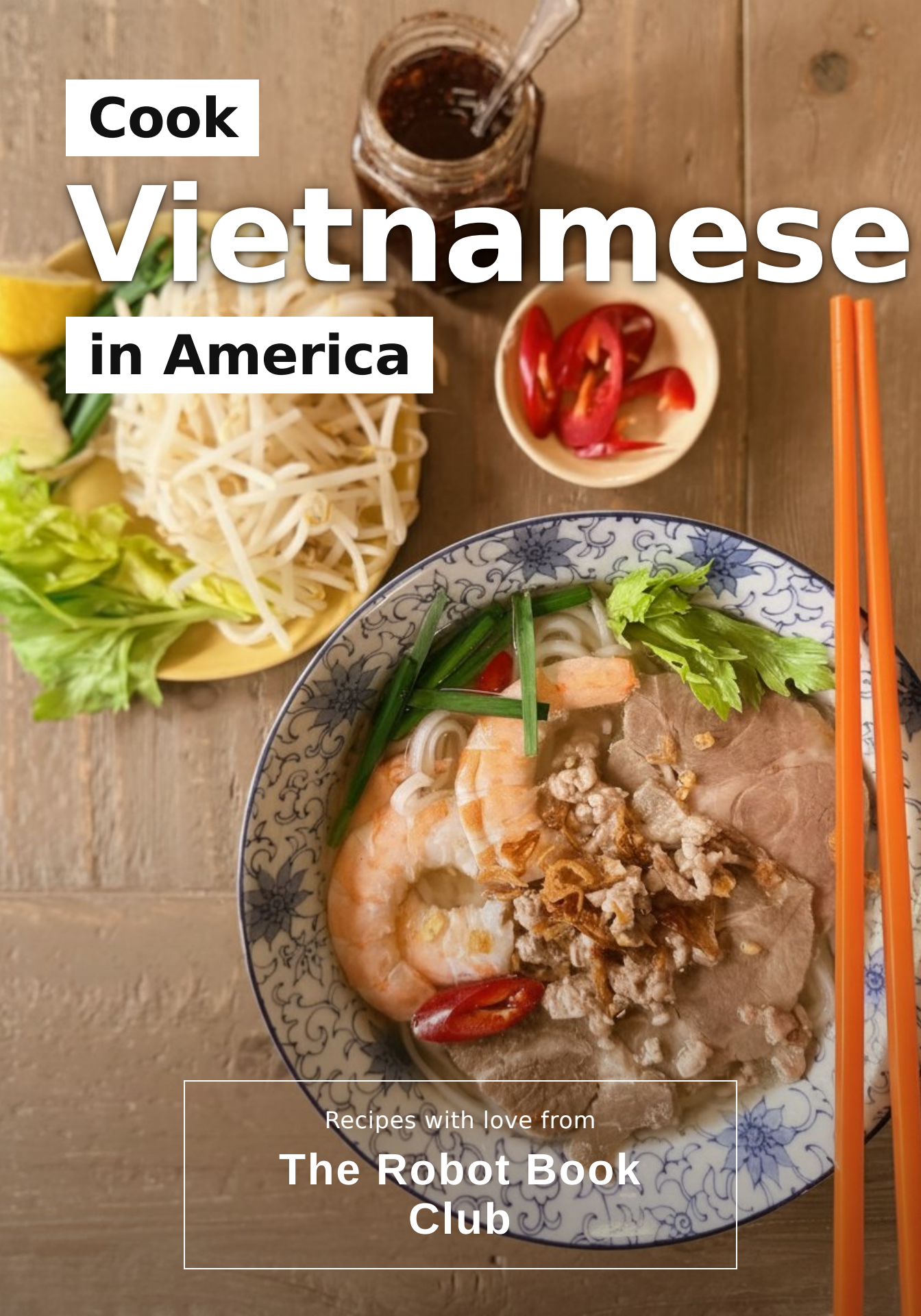


**Cook**

# Vietnamese

**in America**



Recipes with love from

**The Robot Book  
Club**

# **Cook Vietnamese in America**

*Authentic Vietnamese Home Cooking with Everyday Ingredients*

The Robot Book Club

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*Published by 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: Vietnamese Home Cooking.

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

— Ted Benson

# Prologue

For the children of immigrants, especially those raised far from the humid clamor of the homeland, food often serves as the last, most visceral tether. The aromatic ghost of fermented fish sauce, the sharp whisper of bruised lemongrass, the comforting heft of rice in a bowl – these are not just flavors. They are memories. A truth. A connection to a past that, for many, exists only in the mind’s eye or the grandmother’s kitchen.

That kitchen, a universe of intuition and memory, now often clashes with the tyranny of the American weeknight. Time is short. Resources are different. The deep, slow art of making *Thịt Kho* from scratch, the nuanced balance of a perfect *Nước Chấm*, these can feel like relics from another life, another land, impossible to reconcile with school pickups and deadlines. Yet, the memory persists. The craving demands satisfaction.

This book understands. It is not an academic treatise. Nor is it some bland, performative approximation. This is a collection forged in the fertile ground between the ancestral hearth and the fluorescent aisles of the local Asian market. It’s for the cook who knows the difference, who craves the real thing, who wants the honest, unadulterated flavors without needing a passport or a time machine. This is for the first generation, raising the next, to keep those tastes alive.

Here, the old ways meet the new reality. Authentic techniques are honed for efficiency. Foundational ingredients, once exotic, now sit readily on shelves, waiting to be transformed into something deeply familiar. No compromise on flavor. No apologies for the pungent, the sour, the sweet, the spicy dance of *Ngũ vị*.

You won't find mere recipes here. You'll discover the architectural framework of a Vietnamese life. The morning ritual of *Ăn Sáng*. The communal, comforting rhythm of *Mâm Cơm Gia Đình*. The healing hand of *Khi Ốm Đau*. The vibrant, interactive spirit of *Cuối* weekends. And at its heart, *Linh Hồn Việt*, the essential sauces that are the very soul of the cuisine.

This is a preservation project. A defiant act of flavor, born of necessity and fueled by love. It's for keeping the smells alive. For sharing stories. For ensuring that the taste of home, unapologetic and profound, endures on every table, no matter where it stands. This is Vietnamese food, cooked in America.





# Ăn Sáng: Vietnamese Morning Rituals

*Authentic morning meals balancing complex flavors to start the day, from slow weekend broths to quick weekday baguettes.*

A proper Vietnamese morning doesn't involve cold milk or boxed cereal. It demands action. It's the dark, narcotic drip of robusta through a tin phin, the unapologetic hiss of an egg hitting a hot pan, and the aggressive crackle of a freshly torn baguette. Out in the diaspora, morning operates on two distinct speeds.

There is the slow, reverent devotion of a weekend pot of phở, where beef bones are forced to yield their secrets over a low, steady flame. Then there is the ruthless, beautiful efficiency of a Tuesday: runny yolks bleeding into Maggi

seasoning, or a tight, savory bundle of sticky rice grabbed on the way out the door. No compromises. Just the essential, uncompromising fuel required to face the world.





# Bò Né

*baw neh*

If Phở is the quiet, meditative morning walk of Vietnamese breakfasts, Bò Né is the loud, unapologetic alarm clock. Translating to 'dodging beef'—a fair warning for the sputtering butter as the cast-iron hits the table—this is the ultimate Vietnamese-French diner food. You don't need a pricey ribeye to make it sing; the grandmother's trick of a quick oil and cornstarch marinade velvets an affordable supermarket sirloin until it melts. Drag a crusty baguette through the glorious, savory fat left behind by the beef, a sunny-side-up egg, and rich liver pâté, and you're eating like a king on a Tuesday morning.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>10 oz</b>	sirloin or top loin steak <i>sliced 1/4-inch thick against the grain</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>1 tbsp</b>	soy sauce	<b>1 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter
<b>1 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce	<b>1/4 med</b>	yellow onion <i>very thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>1 large</b>	egg
<b>2 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	hot dog or mild smoked sausage <i>scored diagonally</i>
<b>4 tsp</b>	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>	<b>1 1/2 oz</b>	liver pâté
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	cornstarch	<b>1 med</b>	French baguette or bolillo roll <i>warmed</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	toasted sesame seeds	<b>2 small</b>	fresh cilantro

## PREPARATION

- **Always slice your beef against the grain.**

This shortens the muscle fibers, which is critical for ensuring a tender chew on weeknight supermarket cuts.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Massage the soy sauce, oyster sauce, sugar, garlic, one teaspoon of oil, cornstarch, sesame seeds, and black pepper into the sliced beef.**

The oil and cornstarch create a velvety barrier that locks in moisture, a grandmother's trick to tenderize affordable cuts. Let it sit at room temperature for 15 to 20 minutes.

- 2. Crack the egg into a small ramekin and have your sliced onions, scored sausage, and pâté ready by the stove.**

Bò Né moves incredibly fast once the fire is on, so having your ingredients staged is non-negotiable.

- 1. Place a cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat until it begins to lightly smoke, then add the remaining tablespoon of oil followed immediately by the butter.**

The oil prevents the butter from burning instantly while maintaining that essential, rich dairy aroma.

- 2. Toss in the thinly sliced onions to sizzle for 30 seconds, then add the marinated beef in a single layer to sear undisturbed for 60 seconds.**

Once a crust develops, flip the beef pieces and immediately push them to one side of the pan.

- 3. Drop the scored sausage onto the bare iron and carefully pour the egg into the buttery juices on the other side.**

Cook just until the egg whites are mostly set but the yolk remains completely runny, about 1 to 2 minutes. The beef should still be medium-rare in the center.

- 4. Turn off the heat, nestle the pâté directly into the pan to warm through, and garnish with fresh cilantro.**

Bring the entire sizzling skillet to the table—warning everyone to 'né' or dodge the splatters—and dig in immediately with torn pieces of warm baguette.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **You can use a standard heavy-bottomed skillet if you lack individual cast-iron fajita pans.**

Cook the entire batch in your largest skillet, then slide the beef, onions, and eggs onto warm ceramic plates. You lose the tableside acoustics, but the authentic flavor profile remains exactly the same.



# Bánh Cuốn Bằng Bánh Tráng

*bahn kwuhn bahng bahn chahng*

The traditional morning ritual of making bánh cuốn demands soaking rice, grinding a fermented batter, and standing over a steaming pot for hours. This isn't that. This is the diaspora secret for a busy Tuesday in the suburbs. By slipping a splash of vinegar into a warm hydration bath, store-bought rice paper transforms, perfectly mimicking the delicate, sour tang of the real thing. It's practical, it's uncompromising, and it tastes exactly like the bustling Hanoi street corner you remember.

## INGREDIENTS

**1/2 lb** ground pork

**1/2 cup** dried wood ear mushrooms

<b>1 med</b>	shallot <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1</b>	rice paper
<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	<b>package</b>	
<b>4 med</b>	cloves garlic <i>finely minced, divided</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	white vinegar
<b>4 tbsp</b>	fish sauce <i>divided</i>	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>3 1/2 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar <i>divided</i>	<b>2 small</b>	bird's eye chilies <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1/2 lb</b>	chả lụa <i>cut into thick matchsticks</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon	<b>1 cup</b>	bean sprouts <i>blanched</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral oil <i>divided</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	cucumber <i>julienned</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh mixed herbs <i>roughly chopped</i>
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	crispy fried shallots

## PREPARATION

- **Hydrate the mushrooms.**

Submerge the dried wood ear mushrooms in warm water for 15 to 20 minutes until fully expanded, then trim any woody stems and mince finely.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Mix the dipping sauce.**

Whisk 9 tablespoons of warm water with 3 tablespoons of the sugar until dissolved, then stir in 3 tablespoons of the fish sauce, the lime juice, half the minced garlic, and the chilies. Set aside to let the flavors mingle.

- 2. Sauté the aromatics and pork.**

Heat 1 tablespoon of the neutral oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Fry the shallot and remaining garlic for 30 seconds until fragrant, then add the pork, breaking it apart until it crumbles finely and begins to brown.

