly coated in the crab fat.

- 2. Flash-fry the mixed seafood in half the oil and butter, then remove it entirely.**

Sear in a hot wok just until the shrimp turns pink, about one to two minutes. Crucially, scrape all the liquid that pools in the pan into a bowl alongside the seafood—that juice is pure culinary gold and will flavor the rice later without turning the wok into a swamp.

- 1. Brown the garlic deeply in the remaining fat, followed by the onions.**
Don't rush the garlic. Taking it to the edge of toasted, golden brown provides a bitter, nutty contrast essential to cutting the richness of the crab fat. Add the onions and cook until translucent.
- 2. Fry the crab paste in the aromatic oil.**
Cooking the bottled paste for a full minute blooms its essential oils and removes any metallic tininess, awakening a deep, oceanic funk.
- 3. Crank the heat to high and violently toss the cold rice into the wok.**
Stir-fry continuously, scooping from the bottom, until the grains are lightly toasted and uniformly coated in the bright orange fat.
- 4. Pour the reserved seafood juices over the hot rice.**
The searing hot grains will instantly absorb this concentrated stock without getting soggy.
- 5. Fold the cooked seafood back in, season with fish sauce and pepper, and finish with a heavy squeeze of citrus.**
Turn off the heat before squeezing the lemon over the top. The acid is non-negotiable—it slices right through the fat and wakes the whole dish up. Garnish with scallions and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing Crab Paste**

Look for 'Tabang Talangka' in the condiment aisle of your local Asian market, usually near the shrimp pastes. Brands from Pampanga, like Navarro's, are the gold standard.

- **The Authentic Acid**

In the Philippines, this dish is finished with calamansi, a native citrus. If you can find it fresh, use 4 to 5 calamansi in place of the lemon.



Filipino BBQ Pork Skewers with Banana Ketchup Glaze

ee-nee-how nah bah-boy

If there is a scent that defines the Filipino soul, it is the intoxicating, sweet smoke of pork fat and garlic caramelizing over hot coals. For those chasing the ghosts of a Manila sunset in an American backyard, the secret lies in two completely unexpected pantry staples: lemon-lime soda to rapidly tenderize the meat, and the brilliant wartime ingenuity of banana ketchup to lacquer it. This is not a diaspora shortcut; it is the undisputed canon of street-side ihaw-ihaw, designed for a communal, tactile feast.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	pork shoulder <i>cut into 1-inch to 1.5-inch rectangular cubes with fat attached</i>	1 tbsp	black pepper <i>coarsely ground</i>
1 cup	lemon-lime soda	1/2 cup	banana ketchup <i>for the glaze</i>
3/4 cup	soy sauce <i>for the marinade</i>	2 tbsp	soy sauce <i>for the glaze</i>
1/2 cup	banana ketchup <i>for the marinade</i>	2 tbsp	oyster sauce <i>for the glaze</i>
1/4 cup	calamansi juice <i>or equal parts fresh lemon and lime juice</i>	1 tbsp	canola oil
1 med head	garlic <i>peeled and finely minced</i>	1/2 cup	white vinegar
1/2 cup	dark brown sugar <i>packed</i>	1 small	red onion <i>finely diced</i>
1/4 cup	oyster sauce <i>for the marinade</i>	2 med cloves	garlic <i>smashed</i>
1 tbsp	toasted sesame oil	2 small	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>sliced</i>
		1 tsp	sugar
		1 pinch	salt

PREPARATION

- **Soak the bamboo skewers well in advance.**

Submerge 15 to 20 bamboo skewers in a shallow dish of water for at least an hour before threading to keep them from turning to ash over the open flame.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk together the liquid marinade to dissolve the sugars.**

In a large bowl, whisk the lemon-lime soda, 3/4 cup soy sauce, 1/2 cup banana ketchup, calamansi juice, minced garlic, brown sugar, 1/4 cup oyster sauce, sesame oil, and black pepper until the sugar is entirely dissolved.