**1. Finish the savory filling.**

Stir the minced mushrooms and diced yellow onion into the pork along with the remaining 1 tablespoon of fish sauce, remaining 1/2 teaspoon of sugar, black pepper, and bouillon. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes until the liquid evaporates, then remove from the heat.

**2. Prepare the hydration bath.**

In a wide, shallow dish, mix 4 cups of warm water with the remaining 1 tablespoon of neutral oil and the white vinegar. The acid is the secret trick here—it mimics the fermented aroma of traditional batter.

**3. Bloom the rice paper.**

Submerge the rice paper sheets one by one into the bath. Let them soak for 1 to 5 minutes until pliable and slightly opaque, being careful not to let them turn to mush.

**4. Assemble the rolls.**

Lay a softened sheet flat on a lightly oiled plate or board. Spoon 1 1/2 tablespoons of filling in a horizontal line across the lower third, fold the sides in slightly, and roll it up tightly from the bottom. Place on an oiled, heat-proof plate.

**5. Steam to perfection.**

Set a steamer basket over boiling water, place the plate of rolls inside, cover, and steam for 3 to 5 minutes. The steam gelatinizes the starches, transforming the chewy wrapper into a soft, pillowy noodle sheet.

**6. Garnish and serve.**

Transfer the hot rolls to individual plates and snip them into bite-sized pieces with kitchen shears. Pile high with chả lụa, bean sprouts, cucumber, herbs, and fried shallots, then drench heavily in the dipping sauce.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The weeknight microwave hack.**

If you don't have a steamer basket, simply cover your plate of assembled rolls with a damp paper towel and microwave on high for 1 to 2 minutes. The result is slightly chewier but undeniably fast.

- **Wrapper selection matters.**

Choose a thicker rice paper with some tapioca starch. They maintain better structural integrity during soaking and steaming without disintegrating into a paste.



# Bánh Mì Ốp La

*bahn mee op la*

While the West leans heavily on bacon and eggs, the working-class Vietnamese morning ritual is defined by the sharp crackle of a baguette, a rich smear of liver pate, and the distinct, savory punch of Maggi seasoning hitting a hot, runny yolk. Born from French colonialism and perfected on the roaring, smoke-filled streets of 1950s Saigon, this sandwich is a masterclass in culinary assimilation. Unpretentious and highly accessible, it serves as the ultimate low-effort weeknight dinner or a deeply comforting lazy Sunday breakfast.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 med</b>	individual baguettes or bolillos <i>sliced lengthwise and lightly hollowed out</i>	<b>1 handful</b>	fresh cilantro <i>stems and leaves left whole</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	unsalted butter or mayonnaise	<b>1 med</b>	jalapeño or bird's eye chili <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	pork liver pate	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1/4 cup</b>	pickled daikon and carrots	<b>4 large</b>	eggs
<b>1/2 med</b>	English cucumber <i>thinly sliced lengthwise</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	Maggi Seasoning
		<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper

## PREPARATION

- **Make sure your vegetables and bread are prepped before the eggs hit the pan.**  
Timing is everything here; the eggs must move straight from the hot skillet into the waiting sandwich so the yolk can be eaten at its absolute peak temperature.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Prepare the bread canvas.**  
Lightly toast the baguettes until the crust is warm and shatters to the touch, then smear a generous layer of pate on the bottom halves and butter or mayonnaise on the top.
- 2. Lay down the fresh crunch.**  
Layer the cucumber slices, pickled daikon and carrots, cilantro, and chili directly onto the pate-smear side of the bread.
- 3. Fry the eggs for crispy edges and a runny yolk.**  
Heat the oil in a non-stick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering, then crack the eggs in and let them fry undisturbed for 1 to 2 minutes. Do not flip them; if the whites near the yolk are undercooked, briefly cover the pan with a lid for 30 to 45 seconds.

## 1. **Finish with a splash of Maggi.**

Carefully slide the hot, lacy eggs onto the vegetable bed inside the baguettes, immediately dash the Maggi seasoning over the warm yolks, and hit them with cracked black pepper before closing the sandwich.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Bread Cheat.**

Authentic Vietnamese baguettes use a percentage of rice flour for an ethereal, light texture. Because American bakeries rarely make this, the grandmother's trick is to buy a standard hero roll or bolillo, cut it open, and literally pluck out some of the dense white bread in the center to create a trench for the fillings.

- **The Soy Sauce Rule.**

Not all soy sauce is created equal. Maggi seasoning provides the distinct, slightly meaty umami that specifically defines a Vietnamese breakfast. If you want the real taste of Saigon, accept no generic substitutes.

- **The Skillet Hack.**

For an elevated weekend ritual, skip the sandwich format entirely. Fry the eggs in a small personal cast-iron skillet with a spoonful of pate, serve it sizzling at the table splashed with Maggi, and use torn pieces of baguette to dip directly into the pan.



# Miến Gà

*mee-en gah*

When you wake up in Hanoi, the air doesn't smell like phở—it smells like miến gà. It is an exercise in pure, unadulterated comfort: a crystalline broth steeped with charred ginger, carrying slippery mung bean noodles and the snappy bite of impeccably poached chicken. Where other soups rely on a cacophony of spices, this one relies on technique, demanding little more than a gentle simmer and the grandmother's trick of an immediate ice bath to shock the chicken skin. It is a morning ritual that cures whatever ails you, built for real life and completely achievable on a Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 lb</b>	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs	<b>8 oz</b>	dried mung bean glass noodles
<b>1 tbsp</b>	coarse kosher salt <i>plus extra for cleaning</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	dried shiitake mushrooms <i>soaked in hot water until plump, then sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	white vinegar	<b>1/2 cup</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground turmeric	<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 large</b>	yellow onion <i>unpeeled and halved</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	Vietnamese coriander <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>3 inch</b>	fresh ginger <i>sliced in half lengthwise</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	crispy fried shallots
<b>10 cup</b>	cold water	<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder	<b>1 med</b>	lime <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	rock sugar	<b>2 med</b>	Thai chilies <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fish sauce		

## PREPARATION

- **Clean the chicken thoroughly by rubbing the skin with coarse salt and vinegar.** This neutralizes raw poultry odors and ensures a pristine broth; rinse thoroughly with cold water and rub with a tiny pinch of turmeric if you want a vibrant golden skin.
- **Char the onion and ginger until the outsides are deeply blackened and fragrant.** Use an oven broiler or hold them directly over a gas stove flame with tongs for 5 to 10 minutes, then rinse off the loose, flaky ash under the tap while leaving the deep char intact.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bring the prepared chicken, charred aromatics, and cold water to a boil, then meticulously skim the foam.**

Starting with cold water slowly draws out the essence of the bird. Once it boils, aggressively skim off the murky foam to keep the broth perfectly clear.

- 2. Simmer the broth gently for twenty minutes.**

Reduce the heat to the lowest setting, add the chicken bouillon, rock sugar, and salt, then cover the pot with the lid slightly cracked so it barely bubbles.

- 3. Plunge the cooked chicken immediately into an ice bath for five minutes.**

This thermal shock is the ultimate grandmother's trick to halt cooking instantly and tighten the skin, creating the signature bouncy, snappy texture.

- 4. Shred the cooled chicken meat from the bones and return the bones to the pot.**

Toss in the rehydrated, sliced shiitake mushrooms and let the broth simmer for another fifteen minutes to extract the last bit of flavor, stirring in the fish sauce right before turning off the heat.

- 5. Soak the glass noodles in warm tap water until soft, then quickly blanch them in a separate pot of boiling water.**

Never boil glass noodles directly in the soup or they will release starch and turn to mush; soak them for 10 to 15 minutes, then blanch in rapidly boiling water for just 60 seconds and drain immediately.

- 6. Assemble the bowls with noodles, shredded chicken, and boiling broth, then garnish generously.**

Top each bowl with scallions, cilantro, Vietnamese coriander, a spoonful of fried shallots, and black pepper, serving immediately with lime wedges and chilies on the side.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing the right noodles is critical.**

Look for dried mung bean or canna root threads, often labeled as 'Bean Thread Noodles' or 'Glass Noodles'. Do not substitute Korean sweet potato noodles (dangmyeon), which are too thick and chewy for this delicate soup.

- **Shiitake mushrooms are a pragmatic swap for traditional bamboo shoots.**

Authentic Northern recipes often use dried bamboo shoots (măng khô), which require days of soaking and boiling. Rehydrated shiitake mushrooms deliver similar umami depth in a fraction of the time and effort.

- **The ice bath cannot be skipped.**

If the chicken cools at room temperature, carryover cooking turns the skin flabby. The immediate drop in temperature ensures a snappy, perfect bite.



# Súp Nui Sườn Heo

*soop noo-ee suh-uhn heh-oh*

This is the ultimate expression of Vietnamese home cooking, the kind of quiet, deeply comforting bowl you will never find on a restaurant menu. It is the morning ritual a grandmother produces to feed a family before the day begins, built on a pristine, naturally sweet broth coaxed from pork ribs and earthy root vegetables. It is unpretentious, entirely kid-friendly, and relies on simple technique—like an aggressive five-minute parboil of the bones—to achieve a clarity of flavor that tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 1/2 lb** pork spare riblets  
*cut laterally into 1.5-inch strips*

**1 small** yellow onion  
*peeled and left whole*

<b>1 med</b>	ginger <i>peeled and lightly smashed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	high quality fish sauce
<b>2 med</b>	carrots <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch rounds</i>	<b>8 oz</b>	Vietnamese rice macaroni or elbow pasta
<b>1 small</b>	daikon radish <i>peeled, halved lengthwise, and cut into 1/2-inch half-moons</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>10 cup</b>	water	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt <i>plus extra for parboiling</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>chopped</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	chicken or pork bouillon powder	<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	rock sugar	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fried shallots

## PREPARATION

- **Prep the vegetables before starting the broth.**

Peel and cut the carrots and daikon, and slice the scallions and cilantro before you begin cooking so the final assembly is seamless.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Parboil the ribs vigorously in salted water to ensure a crystal-clear broth.**

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil, add a heavy pinch of salt, and drop in the pork ribs for 3 to 5 minutes. Drain the ribs into the sink and wash them aggressively under cold running water to scrub away any coagulated blood or impurities, then wash the pot itself.

- 2. Simmer the cleaned ribs with the aromatics to build the foundational soup.**

Return the clean ribs to the pot with 10 cups of fresh water, the whole onion, and the smashed ginger. Bring to a boil, immediately reduce to a lazy simmer, skim any residual foam, and stir in the salt, bouillon, and rock sugar, letting it cook for 45 to 50 minutes.

- 1. Remove the spent aromatics and add the root vegetables in the final stretch.**  
Carefully fish out and discard the onion and ginger, then drop in the carrots and daikon. Simmer for another 15 to 20 minutes until the vegetables are easily pierced with a fork but still hold their structure.
- 2. Boil the macaroni separately with a splash of oil and shock it cold to prevent a mushy ruin.**  
While the vegetables cook, boil the macaroni in a separate pot with the cooking oil until slightly past al dente. Drain it immediately and run it under cold water to wash away the surface starches, ensuring bouncy, individual noodles.
- 3. Remove the broth from the heat before stirring in the fish sauce.**  
Turn off the stove entirely and stir in the fish sauce. Never boil fish sauce for a long period, as doing so destroys its delicate aromas and turns the broth unpleasantly sour.
- 4. Assemble the bowls by warming the cold noodles with the boiling broth.**  
Divide the cooked macaroni among large bowls and distribute the pork ribs, carrots, and daikon over the top. Ladle the steaming hot, clear broth over the pasta to warm it through, then garnish generously with scallions, cilantro, black pepper, and crispy fried shallots.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the parboil.**  
Boiling the ribs for five minutes and scrubbing them clean is the non-negotiable secret to a pristine, professional-tasting soup. Skipping this leaves the broth cloudy and tasting of impure blood.
- **Store the broth and noodles separately.**  
Never store leftover pasta inside the broth. It will act like a sponge overnight, soaking up all the liquid and turning into an unappetizing paste.

- **The Instant Pot weeknight hack.**

After the 5-minute stovetop parboil, transfer the clean ribs, aromatics, and seasonings to an Instant Pot with the water. Cook on High Pressure for 20 minutes, manually release, then use the Saute function to boil the root vegetables for 10 minutes until soft.



# Bún Mọc

*boon mawk*

To a first-generation kid growing up in the American suburbs, weekend mornings didn't smell like pancakes; they smelled like simmering pork broth. While Phở hogs the spotlight and demands an entire Sunday to execute, Bún Mọc is its deeply practical, profoundly comforting Northern cousin. A crystal-clear pork broth extracts its magic in just an hour, setting the stage for the real star: bouncy meatballs of raw pork paste and wood ear mushrooms. Back in Hanoi, grandmothers pounded that pork by hand before dawn. Today, your secret weapon is a frozen tub of giò sống from the local Asian market.

It bridges the gap between exacting ancestral standards and the reality of a modern weeknight, yielding an uncompromising, authentic taste of the homeland without the punishing labor.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>2 lb</b>	pork spare ribs <i>cut crosswise into 1 1/2-inch strips</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	shallot <i>finely minced</i>
<b>1 lb</b>	pork marrow bones	<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
<b>1 med</b>	yellow onion <i>peeled and halved</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	premium fish sauce
<b>3 large</b>	shallots <i>unpeeled</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	dried round rice vermicelli noodles
<b>2 tsp</b>	sea salt <i>plus extra for parboiling</i>	<b>1/2 lb</b>	Vietnamese pork roll <i>sliced into thin half-moons</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	rock sugar	<b>4 med</b>	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	premium fish sauce	<b>1 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fried shallots
<b>1 lb</b>	frozen raw pork paste <i>thawed overnight in the refrigerator</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	fresh bean sprouts
<b>1/2 cup</b>	dried wood ear mushrooms <i>rehydrated and finely minced</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	Thai basil
<b>6 med</b>	dried shiitake mushrooms <i>rehydrated, half finely minced and half left whole</i>	<b>2 med</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Rehydrate the dried wood ear and shiitake mushrooms before you begin cooking.**

Soak them in warm water for 20 to 30 minutes until fully softened. Trim any hard stems, finely mince all the wood ear mushrooms, and mince half of the shiitakes, leaving the rest whole.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Purge the pork bones of impurities to ensure a crystal-clear broth.**

Place the ribs and marrow bones in a large stockpot, cover with cold water, add a heavy pinch of salt, and boil vigorously for 5 minutes. Dump the entire pot into the sink and meticulously wash the bones under cold running water, scrubbing off any coagulated bits, then wash the pot clean.

**2. Blister the onion and whole shallots over an open flame or under the broiler.**

Char them until deeply blackened and fragrant, about 5 to 7 minutes, then peel away the burnt outer skins of the shallots.

**3. Return the washed bones to the clean pot with fresh water and the charred aromatics to begin the extraction.**

Add 3 quarts of cold water, bring to a gentle boil, and immediately drop the heat to a bare simmer. Leave the pot uncovered. Add the salt and rock sugar, diligently skimming any white foam that rises for the first 20 minutes, and simmer gently for 1 hour.

**4. Aggressively combine the thawed pork paste with the minced mushrooms to activate the proteins.**

In a bowl, mix the thawed raw pork paste, minced wood ear mushrooms, minced shiitakes, minced shallot, black pepper, and 1 teaspoon of fish sauce. Use a sturdy spoon to smack and smear the paste against the side of the bowl for two solid minutes to build that signature bouncy texture.

**5. Drop tablespoon-sized spheres of the pork paste into the gently simmering broth.**

At the one-hour mark, discard the onion and whole shallots from the broth, and toss in the reserved whole shiitake mushrooms. Dip two spoons in cold water to prevent sticking, shape the paste into rustic meatballs, and drop them directly into the pot; they are cooked through when they float to the surface and swell slightly, about 8 to 10 minutes.

**1. Season the finished broth with fish sauce and bouillon powder.**

Stir in 2 tablespoons of fish sauce and the chicken bouillon. Taste it—it should be slightly saltier than you ultimately want, as the plain noodles will balance it out in the bowl.

**2. Boil the vermicelli according to the package, then rinse vigorously under cold water.**

Rinsing stops the cooking process and strips away excess surface starch. Shake off the water and let them sit for 10 minutes to dry out and become slightly tacky.

**3. Divide the noodles, top with the meats, and drown in boiling hot broth.**

Arrange the tender ribs, meatballs, and slices of pork roll over the noodles. Ladle the broth generously, ensuring the noodles are submerged, and garnish heavily with scallions, cilantro, and fried shallots. Serve immediately with the fresh table herbs and a side of chili-spiked fish sauce.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not attempt to make the pork paste from scratch on a weeknight.**

Buying frozen giò sống from an Asian market isn't cheating; it's exactly what busy households in modern Vietnam do. It delivers perfect texture and saves hours of laborious pounding.

● **Avoid the temptation to use an Instant Pot for this broth.**

A pressure cooker boils violently, emulsifying fats and impurities into the liquid. Bún Mộc demands a crystal-clear, clean-tasting broth, which can only be achieved with an uncovered, gentle simmer.



# Mì Khô Xá Xíu

*mee koh sah see-ew*

The magic of a Ho Chi Minh City morning isn't found in a quiet sunrise, but in the unapologetic clatter of noodle stalls and the scent of caramelized pork. This is the definitive dry noodle bowl, an exercise in textural genius passed down from Sino-Vietnamese grandmothers. The secret lies not in elusive ingredients, but in canonical technique: the violent thermal shock of a boil-ice-boil bath that guarantees a fiercely chewy noodle, and a quick skillet braise that yields sticky, sweet char siu on a Tuesday night. It is practical, deeply comforting, and requires a shattered crown of crispy pork fat to be entirely perfect.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 cup</b>	low-sodium chicken or pork broth	<b>1/2 cup</b>	coconut water or water
<b>2 tbsp</b>	dried shrimp <i>briefly toasted in a dry pan</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	trimmed pork fat <i>finely diced</i>
<b>1 med piece</b>	daikon radish or sweet onion <i>peeled</i>	<b>2 med</b>	shallot <i>finely minced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>3 small clove</b>	garlic <i>finely minced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	salt	<b>3 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce
<b>1 lb</b>	pork shoulder <i>cut into 2-inch thick strips, excess fat trimmed and reserved</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	light soy sauce
<b>2 small clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	dark soy sauce
<b>1 tbsp</b>	light soy sauce	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sugar
<b>1 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce	<b>2 tbsp</b>	water or broth
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	honey or brown sugar	<b>1 tsp</b>	sesame oil
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	Chinese five-spice powder	<b>1 lb</b>	fresh Chinese egg noodles <i>shaken vigorously to remove excess starch</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>2 cup</b>	fresh bean sprouts
		<b>1 med bunch</b>	fresh garlic chives <i>cut into 2-inch pieces</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Marinate the pork in advance.**

The pork can be massaged with its marinade up to 24 hours before cooking for deeper flavor, significantly cutting down on weeknight prep.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Simmer the quick broth.**

In a medium pot, combine the broth, toasted dried shrimp, and daikon or onion. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to a gentle simmer, letting it bubble quietly in the background. Season with salt and sugar right before serving.

### 2. **Render the pork fat and fry the aromatics.**

Place the diced pork fat into a cold skillet and turn the heat to medium-low, rendering out the liquid oil. As the fat shrinks and turns golden, add the minced garlic and shallot, cooking until fragrant and the fat pieces become crispy golden croutons. Transfer the entire mixture to a small bowl.

### 3. **Marinate and pan-braise the char siu.**

Massage the pork strips with the garlic, light soy sauce, oyster sauce, honey, and five-spice. Heat the neutral oil in a skillet over medium-high heat and sear the pork until a dark, caramelized crust forms on both sides. Pour in the coconut water and any remaining marinade, cover, and simmer on low for 10 to 12 minutes until cooked through. Remove the lid and reduce the liquid until it forms a thick, sticky glaze, then rest the meat and slice thinly.

### 4. **Simmer the master mixing sauce.**

In a small saucepan, whisk the oyster sauce, light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, sugar, and water. Simmer quickly over medium heat for about 2 minutes until the sugar dissolves and the sauce thickens to a syrupy consistency, then remove from the heat and stir in the sesame oil.

### 5. **Execute the thermal shock noodle boil.**

Bring a large pot of water to a violent boil and set a bowl of ice water next to the stove. Working in portions, drop the noodles into the boiling water for 15 to 30 seconds, immediately plunge them into the ice water for 5 seconds to shock the gluten, then dunk them back into the boiling water for a final 5 seconds. Toss the hot noodles instantly with a spoonful of the reserved garlic and shallot oil to prevent sticking.

## 1. **Blanch the sprouts and assemble the bowls.**

In the last minute of boiling the noodles, dunk the bean sprouts into the hot water for 10 seconds to remove their raw bite. Pour a spoonful of the master sauce over the noodles and toss to coat, then top with the sliced char siu, blanched sprouts, raw garlic chives, and a generous scatter of the crispy pork fat. Serve immediately with a side bowl of the hot shrimp broth.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the thermal shock.**

The Boil-Cold-Boil method washes away surface starch and tightens the gluten network. It is the absolute secret to achieving the signature chewy texture of restaurant-quality noodles.

- **Sourcing dark soy sauce.**

This is crucial for the deep mahogany color and molasses-like sweetness of the mixing sauce. If completely unavailable, use regular soy sauce with a half teaspoon of dark brown sugar, though the color will remain light.



# Instant Pot Cháo Sườn

*chow suhn*

To walk the chilly, bustling streets of Hanoi's Old Quarter on a winter morning is to find locals huddled on plastic stools around steaming metal pots of Cháo Sườn. Unlike the distinct, broken-grain soups of the south, this northern comfort food is velvety and thick—a savory cream built on melting pork cartilage and time. In the homeland, grandmothers achieve this by meticulously stirring milled rice flour over a low flame for hours. But for a Tuesday night in an American suburb, the fierce pressure of an Instant Pot obliterates a clever blend of jasmine and glutinous rice, delivering that exact soul-warming texture in a fraction of the time without compromising a damn thing.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	pork spare riblets <i>cut across the bone into 1-inch pieces</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1 cup</b>	jasmine rice <i>rinsed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fish sauce
<b>1/2 cup</b>	sweet rice or glutinous rice <i>rinsed</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder
<b>7 cup</b>	water or low-sodium chicken broth	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	sugar
<b>1 large</b>	shallot <i>peeled and left whole</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	pork floss
<b>1 med</b>	ginger <i>peeled and thickly sliced</i>	<b>2 med</b>	Chinese crullers <i>cut into bite-sized pieces</i>
<b>piece</b>		<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>
		<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Purge the pork ribs of their impurities.**

Place the ribs in a pot, cover with cold water, and bring to a rapid boil for 3 to 4 minutes to draw out the murky foam and blood. Dump into a colander and rinse the ribs thoroughly under cold running water.

- **Wash the rice.**

Place the jasmine and sweet rice into a fine-mesh strainer and rinse under cold water until the water runs relatively clear.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Load the pressure cooker.**

Add the clean ribs, rinsed rice, water or broth, whole shallot, ginger slices, and salt to the Instant Pot.

- 2. Cook under high pressure.**

Lock the lid, set the venting valve to sealing, and cook on High Pressure for 30 minutes.

**1. Exercise patience with a natural pressure release.**

Let the pot sit completely undisturbed for 20 minutes. The starchy porridge is violently bubbling inside; a quick release will spray boiling rice water across your kitchen ceiling.

**2. Whisk into a velvety paste.**

Carefully release any remaining pressure and open the lid. Fish out the ginger and shallot, then whisk the separated mixture vigorously until the grains obliterate and meld into a thick, creamy matrix.

**3. Season the porridge.**

Stir in the fish sauce, chicken bouillon, and sugar. Taste and adjust, adding a splash of hot water if you prefer a thinner consistency.

**4. Garnish heavily and serve.**

Ladle the steaming cream into deep bowls and top with snipped crullers, pork floss, fresh scallions, and an uncompromising crack of black pepper.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Grandmother's Secret.**

Do not skip the khử mùi parboiling step. It is the single most important technique to ensure your broth tastes clean and sweet rather than muddy and metallic.