- 1. Submerge the pork in the marinade and let time do the heavy lifting.**
Massage the liquid into the cubed pork shoulder until completely coated, then seal in a zip-top bag and refrigerate for at least 4 hours, up to a maximum of 24.
- 2. Prepare the basting glaze and the sharp, acidic sawsawan.**
Whisk the remaining banana ketchup, soy sauce, oyster sauce, and canola oil to create the glaze; in a separate serving bowl, combine the vinegar, red onion, smashed garlic, chilies, sugar, and salt for your dipping sauce.
- 3. Thread the marinated meat tightly onto soaked bamboo skewers.**
Pack 4 to 5 pieces of meat snugly against each other on each stick, deliberately alternating lean cuts with fatty pieces so the rendering fat continuously self-bastes the meat over the fire.
- 4. Grill the pork over medium heat to build a foundational char.**
Lay the skewers on a preheated, lightly oiled grill and let them cook undisturbed for 3 to 5 minutes before flipping.
- 5. Baste and flip the skewers repeatedly to lacquer the meat.**
Brush the cooked sides generously with the glaze every 3 minutes, building up a sticky, deep mahogany crust over a total cook time of 15 to 20 minutes.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not substitute the banana ketchup.**
This WWII-era invention gives the skewers their iconic sticky red sheen and sweet tang; standard tomato ketchup will drag the flavor profile into generic American barbecue territory. Look for UFC or Jufran brands.
- **Manage your heat carefully.**
The high sugar content in this marinade means it will burn quickly; cook the skewers low and slow, and rely on the canola oil in the basting glaze to prevent them from cementing to the grates.



Pinaputok na Tilapia

pee-nah-poo-tok nah tee-lah-pyah

To grow up in a Filipino household is to know the unmistakable, glorious aroma of a weekend fish fry. But for a first-generation kid cooking in a winter-locked Ohio suburb, frying whole seafood indoors is a logistical nightmare. Enter pinaputok—meaning "bursting." You take a fresh whole tilapia, score it deep to the bone, and aggressively overstuff it with aromatics until it threatens to explode. The secret weapon here isn't hours of marination; it's a pragmatic grandmother's trick of rubbing the flesh with dry tamarind soup base to instantly cure and flavor the fish. Tightly sealed in a banana leaf and foil, it bakes

perfectly in the oven, emerging ridiculously moist and bathed in a bright, buttery broth, all without leaving a single lingering odor in your kitchen.

INGREDIENTS

2	whole tilapia <i>gutted, gilled, and scaled (about 1 1/2 to 2 lb total)</i>	1 med	ginger <i>peeled and minced</i>
1 large	banana leaf <i>thawed if frozen and wiped clean</i>	3 med	garlic <i>minced</i>
2 tbsp	tamarind soup base powder	1 tbsp	calamansi or lemon juice
2 large	Roma tomatoes <i>finely diced</i>	2 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>softened</i>
1 med	red onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 tsp	kosher salt
		1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

PREPARATION

- **Make the banana leaves pliable.**

If your banana leaves feel stiff or brittle, briefly pass them over a hot stove burner for about five seconds until they turn glossy and easily bend without tearing.

- **Chop the aromatics ahead of time.**

The tomato, onion, and ginger mixture can be diced and combined up to a day in advance and stored in the fridge, making the assembly completely effortless on a busy weeknight.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven and prepare the aromatic stuffing.

Preheat your oven to 400°F. In a medium bowl, aggressively toss together the diced tomatoes, red onion, minced ginger, garlic, and calamansi juice with the salt and pepper, chopping everything as finely as possible to maximize the volume you can pack into the fish.

2. Clean and deeply score the fish.

Rinse the tilapia under cold water to ensure the cavity is entirely clean of any remaining bloodline, then pat completely dry with paper towels. Using a sharp knife, make two to three deep diagonal slits across both sides of each fish, cutting straight down until the blade taps the bone.

3. Apply the tamarind dry rub.

Take the dry tamarind soup powder and rub it all over the exterior of both fish, packing it deep into the slits you just cut. Rub the remaining powder inside the belly cavity, then let the fish rest for 10 minutes to absorb the tangy cure.

4. Overstuff the fish until bursting.

Scoop the tomato-onion mixture and force it into the belly cavity of each fish. Don't be gentle; pack it in until the fish is literally bursting at the seams, pressing any extra stuffing into the exterior slits or reserving it for the top.

5. Wrap the fish tightly in banana leaves and foil.

Cut two large squares of heavy-duty aluminum foil and two slightly smaller squares of banana leaf. Smear a tablespoon of softened butter directly onto the center of each banana leaf, place a stuffed fish on top, wrap the leaf over it, and then fold and crimp the foil into a completely sealed, airtight pouch.

6. Bake and serve immediately.

Bake the foil packets on a baking sheet for 25 to 30 minutes, until the flesh is entirely opaque and flakes easily with a fork. Carefully open the packets to release the steam, and transfer the fish with all its rich, citrusy juices to a platter to be served alongside steaming white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Odor mitigation is built into the method.**

Baking the fish tightly sealed en papillote (in a foil pouch) traps all the steam and odorous compounds. It's the ultimate weeknight hack for cooking seafood indoors during the winter without your house smelling like a deep fryer.

- **Parchment paper works if banana leaves are scarce.**

While banana leaves impart an authentic, slightly smoky aroma that takes you straight back to the homeland, wrapping the fish in parchment paper inside the foil works perfectly well as a non-stick barrier to protect the delicate skin.

- **The tamarind dry rub is the true secret.**

While modern recipes often rely on generic umami seasoning packets, applying a dry sinigang (tamarind) mix instantly cures the flesh and injects a complex, sour depth that elevates this dish beyond a standard fish roast.



Chicken Inasal

ee-NAH-sal ngah mah-NOK

Forget the sweet soy-sauce-and-soda marinades of the global fast-food chains; true Bacolod inasal relies entirely on the aggressive tang of coconut vinegar, the floral hit of calamansi, and a heavy hand of pounded lemongrass. It is a savory, aromatic masterpiece forged over hot coals and bathed in liquid gold—a brilliant orange basting oil rendered from actual chicken fat and annatto seeds. This is the real deal, adapted for an American kitchen but sacrificing none of the unapologetic, sour-salty magic that built the legendary street stalls of the Visayas.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken leg quarters or thighs <i>excess skin and fat trimmed and reserved</i>	1 large head	garlic <i>peeled and smashed</i>
1 tbsp	coarse sea salt	1 med piece	fresh ginger <i>peeled and roughly chopped</i>
1/2 cup	coconut vinegar or apple cider vinegar	1 tbsp	brown sugar
1/4 cup	calamansi juice or equal parts lemon and lime juice	1 tsp	black pepper
4 med	fresh lemongrass stalks <i>tough outer layers removed, bottom pale parts smashed and roughly chopped</i>	1/2 cup	neutral cooking oil
		3 tbsp	annatto seeds
		3 small clove	garlic <i>smashed</i>

PREPARATION

- **Save the skin and fat trimmings.**

When trimming your chicken leg quarters or thighs, it is critical that you reserve every scrap of excess fat and skin; this is the literal foundation of the authentic chicken oil that makes or breaks the dish.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Score the chicken.**

Using a sharp knife, make 2 or 3 deep diagonal slits down to the bone on the meaty side of the chicken pieces to ensure the marinade penetrates deeply and the meat cooks evenly.

- 2. Pound the aromatics.**

Process or pound the lemongrass, the large head of smashed garlic, and the ginger in a mortar and pestle until it forms a rough, fragrant paste.

1. Build the canonical marinade.

In a large non-reactive bowl, combine the aromatic paste with the vinegar, calamansi juice, brown sugar, and black pepper, stirring until the sugar dissolves.

2. Marinate the chicken.

Massage the marinade thoroughly into the chicken, forcing it into the slits and under the skin, then cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours but no longer than 6 hours.

3. Render the chicken fat.

While the chicken marinates, place the saved chicken fat and skin trimmings into a cold wok or small saucepan over medium-low heat and let the fat slowly render for about 15 minutes until the skins become crispy.

4. Steep the annatto oil.

Remove the crispy skins, pour the neutral oil into the rendered chicken fat, turn off the heat, and stir in the annatto seeds and 3 small cloves of smashed garlic to steep for 15 minutes before straining.

5. Grill over the coals.

Prepare a two-zone charcoal grill and place the chicken skin-side up on the indirect heat side for 15 minutes, then move to direct heat, basting generously with the chicken annatto oil every 3 to 4 minutes until the skin is beautifully charred and the internal temperature reaches 165°F.

6. Serve immediately.

Serve hot alongside garlic rice, providing the remaining uncontaminated chicken annatto oil to pour directly over the rice and a saucer of spiced vinegar for dipping.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The busy weeknight oven method.**

To bypass the grill, preheat the oven to 400°F and roast the chicken on a wire rack set over a foil-lined baking sheet for 30 minutes, basting with the annatto oil every 10 minutes, then switch to the broiler for the final 3 to 5 minutes to achieve the essential street-side char.

- **Mind the marination window.**

Do not leave the chicken in this highly acidic bath overnight; the vinegar and calamansi will excessively break down the meat's enzymatic structure and ruin the texture.