● **The Rice Ratio.**

Standard long-grain rice won't achieve the required texture alone. Glutinous sweet rice breaks down completely under pressure, acting as a binder that replicates the labor-intensive milled rice flour used by Hanoi street vendors.



# Mâm Cơm Gia Đình: The Weeknight Equilibrium

*The heart of the Vietnamese family meal, adapted for the unforgiving reality of the modern American weeknight.*

The traditional mâm cơm is a masterpiece of utilitarian balance—a daily communion of steaming rice, unapologetically salty proteins, quick vegetables, and a clear, restorative broth to wash away the grit of the day. It is the unpretentious, beating heart of the Vietnamese home. But executing that essential four-part harmony after a brutal commute requires tactical precision, not a grandmother's endless patience.

Here is the weeknight equilibrium. We're talking the soulful, slow-burn comfort of caramelized pork belly, the clean, aromatic hit of ginger-scallion steamed fish, and the frugal genius of a dried shrimp and cabbage soup, all engineered for the modern clock. There are no shortcuts taken on flavor, just a sharpening of technique. This is the food you actually crave when the front door finally clicks shut.





# Thịt Ba Chỉ Kho Tiêu

*teet bah chee caw tyew*

If you ask any first-generation Vietnamese-American what home tastes like, they won't point you to an elaborate, all-day bowl of weekend phở. They will point you to this: strips of pork belly shimmering in a sticky mahogany caramel, aggressively seasoned with a punch of crushed black pepper and savory fish sauce. Eaten alongside a mountain of steamed jasmine rice, this is the unapologetic, fiercely comforting meal that sustained their parents and built their childhoods. The secret to making it taste exactly like a grandmother's kitchen in the old country lies in two simple tricks: a quick parboil to purify the meat, and burning the sugar yourself right in the pan. Put away the soy sauce and trust the caramel.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	pork belly	<b>1 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder or MSG
<b>1 tsp</b>	salt	<b>1 tsp</b>	freshly ground black pepper
<b>1 med</b>	shallot <i>smashed</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>2 tbsp</b>	high-quality fish sauce	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1 cup</b>	fresh coconut water
<b>2 med</b>	shallots <i>finely minced</i>	<b>3 small</b>	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>whole or lightly bruised</i>
<b>3 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	freshly cracked black pepper
		<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Parboil the pork belly to remove impurities.**

Bring a medium pot of water to a rolling boil. Add the salt and the smashed shallot. Drop the whole piece of pork belly into the boiling water for exactly 2 to 3 minutes. The exterior will turn gray and foam will rise to the top. Remove the pork, rinse it thoroughly under cold water, and pat it completely dry with paper towels.

- **Slice and marinate the meat.**

Place the blanched pork on a cutting board and slice it into bite-sized strips, about 1/2-inch thick, ensuring every strip contains a piece of skin, fat, and lean meat. Transfer to a mixing bowl and toss vigorously with the fish sauce, 1 tablespoon of granulated sugar, minced shallots, minced garlic, bouillon powder, and 1 teaspoon of ground black pepper. Let it sit for 15 to 30 minutes.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Create the caramel sauce directly in the pan.**

In a clay pot or heavy-bottomed saucepan, add the cooking oil and 2 tablespoons of sugar over medium heat. Do not use a spatula to stir; simply swirl the pot occasionally. Watch it closely as the sugar melts, turns champagne blonde, and finally reaches a dark, smoking amber color.

**2. Sear the pork in the hot caramel.**

The exact second the sugar reaches that dark amber color, immediately dump the marinated pork and all its juices into the pot. Stand back as it will sputter. Vigorously stir the pork for 2 to 3 minutes until the liquid halts the caramelization and the meat shrinks slightly, taking on a gorgeous, glossy brown hue.

**3. Braise the pork with coconut water.**

Pour in the coconut water so it just barely covers the meat, then toss in the whole Thai chilies. Bring the liquid back to a vigorous boil, skim off any foam that rises to the surface, and drop the heat to medium-low. Cover the pot with a lid and let it simmer for 15 to 20 minutes.

**4. Reduce the sauce to a sticky glaze.**

Remove the lid and turn the heat up slightly to medium-high. Let the sauce vigorously bubble and reduce for another 5 to 10 minutes until the liquid evaporates into a thick, sticky, syrupy glaze that coats the bottom of the pot and aggressively clings to the pork.

**5. Finish with a heavy dose of black pepper and scallions.**

Turn off the heat. Shower the glossy pork with the remaining tablespoon of coarsely cracked black pepper and the chopped scallions. Stir once more to release the volatile oils of the pepper into the residual heat, then serve immediately.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Avoid using non-stick pans for the caramelization.**

First-generation cooks accustomed to modern cookware often struggle with the caramel because dark non-stick coatings mask the color progression of the sugar. Use a stainless steel, cast iron, or traditional Vietnamese clay pot.

- **Toss the sugar if it burns black.**

If the caramel goes past dark amber and turns black, throw it away, wipe out the pot, and start over. Burnt sugar will render the entire dish unpalatably acrid and bitter.

- **Do not substitute dark soy sauce for the caramel.**

Younger cooks often instinctively reach for soy sauce as the default brown liquid. In Vietnamese braising, color comes from burnt sugar and salt comes from fish. Adding dark soy sauce flattens the flavor, overriding the delicate bitterness of the caramel and the bright, fermented funk of the fish sauce.

- **Balance the meal with rice and a light soup.**

This dish is intentionally hyper-seasoned and too intense to eat on its own. It is engineered to flavor copious amounts of steamed white rice. Complete the table with a rapid, palate-cleansing vegetable soup to cut through the rich, fatty pork.



# Cá Hấp Xi Dầu Hành Gừng

*cah hup see yow hahn gung*

Growing up, the whole steamed fish at the Lunar New Year banquet was the undisputed king of the table. But you don't need a holiday—or even a whole, head-on fish—to capture that exact magic. In real Vietnamese homes, this technique is applied to simple fillets to create one of the fastest, most comforting weeknight dinners imaginable. The secret lies in a few uncompromising grandma-approved rules: never steam the fish in its sauce, pour away the cloudy, fishy water left on the plate, and finish with a crackling flash of smoking-hot oil over fresh ginger and scallions. It takes thirty seconds, but it makes your kitchen smell exactly like your childhood.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	firm white fish fillets <i>skin-on or skinless</i>	<b>1 1/2 tsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 tsp</b>	toasted sesame oil
<b>1 tbsp</b>	Shaoxing wine or rice vinegar	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground white pepper
<b>1 small</b>	fresh ginger <i>peeled and cut into 4 thick slices</i>	<b>3 med</b>	scallions <i>green tops only, julienned into 2-inch matchsticks</i>
<b>3 med</b>	scallions <i>white stalks only, smashed</i>	<b>1 med</b>	fresh ginger <i>peeled and julienned into fine matchsticks</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	Maggi Seasoning Sauce	<b>1 small</b>	red chili <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	water	<b>3 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce		

## PREPARATION

- **Eradicate the odor by thoroughly washing the fish.**

Rub the fillets gently with the kosher salt and rice wine, then rinse under cold water and aggressively pat dry with paper towels to remove any slime or impurities.

- **Whisk the dressing.**

Combine the Maggi sauce, water, oyster sauce, sugar, sesame oil, and white pepper in a small bowl until the sugar fully dissolves.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Elevate the fish on an aromatic bed.**

Lay the thick ginger slices and smashed scallion whites on a wide, heat-proof plate, and place the fish on top to allow steam to circulate underneath.

- 2. Steam the fish bare over medium-high heat.**

Bring two inches of water to a rolling boil in your steamer or wok, cover tightly, and steam for 8 to 10 minutes until the flesh is opaque and flakes easily.

**1. Pour off and discard the cloudy steaming liquid.**

Carefully remove the hot plate from the steamer, tilt it to drain away the pooled liquid, and discard the steamed ginger and scallions; this liquid holds all the bitter impurities.

**2. Dress the fish with the soy mixture and fresh aromatics.**

Pour the whisked Maggi dressing over the hot fish, then scatter a messy, generous pile of the julienned ginger, scallion greens, and chili directly on top.

**3. Flash the aromatics with smoking hot oil.**

Heat the neutral oil in a small saucepan until it reaches about 400 degrees and begins to smoke, then immediately pour it over the raw ginger and scallions to release their essential oils with a loud sizzle.

**4. Serve immediately while still sizzling.**

Bring the plate straight to the table and eat with steaming hot jasmine rice, spooning the aromatic soy-oil emulsion over every bite.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Maggi Seasoning Sauce is the secret to the modern Vietnamese flavor profile.**

Introduced during the French colonial era, it has a distinct, deep umami that triggers immediate nostalgia. Light soy sauce works in a pinch, but Maggi is the real deal here.



# Cá Chiên Cà Ri Sả

*kah cheen kah ree sah*

The smell of lemongrass hitting hot oil meant one thing: Mom was home, and dinner was almost ready. Traditionally, grandmothers in Vietnam made this with whole, bone-in fish, lightly salted and cured for maximum crispiness. But on a busy Tuesday in an Ohio suburb, you don't always have the time or energy to navigate bones. We bridge that gap by swapping the whole catch for accessible, firm-fleshed fillets and using pre-minced frozen lemongrass to cut prep time to five minutes. A dusting of turmeric-heavy curry powder and a light coating of cornstarch act as a modern insurance policy, locking the aromatics to the fish so they don't burn. It yields a shatteringly crispy, golden crust that tastes exactly like the homeland, minus the stress.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	firm white fish fillets <i>such as tilapia, catfish, or cod; patted completely dry with paper towels</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	fine sea salt
<b>1/4 cup</b>	frozen pre-minced lemongrass <i>thawed before using</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	fish sauce
<b>1 tbsp</b>	Vietnamese curry powder or Madras curry powder	<b>1 tsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>3 med cloves</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground black pepper
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	cornstarch
		<b>5 tbsp</b>	neutral oil <i>divided</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Mix the aromatic paste.**

In a medium bowl, combine the thawed lemongrass, curry powder, minced garlic, sea salt, fish sauce, sugar, black pepper, and 1 tablespoon of the neutral oil to form a thick, fragrant wet paste.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pat the marinade into the dry fish fillets.**

Distribute the aromatic paste evenly over both sides of the fish, using your hands to firmly press it into the flesh rather than rubbing, which causes the lemongrass to clump and fall off.

- 2. Allow the fish to cure at room temperature for 15 minutes.**

This brief resting period is the essence of the traditional *muối sũ* method; the salt draws out surface moisture to firm the flesh and guarantee a crispy crust.

- 3. Lightly dust both sides of the fillets with cornstarch.**

Tap off any excess. This crucial layer absorbs the drawn-out moisture and acts as an insurance policy, locking the aromatics against the meat so the garlic and lemongrass don't scorch in the pan.

**1. Fry the fillets in a shimmering, oiled skillet.**

Heat a large non-stick skillet over medium-high heat with the remaining 4 tablespoons of oil, then carefully lay the fish down away from you to prevent splattering.

**2. Cook undisturbed until deeply golden brown and crisp.**

Fry for 3 to 4 minutes per side without forcing the flip—if the fish resists, the crust hasn't formed yet. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate to drain before serving immediately alongside steamed jasmine rice.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Source frozen minced lemongrass to save time.**

Finding this in plastic tubs in the freezer section of an Asian market bypasses tedious mincing and avoids the woody, fibrous bits common with fresh stalks.

● **Use the right curry powder.**

Vietnamese curry powder is a dry spice blend heavy on turmeric. Do not confuse it with wet Thai curry paste. If unavailable, standard Madras curry powder is a mathematically sound, 1:1 substitute.

● **Manage a hot stove by scraping the aromatics.**

If your pan runs hot and the lemongrass burns before the fish cooks, scrape the excess paste off before dusting with cornstarch. Fry the bare fish, and quickly toast the reserved aromatics in the hot oil for 30 seconds at the end to use as a garnish.