- **Skip the soy sauce.**

If you are looking for soy sauce, put it away. True Bacolod inasal derives its vibrant color exclusively from the annatto basting oil, relying solely on vinegar and citrus to flavor the meat.



The Diaspora Pantry (Sawsawan & Essential Hacks)

A survival guide decoding the Filipino-American pantry, focusing on essential dipping sauces and clever ingredient substitutions.

The sawsawan isn't an afterthought; it's the final, indispensable act of cooking, performed by the eater right at the kitchen table. For the Filipino diaspora, building a pantry far from the motherland isn't about rigid, museum-glass authenticity. It's about survival. It's about scanning the aisles of a local strip-mall grocery and finding the precise alchemy of acid, salt, and funk necessary to conjure the ghost of Lola's kitchen on a busy Wednesday night.

This is a roadmap to the good stuff. It's an unapologetic arsenal of spiced suka, doctored bagoong, and sharp calamansi stand-ins that can transform an otherwise forgettable piece of fried pork into something profound. The ingredients might carry English labels, but the soul in the dipping bowl remains entirely, defiantly Filipino.





Toyomansi Pan-Seared Pork Chops

pree-tong bah-boy sah toh-yoh-mahn-see

If there is a scent that anchors a Filipino kid to an Ohio suburb on a Tuesday night, it is the sharp, undeniable hit of garlic and soy sauce hitting hot oil. Toyomansi is the ultimate utilitarian workhorse of the diaspora pantry—a seamless marriage of dark, salty soy sauce and the tart, floral slap of the Philippine lime. There are no culinary school flourishes here, just the pure, unadulterated intelligence of home cooking. A splash of liquid seasoning brings the deep, savory umami of a Manila country club, while a short, disciplined marinade ensures the acid tenderizes without turning the meat to mush. Keep it simple, sear it hard, and serve it with a mountain of rice.

INGREDIENTS

4 med	bone-in pork loin rib chops <i>cut 1/2-inch thick</i>	2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
1/2 cup	Filipino soy sauce	4 cup	steamed Jasmine rice
1/4 cup	pure calamansi juice	2 tbsp	Filipino soy sauce <i>for the dipping sauce</i>
6 med	garlic <i>peeled, smashed, and minced</i>	1 tbsp	pure calamansi juice <i>for the dipping sauce</i>
1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>	1 small	bird's eye chili <i>crushed</i>
1 tsp	granulated sugar	1 med	tomato <i>sliced</i>
1 tsp	Knorr Liquid Seasoning		

PREPARATION

- **Thaw the calamansi.**

If using frozen calamansi packets from the Asian market, run them under warm water until liquid before mixing.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Combine the marinade ingredients.**

In a wide bowl or resealable bag, whisk together the half cup of soy sauce, quarter cup of calamansi juice, minced garlic, black pepper, sugar, and liquid seasoning until the sugar dissolves.

- 2. Massage the meat.**

Add the pork chops to the marinade, massaging the liquid into the meat so every crevice is coated.

- 3. Marinate in the refrigerator.**

Let the meat rest for at least 30 minutes, but no longer than 4 hours. The aggressive acid of the calamansi will chemically cook the meat if left overnight, resulting in an unpleasantly mushy texture.

1. Dry the chops for the pan.

Remove the chops from the marinade 15 minutes before cooking. Wipe off any minced garlic—which will burn bitterly in the pan—and pat the meat thoroughly dry with paper towels.

2. Sear the pork.

Heat the neutral oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Carefully lay the pork chops in the pan, dropping them away from you to avoid splatters.

3. Build the crust.

Fry undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes to develop a deep, golden-brown caramelization. Flip and cook for another 2 to 3 minutes, until the internal temperature reaches 145°F.

4. Rest and serve.

Transfer the chops to a board and let them rest for 3 to 5 minutes. Serve immediately alongside steamed rice, sliced tomatoes, and a small side dish of the extra soy sauce, calamansi, and crushed chili.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not skip the bone.**

Bone-in chops are critical for flavor and moisture retention; avoid thick-cut steakhouse chops as the quick marinade will not penetrate them deeply enough.

● **Calamansi alternatives.**

If frozen pure calamansi packets are unavailable, Meyer lemon juice or a fifty-fifty mix of standard lemon and lime juice is a highly effective substitute.

● **Mind your soy sauce.**

Filipino soy sauce is darker and saltier than its Japanese counterparts. If you must use Kikkoman, add a small pinch of salt to the marinade to compensate.



Tokwa't Baboy with The Master Suka't Toyo

tohk-waht bah-boy

In Cavite, the true soul of this dish was born of necessity and indigenous curing methods, relying on pig's ears for a cartilaginous chew. For the modern diaspora kitchen, a rich slab of pork belly stands in brilliantly, offering tender, unctuous comfort against the sharp snap of deep-fried extra-firm tofu. The real secret lies not in the proteins but in the master sawsawan—a heavily fortified cane vinegar dressing that physically transforms everything it touches, provided you know the sacred rule: boil the vinegar, but never stir it.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	skin-on pork belly <i>left whole</i>	1 1/2 cup	cane vinegar
4 med cloves	garlic <i>smashed</i>	1/4 cup	soy sauce
1 small	yellow onion <i>quartered</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	brown sugar
2 med	dried bay leaves	1 tsp	kosher salt
1 tsp	whole black peppercorns	1/2 tsp	ground black pepper
1 tbsp	kosher salt	1/2 cup	pork broth <i>reserved from boiling the pork</i>
4 cup	water <i>or enough to submerge pork</i>	1 large	red onion <i>finely diced</i>
14 oz	extra-firm tofu <i>pressed and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	3 med cloves	garlic <i>minced</i>
1 1/2 cup	neutral cooking oil	3 med	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Drain and press the tofu to remove excess moisture.**

Wrap the block tightly in several layers of paper towels or a clean kitchen cloth, set a heavy skillet on top, and let it sit for 15 to 20 minutes. This ensures a crisp shell during frying and prevents dangerous oil splatters.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Submerge the pork belly in a pot with the smashed garlic, quartered onion, bay leaves, peppercorns, salt, and water.**

Bring to a rolling boil over high heat, skimming off any grayish scum, then reduce to low, cover, and simmer gently for 35 to 45 minutes until fork-tender.

- 1. Transfer the pork belly to a cutting board to dry, and reserve exactly one half cup of the clear pork broth.**

Allowing the meat to cool completely before slicing prevents it from shredding. Once cool to the touch, cut the pork into bite-sized half-inch cubes.
- 2. Fry the pressed, cubed tofu in 350°F oil until deeply golden brown and crusted with a hard shell.**

Work in batches to prevent the oil temperature from plummeting, which leads to soggy tofu. Transfer to a wire rack or paper towel-lined plate to drain.
- 3. Combine the reserved pork broth, vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, salt, and ground black pepper in a small saucepan and bring to a boil without stirring.**

This is the cardinal rule of Filipino vinegar sauces: do not stir the boiling liquid. Let it boil undisturbed for 3 to 5 minutes to cook off the harsh, raw edge of the acetic acid.
- 4. Toss the diced pork belly, crispy tofu, raw red onions, minced garlic, and chilies together in a large serving bowl.**

Pour the warm, cooked vinegar sauce over the top and toss gently so the porous tofu absorbs the master sawsawan before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Pork belly effortlessly bridges the gap between the traditional carinderia and the diaspora kitchen.**

While indigenous kulao relies on the cartilaginous snap of pig's ears, pork belly delivers the necessary unctuous fat to balance the sharp vinegar without requiring a trip to a specialty butcher.
- **Never stir raw vinegar until it boils.**

Stirring halts the evaporation of the acetic acid, leaving a metallic, overly aggressive sharpness. Let the heat do its job to mellow the sauce naturally.
- **The master sawsawan only improves with age.**

Store leftover sauce with its raw aromatics in a mason jar in the fridge for up to a week; it lightly pickles the onions and chilies, creating a formidable condiment for fried foods.



Express Crispy Tadyang with Mock Sinamak

Pulutan is a love language spelled out in rich, crispy plates of meat shared over cold beers and loud laughter. Crispy Tadyang ng Baka—deep-fried beef ribs—is the undisputed king of this genre, but Lola's traditional two-day method doesn't work for a Tuesday in Ohio. This adaptation enlists a pressure cooker to force star-anise and soy-soaked flavor into the beef in under an hour, followed by a quick freeze to ensure the meat survives the fryer. Because we are frying rich beef, a sawsawan is mandatory; a violently quick-infused "Mock Sinamak" cuts through the fat with a fiery bite that tastes exactly like a month-long fermentation in mere minutes.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/2 lb	English-cut bone-in beef short ribs	1 qt	neutral oil
1/2 cup	soy sauce	2 tbsp	cornstarch
1 large	white onion <i>roughly quartered</i>	1/4 cup	all-purpose flour
1 med	head garlic <i>smashed with skins left on</i>	1 1/2 cup	white cane vinegar
3 med	whole star anise	15 med	fresh Thai bird's eye chilies <i>stems removed</i>
4 med	dried bay leaves	1 med	fresh ginger <i>peeled and cut into thick coins</i>
1 tbsp	whole black peppercorns	6 med	garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>
2 tbsp	brown sugar	1/2 small	red onion <i>roughly chopped</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	1 tsp	whole black peppercorns
4 cup	water	1/2 tsp	kosher salt