# Đậu Hũ Chiên Tẩm Hành

*dow hoo chee-en tuhm hahn*

In the lean years of Vietnam's post-war subsidy era, home cooks proved you don't need expensive ingredients to create a masterpiece—you just need a little culinary wisdom. This dish relies on a singular, ingenious trick: plunging screaming-hot, freshly pan-fried tofu directly into a room-temperature bath of raw scallions and fish sauce. The residual hot oil instantly neutralizes the onion's sharp bite, while the crispy crust acts like a sponge, drinking up the umami-rich broth. It is an exercise in absolute minimalism that delivers exactly what a Hanoi grandmother's kitchen tastes like.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>14 oz</b>	medium-firm tofu <i>rinsed, thoroughly patted dry, and cut into 3/4-inch thick rectangles</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fish sauce
<b>5 med</b>	scallions <i>roots trimmed and very thinly sliced, green parts only</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>6 tbsp</b>	warm filtered water	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	MSG
		<b>1/4 cup</b>	neutral cooking oil

## PREPARATION

- **Thoroughly dry the tofu before frying.**

Wrap the block in a few layers of paper towels and press gently to remove excess surface moisture, which prevents the oil from dangerously popping and splattering.

- **Stage your workspace.**

Because the thermal shock trick requires moving extremely fast, ensure your scallion bath is fully mixed and sitting directly beside the frying pan before the tofu hits the oil.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the dipping broth together in a wide, shallow bowl.**

Combine the warm water, fish sauce, sugar, and MSG, whisking until the sugar is completely dissolved, then stir in the sliced scallions and set the bowl immediately next to your stove.

- 2. Heat the neutral oil in a wide skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering.**

You do not need to deep fry, but there should be enough oil to generously coat the bottom of the pan about 1/4-inch deep.

- 1. Fry the tofu completely undisturbed until the bottom is a deep, blistered golden brown.**

Carefully slide the tofu into the hot oil in a single layer and leave it alone for 5 to 7 minutes; once it releases naturally from the pan, flip and fry the other side until equally golden.

- 2. Pluck a piece of screaming-hot tofu straight out of the pan and immediately dunk it into the scallion bath.**

You will hear a satisfying sizzle as the hot oil hits the liquid; let it sit in the bath for just 2 to 3 seconds, flipping it once so the crust absorbs the liquid and the oil slightly cooks the scallions.

- 3. Transfer the bathed tofu to a serving platter and repeat with the remaining pieces.**

Once all the tofu is plated, use a spoon to scoop up the remaining softened scallions and broth from the bowl and drape them generously over the top before serving with hot jasmine rice.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Put the air fryer away.**

The magic of this dish requires the residual hot cooking oil clinging to the tofu to hit the water-based sauce, creating a micro-emulsion and instantly blanching the scallions. An air fryer simply cannot replicate this thermal shock.

- **Avoid extra-firm or silken tofu.**

Extra-firm tofu has been pressed so hard it becomes rubbery, while silken will shatter in the pan. Medium-firm or firm is the sweet spot to achieve a sturdy crust with a custardy interior.



# Bò Xào Su Su

*baw saow soo soo*

If you grew up in a Vietnamese household, the aggressive clang of a spatula against a wok and the aroma of garlic and oyster sauce caramelizing meant one thing: dinner was almost ready. Bò Xào Su Su is the quintessential weeknight stir-fry, representing the perfect equilibrium of the family meal. The rich, savory beef balances beautifully against the sweet, crisp hydration of chayote squash. It is a practical, deeply comforting dish that pulls no punches, tasting exactly like home without asking for more time than you have on a busy Tuesday night.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 lb</b>	flank steak, sirloin, or tenderloin <i>thinly sliced against the grain</i>	<b>5 med clove</b>	garlic <i>minced and divided</i>
<b>2 med</b>	chayote squash <i>peeled, seeded, and sliced into 1/4-inch strips</i>	<b>1 small</b>	shallot <i>minced</i>
<b>1/2 small</b>	carrot <i>peeled and julienned</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	premium fish sauce
<b>1 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce	<b>1/4 cup</b>	water
<b>1 tsp</b>	soy sauce	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>cut into 2-inch pieces</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	chicken or mushroom bouillon powder	<b>1 handful</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Firm up the beef.**

Place the steak in the freezer for 20 minutes before prep; this firms up the meat and makes it significantly easier to slice thinly against the grain.

- **Conquer the chayote sap.**

Raw chayote releases a sticky, latex-like sap that dries on your hands like glue. Peel the squash under a gentle stream of cold running water, or rub a little cooking oil on your hands before you start so the sap washes right down the drain.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Marinate the beef.**

In a medium bowl, combine the thinly sliced beef with the oyster sauce, soy sauce, bouillon powder, 1 tablespoon of the oil, 2 cloves of the minced garlic, the minced shallot, and the black pepper. Massage the marinade into the meat so every slice is coated and let it sit at room temperature for 15 minutes.

**1. Flash-fry the meat.**

Place a large wok or a heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat with 1 tablespoon of oil. When the oil is shimmering, add the marinated beef in a single layer, let it sit undisturbed for 15 seconds to sear, then stir-fry rapidly for 1 to 2 minutes until browned on the outside but still slightly pink on the inside. Immediately remove the beef and all its juices to a plate so it does not overcook.

**2. Blister the vegetables.**

Return the empty pan to the heat and add the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil. Toss in the remaining minced garlic and let it sizzle for 10 seconds until fragrant, then add the julienned chayote and carrots. Stir-fry for 2 minutes to blister the vegetables.

**3. Steam the squash.**

Pour in the water to create a burst of steam that helps cook the dense squash without burning the garlic. Continue to stir-fry for another 3 to 4 minutes until the chayote begins to look slightly translucent but still has a firm crunch.

**4. Establish the equilibrium.**

Lower the heat to medium and pour the beef and all of its resting juices back into the pan with the chayote. Drizzle the fish sauce down the side of the hot pan to caramelize it and burn off the pungent smell, then toss everything together for 1 minute until the beef is fully cooked and the sauce lightly coats the vegetables.

**5. Garnish and serve.**

Turn off the heat and fold in the scallions and cilantro, letting the residual heat wilt them slightly. Transfer the entire dish to a serving platter, finish with a generous crack of black pepper, and serve immediately with steamed jasmine rice.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the bouillon.**

While Westernized recipes often rely solely on salt or soy sauce, authentic contemporary Vietnamese home cooking heavily utilizes hạt nêm, a savory granulated bouillon powder. Knorr chicken bouillon perfectly replicates this homeland taste.

- **The two-stage stir-fry is non-negotiable.**

To get tender beef and crisp veggies, you must cook them separately. Cooking them together will cause the vegetables to release water and boil the meat, ruining the texture of both.



# Canh Bí Đao Thịt Băm

*kahn bee dow teet bahm*

This is the restorative bowl that anchored countless Tuesday night dinners in Ohio suburbs, a subtle, sweet counterweight to the salty braises of the traditional Vietnamese family table. To capture that exact, pristine taste of grandmother's kitchen, the rules are rigid but simple: vigorously massage the pork for a bouncy chew, omit the fish sauce so the delicate broth doesn't turn muddy, and decisively carve away the melon's spongy pith to ensure absolute clarity. It's weeknight equilibrium achieved in under thirty minutes, healing from the inside out.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>1 lb</b>	winter melon <i>peeled, pith removed, and cut into bite-sized wedges</i>
<b>1 large</b>	shallot <i>finely minced</i>	<b>4 cup</b>	water
<b>2 tsp</b>	chicken or pork bouillon powder <i>divided</i>	<b>2 med</b>	fresh ginger slices <i>optional</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	sea salt
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	ground black pepper <i>plus extra for garnish</i>	<b>3 med</b>	scallions <i>green parts only, thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fish sauce <i>optional</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Carve away the winter melon pith.**

Strip the fuzzy green skin with a peeler, halve the melon lengthwise, and thoroughly scoop out the spongy, seed-filled center. Leaving any of this core behind will inevitably turn the delicate broth sour and cloudy.

- **Massage the ground pork.**

In a mixing bowl, combine the ground pork, minced shallot, one teaspoon of the bouillon powder, sugar, black pepper, and fish sauce if using. Stir vigorously with chopsticks in one direction for about sixty seconds until the meat becomes sticky and cohesive, ensuring a satisfying, bouncy chew.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the clear broth.**

Bring the water and ginger slices to a rolling boil in a medium pot over medium-high heat. Using a small spoon, scoop bite-sized clusters of the seasoned pork and drop them directly into the actively boiling water to instantly seal in their juices.

**1. Skim and simmer.**

Let the pork cook for two to three minutes, using a fine-mesh skimmer to gently lift and discard any impurities or foam that float to the surface.

**2. Cook the melon briefly.**

Season the crystal-clear broth with the salt and the remaining teaspoon of bouillon powder, then drop in the winter melon pieces. Simmer for exactly four to six minutes, pulling the pot from the heat while the melon still retains an opaque white center and a firm bite.

**3. Garnish and serve.**

Ladle the hot soup into a large communal bowl. Top generously with the sliced scallions, chopped cilantro, and a dusting of cracked black pepper, letting the residual heat finish cooking the melon to a perfect, translucent tenderness.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Respect the delicate cooking time.**

Winter melon turns to unappetizing mush if boiled completely soft in the pot. It must be pulled from the heat while slightly firm to account for carryover cooking in the hot broth.

● **Keep the fish sauce out of the broth.**

While a dash can be massaged into the raw meat for umami, boiling fish sauce in a delicate soup like this risks a funky odor that masks the pure, sweet melon flavor.



# Canh Cải Thảo Tôm Khô

*cahn kigh th-ow tohm kho*

In a proper Vietnamese family meal, soup isn't the main event—it's the great equalizer. You need a clear, restorative broth to wash down the intense, caramelized saltiness of your braised pork or fish. For kids who grew up in American suburbs, this simple Napa cabbage soup is the quintessential taste of a weeknight at home. The trick your grandmother knew, and the only one that matters here, is how you treat the dried shrimp. Forget the boxed chicken stock. You rehydrate those salty, sun-dried little shrimp and beat them in a mortar and pestle before hitting them with hot oil. That physical breakdown is what extracts generations of flavor into a sweet, savory broth in under ten minutes.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/3 cup</b>	dried salted shrimp <i>soaked in warm water for 15 minutes, then drained</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fish sauce
<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>1 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder
<b>1 large</b>	shallot <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	sugar
<b>5 cup</b>	water	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	fine sea salt
<b>10 oz</b>	Napa cabbage <i>sliced crosswise into 1.5-inch squares, white stalks separated from green leaves</i>	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>root ends trimmed and finely chopped</i>
		<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Wash the cabbage thoroughly.**

Napa cabbage holds dirt near the root. Separate the leaves and wash them well in cold water before chopping.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pound the rehydrated shrimp to release their flavor.**

Transfer the softened, drained shrimp to a mortar and pestle and lightly pound them until flattened and the fibers look visibly frayed.

- 2. Build the aromatic base.**

Place a medium soup pot over medium heat, add the oil, and toss in the sliced shallot. Sauté for about 30 seconds until fragrant, then drop in the pounded shrimp and cook for another minute or two until lightly toasted and intensely aromatic.

- 3. Simmer the broth.**

Pour the water into the pot, turn the heat to high, and bring it to a rolling boil. Skim off any foam that rises to the surface, then lower the heat to a gentle simmer for 5 minutes to let the shrimp extract into the water.

**1. Blanch the cabbage and season the soup.**

Drop the thicker white cabbage stalks into the simmering broth first for 1 minute, followed by the leafy green tops, fish sauce, bouillon powder, sugar, and salt. Cook for exactly 2 more minutes so the cabbage turns translucent but retains a slight crunch.

**2. Garnish and serve immediately.**

Cut the heat, taste the broth to adjust seasoning if necessary, and ladle into a large communal serving bowl. Top generously with the chopped scallions and a heavy pinch of black pepper to serve alongside steamed rice.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Missing a mortar and pestle?**

If you don't have one, lay the softened shrimp on your cutting board and smash them aggressively with the flat side of a heavy chef's knife. The goal is to break the fibers, not mince them cleanly.