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Violently smash the ginger, six peeled garlic cloves, and Thai chilies with the flat side of a knife to rupture their cell walls.**

Transfer the smashed aromatics, chopped red onion, one teaspoon of peppercorns, and a half teaspoon of salt to a heat-proof jar. Heat the cane vinegar in a small saucepan until just steaming—do not let it boil—and pour it over the aromatics, covering tightly to infuse at room temperature.

- 2. Combine the beef ribs, soy sauce, white onion, smashed head of garlic, star anise, bay leaves, tablespoon of peppercorns, brown sugar, one teaspoon of salt, and water in a pressure cooker.**

Ensure the water just barely covers the meat. Seal the lid and cook on high pressure for 40 minutes to force the deep, savory aromatics into the beef and break down the tough connective tissue.

- 1. Perform a quick pressure release, carefully remove the ribs with tongs, and place them directly in the freezer for 20 to 30 minutes.**
Do not skip this step. The meat is incredibly tender; freezing firms up the rendered fat and gelatin, locking the meat to the bone so it doesn't disintegrate in the hot oil.
- 2. Heat two inches of neutral oil in a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven to 350°F and fry the chilled ribs for two to four minutes per side.**
For an extra-shatteringly crisp exterior, lightly dust the ribs in a mixture of the cornstarch and flour before frying, tapping off the excess. Stand back and use a splatter screen, as the moisture in the beef will cause the oil to pop.
- 3. Drain the ribs on a wire rack and serve immediately alongside steamed white rice and the Mock Sinamak.**
The diner should pull the tender meat from the bone and dunk it generously into the spiced vinegar to cut the rich fat.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Keep a splatter screen handy when frying the ribs.**
Moisture from the braise will cause the hot oil to pop violently; thoroughly pat the ribs dry after chilling to mitigate the mess.
- **Do not skip the star anise.**
While often associated with Chinese cuisine, it is the non-negotiable bedrock of Filipino-Chinese dishes like Tadyang, giving the broth its canonical, slightly sweet aroma.



Granny Smith "Manggang Hilaw" Ensalada over Bagoong Fried Rice

If you ask any Filipino what cuts through the humid heat or a heavy meal, the answer is always the same: manggang hilaw at bagoong. It's a national pastime—aggressively sour, rock-hard green mango dipped in deeply funky, salty, fermented shrimp paste. For children of the diaspora, finding a genuinely unripe Carabao mango in a suburban American supermarket on a Tuesday is almost impossible. The solution passed down by resourceful grandmothers is brilliant: the Granny Smith apple. It possesses the exact acoustic crunch and mouth-puckering tartness needed to stand up to the umami bomb of garlic-

laced shrimp paste fried rice. This isn't a compromise; it's immigrant ingenuity at its finest, delivering the exact taste of home without a plane ticket.

INGREDIENTS

1 large	Granny Smith apple <i>peeled, cored, and cut into thin matchsticks</i>	4 oz	thick-cut bacon <i>cut into 1/2-inch pieces</i>
2 med	Roma tomatoes <i>cored and diced</i>	1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil
1/2 small	red onion <i>thinly sliced</i>	4 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>
1 tbsp	fresh lime juice	3 tbsp	bagoong guisado <i>store-bought sweetened or spicy sautéed shrimp paste</i>
1 tsp	fish sauce	2 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
4 cup	Jasmine white rice <i>cooked a day ahead, chilled, and grains separated</i>	1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>

PREPARATION

- **Plan ahead for perfect rice.**

You must use day-old rice for this to work. Freshly cooked rice retains too much moisture and will turn into a gelatinous mush when mixed with the heavy, oil-rich bagoong paste.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Macerate the diaspora ensalada.**

In a medium bowl, combine the apple, diced tomatoes, and sliced red onion.

Drizzle with the lime juice and fish sauce, toss gently, and let it sit on the counter.

The salt will draw out the tomato juices to create a natural, bright dressing while you cook the rice.

1. Render the pork fat.

Place a large wok or skillet over medium-high heat. Add the bacon and cook for 5 to 7 minutes until crispy and the fat has rendered. Remove the meat with a slotted spoon and set aside, leaving that precious fat in the pan. If your pork was very lean, add the neutral cooking oil here.

2. Make the egg ribbons.

Push the hot fat to one side and pour the beaten egg into a thin layer. Let it set like a crepe, flip it once, then remove it to a cutting board. Slice into thin ribbons and set aside.

3. Bloom the bagoong.

Lower the heat to medium. Add the minced garlic to the hot pork fat and sauté for 30 to 45 seconds until golden and nutty. Add the bagoong guisado directly into the garlic oil. Fry the paste for 1 minute until it bubbles, darkens slightly, and smells incredibly savory. This step is non-negotiable—it activates the oils and guarantees even coating.

4. Fry the rice.

Crumble the cold, day-old rice into the wok, breaking up any clumps with your hands. Turn the heat up to medium-high and toss vigorously for 3 to 4 minutes, pressing it against the sides and folding it over until every grain is steaming hot and evenly coated in the brownish-pink hue of the shrimp paste.

5. Assemble and serve.

Transfer the hot rice to a platter and top with the crispy pork bits and egg ribbons. Spoon the cold, juicy apple ensalada generously over the top, pouring any accumulated juices straight into the rice. Garnish with scallions.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Keep simple things simple.**

The key to any authentic Filipino sinangag is the garlic. It must be toasted in the oil until nutty and golden before you add anything else.

- **The perfect bite.**

Don't mix the whole platter together at once. Grab a scoop of the hot, umami-rich rice, and make sure you get a piece of the cold, sour apple and a bite of tomato on the exact same spoon. The contrast of hot and cold, salty and sour, is exactly what it tastes like at home.



Daikon "Achara" Relish

ah-CHAH-rahng lah-bah-NOHS

Growing up, the sharp, sweet smell of vinegar boiling on the stove meant a serious feast was imminent. Atchara is the ultimate Filipino palate cleanser—a bright, bracing pickle engineered to slice straight through the fatty glory of fried pork or savory longganisa. Out here in the diaspora, daikon radish steps in for green papaya, offering an immaculate, peppery crunch you can grab at any corner supermarket. The only secret that matters isn't some rare vine; it's patience and brute force. Salt the radish, let it sweat out the bitter sulfur, and wring it absolutely dry before it hits the brine. It's the real, unvarnished taste of a Manila kitchen, pulled off on a random Tuesday night.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	daikon radish <i>peeled and julienned</i>	1 1/2 cup	white cane vinegar
1 med	carrot <i>peeled and julienned</i>	1 cup	granulated white sugar
3 tbsp	kosher salt	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1/2 med	red bell pepper <i>cored, seeded, and thinly sliced</i>	1 tsp	whole black peppercorns
1/2 small	red onion <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>	4 clove	garlic <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>
1/4 cup	raisins	1 inch	fresh ginger <i>peeled and julienned</i>

PREPARATION

- **Deploy the mandoline.**

Don't spend an hour doing tedious knife work on a weeknight. Use a mandoline slicer to julienne the daikon and carrots in minutes, keeping the pieces uniform for an even, perfect pickle.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Salt and sweat the vegetables to draw out their bitterness.**

Toss the julienned daikon and carrot in a large bowl with the 3 tablespoons of kosher salt. Massage it in with your hands, then walk away for 45 minutes to let osmosis do the heavy lifting.

- 2. Rinse the vegetables and wring them completely dry.**

Transfer the vegetables to a colander and rinse thoroughly under cold water to wash away the salt. Grab handfuls and squeeze aggressively—or twist them in a clean kitchen towel—until they feel like a dry sponge, then toss in a bowl with the bell pepper, onion, and raisins.

1. Simmer the sweet and sour brine without stirring.

In a non-reactive saucepan, combine the vinegar, sugar, remaining 1/2 teaspoon of salt, and peppercorns over medium-high heat. Let it come to a gentle simmer undisturbed to honor tradition, stirring only at the very end to ensure the sugar is fully dissolved.

2. Steep the aromatics in the warm liquid.

Turn off the heat and immediately drop in the garlic and ginger. Let them sit for 5 minutes to mellow their raw bite, then allow the brine to cool until it is merely warm to the touch.