● **Keep the cabbage crisp.**

Napa cabbage cooks incredibly fast. Turn off the heat as soon as the leaves turn bright; residual heat will finish the job. Overcooked, mushy cabbage is a tragedy.

● **The diaspora carrot.**

Many Vietnamese-American families toss in a sliced carrot for color and extra sweetness. If you want it, add it to the broth while it simmers, right before the cabbage goes in.



# Canh Khổ Qua Nhồi Thịt

*cahn koh kwah nyoy tit*

To understand the Vietnamese soul, you must understand the poetry of this soup. The name translates roughly to 'hardship passes'—a simmering promise that yesterday's bitter struggles are gone, leaving only a sweet, pristine broth for tomorrow. The secret to recreating a grandmother's version in an American kitchen lies not in endless labor, but in the vigorous emulsion of the pork and fish paste matrix. It is this exact technique that yields the authentic, unmistakable bounce, while boiling the melons entirely uncovered guarantees the broth remains crystal clear and the skins vibrantly green.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>4 med</b>	Chinese or Vietnamese bitter melons <i>ends trimmed and slit lengthwise</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	premium fish sauce
		<b>1 tsp</b>	sugar
<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground pork <i>chilled</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	freshly cracked black pepper
		<b>2 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder
<b>1/3 lb</b>	frozen featherback fish paste <i>thawed overnight in the fridge</i>	<b>6 cup</b>	unsalted chicken broth
<b>1/2 oz</b>	dried wood ear mushrooms <i>soaked in warm water for 15 mins, hard stems removed, and finely minced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt
		<b>1 tsp</b>	rock sugar or granulated sugar
<b>1 oz</b>	cellophane noodles <i>soaked in warm water for 10 mins and snipped into 1-inch lengths</i>	<b>3 med</b>	scallions <i>whites minced for filling, greens thinly sliced for garnish</i>
<b>2 med</b>	shallots <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 small</b>	cilantro
<b>2 med</b>	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	<b>handful</b>	<i>roughly chopped</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Scrape the bitter melons cleanly to the firm green flesh.**

The white spongy pith holds the highest concentration of bitter compounds. Use a small spoon to aggressively scrape out the pith and seeds from the slit melons until only the firm green flesh remains.

- **Blanch the hollowed melons to set the color and tame the bitterness.**

Drop the hollowed melons into boiling water for exactly 30 seconds, then immediately plunge them into an ice bath to preserve their vibrant green hue, patting the insides dry afterward.

- **Knead the filling vigorously in a single circular direction.**

Combine the ground pork, thawed fish paste, mushrooms, noodles, minced shallots, garlic, scallion whites, fish sauce, sugar, black pepper, and 1 teaspoon of the bouillon powder in a large bowl. Mix forcefully in one direction for 3 to 5 minutes until it transforms into a highly cohesive, sticky paste.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Stuff the melons firmly with the chilled meat paste.**

Pack the cohesive filling tightly into the cavity of each melon, leaving no air pockets, and smooth the exposed meat flush along the slit.

**2. Bring the broth to an aggressive rolling boil before adding the melons.**

In a heavy-bottomed pot, bring the chicken broth, kosher salt, rock sugar, and remaining 1 teaspoon of bouillon powder to a boil. Do not put fish sauce in the broth; boiling it for an extended period will cause it to sour.

**3. Drop the stuffed melons directly into the boiling broth.**

Never introduce the meat to cold water. The high heat instantly sears the exposed meat, locking it into the melon and ensuring the broth remains perfectly clear.

**4. Simmer the soup entirely uncovered for 35 to 40 minutes.**

Reduce the heat to maintain a gentle, steady simmer and skim off any foam that rises. Never cover the pot with a lid, as trapped acidic condensation will destroy the chlorophyll and turn your beautiful green melons a muddy olive color.

**5. Slice into thick medallions and serve with a side of fiery fish sauce.**

Transfer the softened melons to a cutting board, slice crosswise, and place into deep bowls. Ladle the hot, sweet broth over the medallions, garnish with the scallion greens and cilantro, and serve with rice and a small dish of undiluted fish sauce loaded with bird's eye chilies.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Substitute frozen fish paste with processed raw shrimp to achieve the same textural bounce.**

If featherback fish paste isn't readily available at your local Asian market, pulse ice-cold raw shrimp in a food processor until it forms a sticky paste. It provides the exact structural emulsion needed to keep the pork bound and bouncy during the long boil.



# Khi Ôm Đau: Maternal Comfort and Sick-Day Foods

*Deeply comforting, restorative dishes honoring the maternal care of the Vietnamese kitchen, utilizing thermal balance and modern shortcuts.*

When sickness hits a Vietnamese household, the response isn't sterile medicine or bland toast—it is a tactical deployment of thermal balance and maternal instinct. There is a quiet, restorative magic in the heavy thud of a cleaver bruising ginger, and the steady, pressurized hiss of an Instant Pot standing in for the low-and-slow simmer of our grandmothers' stovetops. These are the dishes engineered to sweat out the weakness and pull you back to the land of the living.

It is food that fixes you. A bowl of Cháo Gà weeping with steam, chased by the sharp, textural snap of Gỏi Gà dragged through a fierce Nước Mắm Gừng. A pot of Canh Bí Đỏ breaking down into a sweet, pork-laced broth. This isn't delicate spa food. It is the culinary equivalent of a mother's cool hand on a fevered forehead—unapologetically savory, deeply medicinal, and exactly what is required.





# Cháo Gà Nguyên Sinh

*chow gah*

For the diaspora kid fighting off a midwestern winter flu, this isn't just soup. It is medicine, a warm blanket, and a grandmother's love served in a ceramic bowl. Replicating the legendary street stalls of Hanoi requires three non-negotiable laws. First, you need a whole, bone-in bird to build the broth. Second, you mix everyday jasmine rice with a handful of sweet glutinous rice for a luxurious, silky body. Finally, the true grandmother's secret: you toast the raw grains in a dry pan before they ever see the water. It locks the starches so they blossom beautifully instead of disintegrating into glue. Stir it up, inhale the steam, and feel better.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 1/2 lb</b>	Kosher whole chicken <i>rinsed and scrubbed with salt</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	sweet rice
<b>1 med</b>	fresh ginger <i>halved lengthwise</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	scallions <i>finely sliced</i>
<b>3 large</b>	shallots <i>peeled and halved</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 bunch</b>	Vietnamese perilla leaves <i>finely julienned</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fish sauce	<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>2 med</b>	limes <i>cut into wedges</i>
<b>3/4 cup</b>	Jasmine rice		

## PREPARATION

- **Rinse and drain the rice thoroughly.**

Wash the jasmine and sweet rice until the water runs clear, then ensure it is completely dry before hitting the skillet so it toasts rather than steams.

- **Scrub the chicken with salt.**

A quick massage with coarse salt and a cold water rinse removes impurities and ensures a crystal-clear broth.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Char the aromatics in a dry pan.**

Heat a dry skillet over medium-high heat and char the ginger and shallots until slightly blackened and fragrant, about 4 minutes.

- 2. Poach the whole chicken with the charred aromatics.**

Place the scrubbed chicken, charred ginger, and shallots in a large stockpot with 3 1/2 quarts of cold water and the kosher salt. Bring to a gentle boil, skim the foam, reduce the heat to a low simmer, cover partially, and poach for 40 to 45 minutes until the juices run clear.

**1. Toast the mixed rice to lock in the starches.**

While the chicken cooks, in a wide, dry skillet over medium heat, toast the drained rice. Stir constantly until it separates, turns opaque, and smells warmly toasted and nutty, about 10 minutes.

**2. Remove the cooked chicken and strain the broth.**

Carefully transfer the chicken to a cutting board to cool. Discard the ginger and shallots from the pot and skim off any excess fat from the liquid, preserving the golden broth.

**3. Simmer the toasted rice in the golden broth.**

Bring the clear broth back to a low boil and pour in the toasted rice. Reduce the heat to low and simmer gently for 30 to 40 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the rice blossoms and thickens the soup.

**4. Hand-shred the cooled chicken.**

Discard the skin and bones, then shred the meat along the grain into bite-sized pieces using your hands to preserve its texture. Toss the shredded meat with the fish sauce, sugar, and a pinch of black pepper.

**5. Assemble the bowls over raw medicinal herbs.**

Place a generous nest of raw perilla, scallions, and cilantro at the bottom of each bowl, then ladle the boiling hot congee directly over them to blanch the leaves and release their volatile oils. Top with the seasoned shredded chicken, a fierce crack of black pepper, and a squeeze of lime.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Weeknight prep keeps you sane.**

Poach the chicken on Sunday, shred the meat, and store the strained broth separately; on a busy weeknight, just bring the broth to a boil and toss in your pre-toasted rice for a 30-minute authentic meal.

- **Utilize your pressure cooker.**

Throw the whole chicken, aromatics, and water into an Instant Pot on high pressure for 25 minutes with a natural release, then proceed with simmering the toasted rice on the sauté function.



# Gỏi Gà Hành Tây & Nước Mắm Gừng

*goy gah hahn tay & nook mum goong*

When illness strikes a Vietnamese household, this is the absolute remedy. Born from the pragmatic genius of the matriarch's kitchen, it is a dual-purpose masterpiece: a restorative poached chicken that yields both a comforting broth and this wildly vibrant, crunchy salad. The magic lies in simple but strict mechanics—the brutal alchemy of a mortar and pestle pounding ginger into fish sauce, and the sharp shock of ice water rendering raw onions incredibly sweet. It is a brilliant prescription for the soul, easily recreated on a Tuesday night in America.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs or split breasts	<b>2 cup</b>	green cabbage <i>finely shredded</i>
<b>1 med piece</b>	fresh ginger <i>unpeeled and smashed flat</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	roasted lightly salted peanuts <i>roughly crushed</i>
<b>1 large</b>	shallot <i>peeled and halved</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	crispy fried shallots
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 oz</b>	fresh ginger <i>peeled and roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 med</b>	yellow or white onion <i>peeled and sliced paper-thin with the grain</i>	<b>2 med clove</b>	garlic <i>peeled</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	white vinegar or fresh lime juice	<b>2 med</b>	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>stems removed</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>3 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1 cup</b>	Rau Răm (Vietnamese coriander) or equal parts fresh mint and cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	premium fish sauce
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	warm water

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare the ice baths in advance.**

You will need two separate ice water stations: a large bowl to shock the entire batch of chicken, and a smaller bowl to cure the sliced onions.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Poach the chicken and shock it in ice water.**

In a medium pot, cover the chicken, smashed ginger, shallot, and salt with an inch of cold water, bringing it to a gentle simmer for 15 to 20 minutes until cooked through. Immediately plunge the hot chicken into a waiting ice bath for five minutes to halt the cooking and tighten the skin into a snappy, authentic crunch.

**1. Cure the onions in an icy acid bath.**

Submerge the paper-thin onion slices in a bowl of ice water spiked with the vinegar and one teaspoon of sugar, soaking for at least 15 minutes. This thermal and osmotic shock neutralizes the harsh sulfur compounds, leaving behind a perfectly sweet, crisp allium devoid of any unpleasant bite; drain and pat dry before use.

**2. Pound the aromatics into a fragrant paste.**

Using a mortar and pestle, aggressively pound the chopped ginger, garlic, chilies, and three tablespoons of sugar until they collapse into a fragrant, sticky paste. Do not merely mince them; the mechanical crushing action is essential to rupture the plant cell walls, releasing the volatile ginger and chili oils directly into the abrasive sugar.

**3. Finish the ginger fish sauce dressing.**

Stir the fish sauce, lime juice, and warm water into the pounded paste until the sugar is fully dissolved. The resulting emulsion should be aggressively pungent, deeply savory, and bright, clinging together rather than pooling.

**4. Shred the chicken by hand.**

Remove the chilled chicken from the ice bath, pat it dry, and discard the bones. Tear the meat and skin into bite-sized strips with your hands, an essential technique known as *xé phay* that creates jagged edges perfectly suited for grabbing and holding the dressing.