3. Pack the jars and let the flavors mature.

Stuff the dry vegetable mixture tightly into two clean glass jars and pour the warm brine over the top until completely submerged. Let them cool, seal tight, and stash in the fridge for at least 24 hours before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Squeeze like you mean it.**

If your atchara ends up watery or overly pungent, you didn't squeeze the daikon hard enough. It needs to be entirely wrung out so it acts like a sponge ready to absorb the sweet vinegar brine.

● **Respect the temperature.**

Never pour boiling hot brine over the vegetables, or you'll cook the crunch right out of them. Warm to the touch is exactly what you want.



Sardine Lumpiang

loom-pyang sar-dee-nas

This is the ultimate testament to the magic of the diaspora pantry. When budgets were tight or a typhoon kept everyone indoors, Lola didn't panic—she reached for a can of Ligo sardines. But she didn't just heat them up; she transformed them. By thoroughly draining the fish, binding it with sharp aromatics, and rolling it in a paper-thin wrapper, she turned a humble canned good into a blistering, shattering-crisp feast. The real secret here—the trick that separates authentic home cooking from cheap internet approximations—is the sauce. You save that leftover tomato canning liquid, brighten it with citrus, and thicken

it into a savory sawsawan. It is a zero-waste masterpiece that is deeply comforting, practically free, and takes less than thirty minutes on a Tuesday night. This is what home tastes like.

INGREDIENTS

310 g	sardines in tomato sauce <i>drained, with the tomato sauce reserved</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 small	red onion <i>very finely minced</i>	15	spring roll wrappers <i>thawed under a damp towel</i>
3 small	garlic <i>smashed and minced</i>	2 cup	neutral cooking oil <i>for frying</i>
1 med	carrot <i>peeled and grated</i>	1/4 cup	water
3 tbsp	Chinese celery <i>finely chopped</i>	1 tbsp	calamansi or lemon juice <i>freshly squeezed</i>
1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>	1 tsp	granulated sugar
3 tbsp	all-purpose flour	1 tsp	cornstarch <i>dissolved in 1 tbsp cold water</i>

PREPARATION

- **Protect your wrappers from the air.**

Spring roll pastry dries out and cracks in mere minutes. Keep the stack covered with a slightly damp paper towel while you work to maintain their pliability.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Extract the tomato sauce from the sardines without rinsing the fish.**

Place a fine-mesh strainer over a small saucepan and empty the canned sardines into it. Gently press the fish with the back of a spoon to squeeze out as much of the red tomato sauce as possible, setting the liquid aside in the saucepan for your dipping sauce.

1. Mix the flaked fish with the binders and aromatics.

Transfer the drained sardines to a mixing bowl and flake them gently with a fork, taking care not to mash them into a complete paste. Fold in the onion, garlic, grated carrot, Chinese celery, beaten egg, flour, and black pepper until the mixture is thick and cohesive.

2. Roll the sardine mixture tightly in the spring roll wrappers.

Lay a wrapper flat like a diamond and place one to one-and-a-half tablespoons of filling in the lower third. Fold the bottom point over the filling, tuck the sides in like an envelope, and roll upward tightly, sealing the final point with a dab of water on your fingertip.

3. Simmer and thicken the reserved tomato sauce for the sawsawan.

Place the saucepan with the reserved tomato liquid over medium heat, stirring in the water, citrus juice, and sugar. Once simmering, whisk in the cornstarch slurry and stir for about a minute until the sauce becomes glossy and thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.

4. Fry the lumpia in batches until deeply golden and blistered.

Heat about an inch of neutral oil in a heavy-bottomed skillet or Dutch oven to 350°F. Carefully slide four to five rolls into the hot oil seam-side down, frying for four to five minutes and turning occasionally, before transferring them to a wire rack to drain.

5. Serve immediately alongside the warm sawsawan.

These are best enjoyed shattering-crisp, ideally paired with a steaming bowl of jasmine rice to soak up the extra sauce.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Mimicking the aroma of authentic Chinese celery.**

If you cannot find kinchay at your local Asian market, do not omit it entirely. Mince two tablespoons of standard Western celery and mix it with one tablespoon of chopped fresh cilantro or flat-leaf parsley to neutralize the brininess of the canned fish.

- **Wrapper selection is strictly non-negotiable.**

Avoid thick Chinese egg roll wrappers or Vietnamese rice paper entirely. Seek out frozen, paper-thin wheat-based spring roll pastry to achieve the shattering crispness characteristic of authentic lutong bahay.