**5. Dress, assemble, and serve immediately.**

In a large bowl, vigorously toss the shredded chicken, cured onions, cabbage, and half the herbs with half of the dressing, massaging the flavors into the meat. Transfer to a platter, garnish with the remaining herbs, crushed peanuts, and fried shallots, and serve alongside the remaining dressing.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Substitute the Rau Răm with confidence.**

If Vietnamese coriander is unavailable at your local market, a fifty-fifty mix of fresh mint and cilantro effectively mimics its unique cooling, citrus-pepper profile.

- **Save the poaching liquid.**

The highly seasoned broth left in the pot after poaching the chicken is liquid gold; strain it and use it as the base for a quick weeknight cháo (rice porridge).



# Canh Cà Chua Trứng

*kahn kah choo-ah troong*

If you grew up in a Vietnamese household, this soup is the taste of a Tuesday night and the ultimate maternal panacea for a sick day. Known poetically as cloud soup, it relies on pure weeknight pragmatism rather than a weekend-project broth. The secret isn't a special ingredient or a heavy box of American chicken stock; it's simply cooking the tomatoes down in oil until they surrender their juices, creating a naturally rich, bright red broth where silky ribbons of egg can drift.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 tbsp** neutral cooking oil

**2 large** shallots  
*peeled and thinly sliced*

**3 large** ripe tomatoes  
*cored, one finely chopped, two cut into wedges*

**4 cup** water

**1 1/2 tbsp** fish sauce

**1 tsp** chicken bouillon powder

**1/2 tsp** sugar

**1/4 tsp** sea salt

**3 large** chicken eggs  
*beaten thoroughly*

**2 med** scallions  
*roots removed and finely chopped*

**1/4 cup** fresh cilantro  
*roughly chopped*

**1/4 tsp** black pepper

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare all ingredients before turning on the stove.**

This soup cooks in under ten minutes, so having the tomatoes chopped, the eggs thoroughly whisked, and the seasonings measured is essential to avoid overcooking the broth.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sauté the shallots and tomatoes to build the color base.**

Heat the oil in a medium pot over medium-high heat, add the shallots, and cook for about a minute until fragrant. Add all the tomatoes and stir-fry continuously for 3 to 4 minutes until the finely chopped tomato melts into the oil, turning it a bright orange-red.

- 2. Add the water and seasonings to build the broth.**

Pour in the water, bring to a rolling boil, then stir in the fish sauce, bouillon powder, sugar, and salt. Lower the heat to maintain a gentle, steady simmer rather than an aggressive boil.

- 3. Slowly pour the eggs into the broth while stirring in a single direction.**

Holding chopsticks or a ladle, gently stir the soup in one circular motion while pouring the beaten eggs in a thin, steady stream so they cook instantly into silky clouds without shattering into a murky mess.

**1. Remove from heat immediately to preserve the delicate texture.**

Let the soup simmer for just 30 to 60 seconds after adding the eggs, then turn off the heat, stir in the scallions and cilantro, and serve piping hot topped with black pepper.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Never substitute duck eggs in this soup.**

Vietnamese cooks strictly avoid duck eggs here because they impart an unappetizing, fishy odor to the delicate broth.

● **Serve the soup piping hot.**

Allowing the soup to cool exacerbates any latent aromas from the egg; it is best consumed immediately alongside steamed rice and not saved for leftovers.

● **Add tofu or minced pork for a heavier meal.**

To make this a main course, sauté a quarter pound of minced pork with the shallots, or drop in cubed soft tofu just before adding the eggs.



# Canh Bí Đỏ Thịt Bằm

*kahn bee daw thit bahm*

If you grew up in a Vietnamese household, you know this soup. It is the undisputed anchor of the traditional family meal, the bowl a mother sets down when the Midwest winter bites or the sniffles hit. The secret to bridging the gap between an Ohio weeknight and a grandmother's kitchen in Saigon lies entirely in the technique: marinating the ground pork before it ever hits the pot, and diligently skimming the broth until it runs perfectly clear. Sweet, dense squash swimming in a savory, umami-rich pork broth—it is a deeply restorative bowl of food.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 lb</b>	ground pork <i>80/20 lean-to-fat ratio preferred</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>1 med</b>	shallot <i>finely minced, divided</i>	<b>1 lb</b>	Kabocha or butternut squash <i>peeled, seeded, and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fish sauce	<b>4 cup</b>	water
<b>1 tsp</b>	fish sauce	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder	<b>2 large</b>	scallions <i>green parts only, finely chopped</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1 small</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper		

## PREPARATION

- **Marinate the ground pork.**

In a mixing bowl, combine the ground pork, half the minced shallot, 1 teaspoon of fish sauce, bouillon powder, sugar, and black pepper. Mix thoroughly until slightly sticky, then let it sit at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the oil in a medium pot over medium-high heat, then add half the minced shallot and fry until fragrant and slightly golden.**

- 2. Drop in the marinated pork, breaking it into small bite-sized chunks with a wooden spoon, and stir-fry until no longer pink.**

This searing step develops the foundational savory flavor of the soup and helps the meat hold together once the liquid is added.

- 3. Pour in the water, bring to a rolling boil, and meticulously skim off any grey foam or impurities that rise to the surface.**

Do not skip this. Skimming the foam—*vớt bọt*—is the hallmark of a skilled Vietnamese home cook and ensures an elegant, clean broth.

- 1. Gently drop in the cubed squash, reduce the heat to medium-low, cover partially, and let simmer for 10 to 15 minutes.**

Poke a piece with a fork at the ten-minute mark; it should be creamy but structurally intact. If overcooked, the squash will disintegrate and ruin the clarity of the soup.

- 2. Turn off the heat immediately once the squash is tender, then stir in the remaining 1 tablespoon of fish sauce, salt, scallions, and cilantro.**

The residual heat blanches the herbs instantly, releasing their fragrant essential oils without turning them bitter.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Serve it like a local.**

Ladle the hot soup into a communal bowl with a final crack of black pepper. Spoon the broth and squash directly over a small bowl of steaming jasmine rice.

- **Choosing the right squash.**

While Kabocha (often sold as Japanese pumpkin) is the most authentic choice for its dense, chestnut-like flavor, standard grocery store butternut squash is a flawless substitute on a busy weeknight.



# Bánh Canh Gà

*bahn kahn gah*

There is a distinct aroma that separates an American chicken soup from a Vietnamese one. It is not just the whisper of fish sauce, but the profound, clean purity of the broth itself. When you were home sick, this was the bowl your mother brought to the couch: pure, unadulterated maternal comfort. The thick, chewy tapioca noodles demand attention while the naturally sweet broth, fortified with daikon and carrots, soothes the body. The real secret isn't a rare spice, but the grandmother's technique of rigorously scrubbing the raw chicken with salt and citrus to banish any foul poultry odors, guaranteeing a pristine, golden bowl in under an hour.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 lb</b>	bone-in skin-on chicken pieces	<b>3 tbsp</b>	premium fish sauce
<b>2 tbsp</b>	coarse sea salt	<b>1 tbsp</b>	rock sugar
<b>1 large</b>	lemon <i>halved</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder
<b>10 cup</b>	cold water	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	MSG
<b>1 med</b>	daikon radish <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch thick half-moons</i>	<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	fresh Vietnamese tapioca noodles
<b>2 med</b>	carrots <i>peeled and cut into 1/2-inch thick rounds</i>	<b>2 cup</b>	fresh bean sprouts
<b>1 med</b>	yellow onion <i>peeled and halved</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 small</b>	fresh ginger <i>halved</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	cremini mushrooms <i>quartered</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	fried shallots
		<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper

## PREPARATION

- **Scrub the raw chicken vigorously with salt and citrus to remove impurities.**

Place the raw chicken pieces in a large bowl with the coarse salt. Squeeze the lemon halves over the chicken, then use the spent rinds to aggressively scrub the salt into the meat and skin for two minutes. Rinse thoroughly under cold running water until it runs perfectly clear. This is the grandmother's secret that ensures your kitchen smells like a Vietnamese home, not a commercial poultry plant.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bring the chicken and aromatics to a rolling boil.**

Place the cleaned chicken pieces, onion halves, and ginger into a large, heavy-bottomed stockpot. Cover entirely with the cold water and place over high heat.

**1. Skim the foam immediately to ensure a pristine broth.**

As the water reaches a boil, grayish impurities will rise to the surface.

Immediately drop the heat to a gentle, rolling simmer and spend three to four minutes meticulously skimming and discarding the foam with a fine-mesh skimmer. This patience yields a brilliantly clear soup.

**2. Simmer the broth with the root vegetables.**

Add the daikon radish and carrots to the gently simmering broth. Leave the lid slightly ajar and let it cook for 30 to 35 minutes until the chicken is tender but not entirely falling off the bone, and the vegetables yield easily to a fork.

**3. Season the liquid and prepare the meat.**

Carefully remove the chicken pieces with tongs and transfer them to a cutting board to cool slightly. Remove and discard the onion and ginger. Add the mushrooms to the broth, then season with the fish sauce, rock sugar, chicken bouillon, and MSG. Once the chicken is cool enough to handle, discard the bones and shred the meat into bite-sized pieces.

**4. Blanch the tapioca noodles separately to maintain broth clarity.**

Bring a separate pot of water to a boil. Drop the fresh noodles in and blanch them for just one to two minutes to wash away their exterior starch. Drain immediately so they retain a fierce, satisfying chew.

**5. Assemble the bowls and garnish generously.**

Divide the hot noodles and shredded chicken among large, deep soup bowls. Add a few pieces of daikon, carrot, and mushroom from the pot, then ladle the boiling broth over the top until the noodles are fully submerged. Finish heavily with fresh bean sprouts, sliced scallions, cilantro, a shower of black pepper, and crispy fried shallots.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing the right noodles is the key to the texture.**

Look for vacuum-sealed packages labeled Bánh Canh in the fresh refrigerated section of your Asian grocer. The most authentic texture comes from a blend of tapioca starch and rice flour, yielding a white, udon-like appearance with a deeply bouncy bite.

- **Embrace the pantry staples.**

This is not a 24-hour project. To achieve profound savory depth in 45 minutes, authentic Vietnamese home cooking relies on the strategic use of chicken bouillon and MSG to round out the flavor profile. Do not skip them.



# Soda Chanh Muối & Trứng Sữa

*so-dah chan mwuy and so-dah swuh hot gah*

In the Vietnamese ethnomedical tradition, the line between the medicine cabinet and the pantry doesn't exist. For a first-generation kid growing up in the American Midwest, a sick day meant your mother reaching for one of two iconic elixirs. If you battled a sore throat, you got the cooling, electrolyte-packed magic of Soda Chanh Muối, poured from a jar of salted Meyer lemons fermenting in the window. If you needed pure caloric warmth, she whipped up Soda Sữa Hột Gà—a rich, custardy emulsion of egg yolk and condensed milk. They are the

yin and yang of maternal comfort, relying on foundational techniques to deliver the exact taste of the motherland using standard supermarket staples.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	Meyer lemons <i>scrubbed clean and dried</i>	<b>1 large</b>	large egg yolk <i>preferably pasteurized</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	coarse kosher salt <i>plus extra for scrubbing the lemons</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	sweetened condensed milk
<b>3 cup</b>	water	<b>1 tsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1 tsp</b>	white vinegar	<b>2 cup</b>	club soda <i>chilled and divided between the two drinks</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	sugar	<b>2 cup</b>	ice cubes <i>divided between the two drinks</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Make the preserved lemons a month ahead.**

The Chanh Muối requires four weeks of fermentation before it can be used, but once mature, the jar will last at room temperature for years.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Extract the bitter oils from the lemon skins.**

Place the Meyer lemons in a bowl and sprinkle generously with coarse salt.

Vigorously rub each lemon against the salt for a few minutes to rupture the oil glands and extract bitter compounds, then rinse thoroughly in cold water.

- 2. Blanch and dry the lemons.**

Boil the water with the vinegar. Drop the lemons in for exactly one to two minutes, plunge them into an ice bath, then dry them thoroughly. Leave them by a sunny window for a full day until the skins feel dry and slightly wrinkled to prevent molding.

**1. Ferment the lemons in a salt brine.**

Boil 3 cups of water with a half cup of coarse salt until dissolved, then let it cool completely. Pack the dried lemons tightly into a sterilized glass jar, pour the cooled brine over them to submerge entirely, and let sit in a pantry for at least four weeks.

**2. Assemble the Soda Chanh Muối.**

When a sore throat strikes, aggressively muddle a quarter of a preserved lemon, a teaspoon of its brine, and the sugar in a sturdy glass until it forms a syrup. Top with ice and a cup of club soda, stirring well.

**3. Emulsify the yolk for the Soda Sữa Hột Gà.**

For the egg soda, combine the egg yolk and sweetened condensed milk in a tall glass. Vigorously whisk or froth for two minutes until the mixture is pale, thick, and fluffy. This mechanical aeration completely eliminates the raw egg smell.

**4. Acidify and carbonate the egg soda.**

Stir in the fresh lime juice to cut the richness, then slowly pour in a cup of chilled club soda. The carbonation will react with the egg proteins to create a rich, custardy foam. Drink immediately.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The science of the egg emulsion.**

Vigorous mechanical whisking denatures the egg proteins and eliminates the fishy odor associated with raw yolks. The slight acidity of the carbonated water further thickens the mixture into a safe, luxurious custard.



# Cuốn: The Weekend Gathering Table

*Expansive, interactive dishes meant for wrapping, sharing, and feeding a loud, hungry crowd.*

To understand a Vietnamese weekend, you have to look at the table. It is not a place for quiet, plated contemplation. It is a staging ground for organized, beautiful chaos. Platter upon platter of washed herbs—perilla, spearmint, whatever looks good at the market—piled high alongside blistered bánh xèo and smoky, fat-dripping nem nướng. The act of cuốn, of wrapping, is deeply democratic. You take a sheer disc of rice paper, you load it up, and you build your own perfect bite.

It's a contact sport. Hands reaching across the table, tearing off pieces of bò nướng lá lốt, rolling it tight, and dragging the whole glorious mess through a bowl of thick, unapologetic tương đậu phộng. This is how you feed a crowd. Scale it up, invite the cousins, and let the grease and the laughter spill over the edges.





# Bánh Xèo Miền Trung

*bahn-seow mee-en-troong*

Growing up in the Midwest, the sound of Sunday afternoon was the violent, beautiful sizzle of batter hitting smoking hot oil. Unlike the massive, flimsy crepes of the South that get all the Hollywood attention, these are small, shatteringly crunchy, and born in cast iron. The grandmother's secret here is a splash of cheap beer in the batter for an airy, lace-like crunch, and rendering pork fat directly into the peanut oil. Served with a deeply savory Da Nang-style liver and peanut dipping sauce, this is a masterclass in regional cooking that transports the weekend gathering table straight to a bustling Vietnamese alleyway.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 cup</b>	rice flour <i>do not use glutinous rice flour</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	peanut oil <i>divided</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	cornstarch	<b>1/4 lb</b>	pork liver <i>soaked in milk for 20 minutes, drained, and finely minced</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground turmeric	<b>1/4 lb</b>	ground pork
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 small</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>
<b>3/4 cup</b>	filtered water	<b>1 tbsp</b>	annatto oil
<b>1/2 cup</b>	light beer	<b>2 tbsp</b>	hoisin sauce
<b>3 tbsp</b>	canned coconut milk	<b>1/4 cup</b>	roasted peanuts <i>finely crushed</i>
<b>3 med</b>	scallions <i>green parts only, thinly sliced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame seeds
<b>1/2 lb</b>	pork belly <i>skin removed, sliced paper-thin</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	cornstarch <i>mixed with a tablespoon of water</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	small raw shrimp <i>peeled and deveined</i>	<b>12 med</b>	Vietnamese rice paper
<b>2 med</b>	shallot <i>minced and divided</i>	<b>1 large</b>	leafy green lettuce <i>separated into leaves</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	fish sauce	<b>2 cup</b>	mixed Vietnamese herbs <i>mint, Thai basil, and perilla</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>1 med</b>	Granny Smith apple <i>julienned</i>
<b>1/8 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1 med</b>	cucumber <i>sliced into thin sticks</i>
<b>2 cup</b>	fresh bean sprouts <i>washed and dried well</i>		
<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow onion <i>sliced paper-thin</i>		

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the rice flour, cornstarch, turmeric, salt, water, beer, and coconut milk in a large bowl until perfectly smooth.**

Stir in the sliced scallions and let the batter rest at room temperature for at least 30 minutes so the rice starches hydrate fully, preventing a powdery crepe.

- 1. Toss the sliced pork belly and shrimp in a small bowl with half the minced shallot, fish sauce, sugar, and black pepper.**

Let the proteins sit and marinate while the batter rests.

- 2. Heat the annatto oil in a saucepan over medium heat, then sauté the remaining shallot and garlic until fragrant.**

Add the minced liver and ground pork, browning for about three minutes before stirring in the hoisin sauce and a half cup of water.

- 3. Simmer the sauce for five minutes, stir in the cornstarch slurry to thicken, and finish with the crushed peanuts and sesame seeds.**

Remove from heat and keep the sauce warm while you cook the crepes.

- 4. Place an 8-inch cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat until it is smoking hot, and add a tablespoon of peanut oil.**

Cast iron is strictly necessary here; it holds the immense, even heat required for the batter to fry instantly upon contact.

- 5. Drop two slices of pork and a few shrimp into the pan, searing for thirty seconds until the pork fat begins to render.**

The rendered pork fat will mix with the cooking oil to fry the batter, embedding a deep, savory flavor right into the crust.

- 6. Stir the resting batter, then ladle a third of a cup around the absolute edges of the hot pan.**

It should hiss violently. Immediately tilt and swirl the pan in a circular motion to spread the batter into a thin, even layer up the sides.

- 7. Toss a small handful of bean sprouts and a few onion slices onto one half of the crepe, immediately cover with a lid, and steam for one minute.**

This cooks the top of the batter and lightly blanches the sprouts.

- 8. Remove the lid, drizzle a half teaspoon of oil around the outer rim of the crepe, and fry uncovered for another two minutes.**

Cook until the edges pull away from the pan and the bottom is deeply golden and rigid.

- 1. Fold the crepe in half over the sprouts using a spatula, and transfer to a wire rack to maintain its crispness.**

Repeat with the remaining batter. Serve immediately, tearing off pieces of the hot crepe to roll up in damp rice paper with lettuce, fresh herbs, and tart apple, dunking generously into the warm liver sauce.



# Nem Nướng Nha Trang Nồi Chiên Không Dầu

*nem noong nya chang noy chee-en kohng yow*

For anyone who grew up chasing the sweet, garlicky smoke of Vietnamese barbecue, this takes you straight back home. We skip the exhausting traditional mortar work by utilizing pre-made giò sống to nail the meat's signature bounce, and trade the charcoal pit for a weeknight-friendly air fryer. The real secret here is the dipping sauce: a thick, savory emulsion of glutinous rice and pork liver, brilliantly streamlined with high-quality pâté. It is deeply comforting, undeniably authentic, and tastes exactly like you remember.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	ground pork <i>80/20 fat ratio preferred</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	glutinous rice <i>rinsed well</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	giò sống <i>thawed if frozen</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	chicken broth
<b>2 oz</b>	pork back fat <i>finely diced</i>	<b>4 oz</b>	raw shrimp <i>peeled, deveined, and finely minced</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	garlic <i>finely minced, divided</i>	<b>4 oz</b>	ground pork
<b>3 tbsp</b>	shallot <i>finely minced, divided</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	pork liver pâté
<b>4 tbsp</b>	fish sauce <i>divided</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	hoisin sauce
<b>2 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce	<b>2 tbsp</b>	roasted peanuts <i>crushed</i>
<b>3 1/2 tbsp</b>	sugar <i>divided</i>	<b>1 med</b>	rice paper wrappers <i>package</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	tapioca starch	<b>1 med</b>	spring roll wrappers <i>package</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	annatto oil <i>divided</i>	<b>1 med</b>	butter lettuce <i>leaves separated and washed</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1 med</b>	cucumber <i>cut into thin spears</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	baking powder	<b>1 cup</b>	mixed fresh herbs <i>garlic chives, mint, and perilla, washed</i>
<b>10 med</b>	fresh lemongrass stalks <i>thick outer layers removed</i>	<b>1 med</b>	green unripe mango <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Soak wooden skewers if substituting for lemongrass.**

If you cannot find fresh lemongrass stalks to mold the meat around, soak wooden bamboo skewers in water for thirty minutes prior to use so they do not burn in the air fryer.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Boil the glutinous rice into a soft porridge.**

In a small saucepan, combine the rinsed sticky rice with the chicken broth. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to the lowest setting, cover, and simmer for 20 to 25 minutes until the rice breaks down into a mushy porridge. Blend or mash vigorously until completely smooth and thick.

### 2. **Emulsify the meat mixture to build the signature bounce.**

In a large bowl, combine the 1 lb ground pork, giò sỡng, diced pork fat, 2 tablespoons garlic, 2 tablespoons shallot, 2 tablespoons fish sauce, oyster sauce, 1 1/2 tablespoons sugar, tapioca starch, 2 tablespoons annatto oil, black pepper, and baking powder. Put on a food-safe glove and aggressively knead and slap the meat against the bowl for 3 to 5 minutes until it forms a sticky, bouncy paste. Chill in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes.

### 3. **Fry the spring roll wrappers for the crucial crunch.**

Take the spring roll wrappers and roll them up tightly into thin cylinders, resembling cigars. Fry them in a skillet with a shallow layer of oil until golden and shatteringly crisp, then drain on paper towels.

### 4. **Sauté the proteins to build the base of the dipping sauce.**

Heat a small saucepan over medium heat, add the remaining 1 tablespoon of annatto oil, 1 tablespoon garlic, and 1 tablespoon shallot, and sauté until fragrant. Add the 4 oz minced pork and minced shrimp, cooking until no longer pink, then lower the heat and mash in the pork liver pâté until it melts entirely into the meat.

### 5. **Finish the authentic dipping sauce.**

Pour the blended sticky rice porridge into the saucepan with the meat mixture. Season with the hoisin sauce, remaining 2 tablespoons fish sauce, and remaining 2 tablespoons sugar. Simmer for 5 minutes, stirring constantly to prevent the starches from sticking to the bottom. Transfer to a bowl and garnish with crushed peanuts.

**1. Form and air fry the pork skewers.**

Preheat the air fryer to 350°F. With lightly oiled hands, mold a handful of the chilled meat mixture tightly around the top half of each lemongrass stalk. Air fry in a single layer for 10 minutes, then open the basket, flip the skewers, brush lightly with a little oil, and cook for another 3 to 5 minutes until deeply caramelized and charred at the edges.

**2. Assemble the weekend gathering table.**

Bring the hot skewers, warm dipping sauce, crispy rolls, and a massive platter of wet rice paper, lettuce, herbs, cucumber, and green mango to the table so everyone can build, roll, and dunk their own.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not skip the aggressive meat kneading.**

This step extracts the proteins required to bind the meat together, providing the signature snap that separates real Nem Nướng from an ordinary crumbly meatball.

● **The pâté shortcut saves your Tuesday night.**

Using high-quality canned pork liver pâté in the sauce achieves the profound, earthy richness of the authentic Nha Trang flavor profile without the exhausting labor of soaking and processing raw liver.



# Sốt Nước Chấm Xôi Gan

*soht nook chum soy gahn*

If you grew up eating xôi mặn—the legendary, loaded savory sticky rice of Saigon—you know the toppings are only half the story. The Chinese sausage, the pork floss, the crispy shallots... they're beautiful, but without the sauce, it's just dry rice. The secret weapon of every great street vendor is sốt pate gan. Making liver pate from scratch on a Tuesday is madness, so we look to a brilliant shortcut: high-quality store-bought pate, melted into a bubbling broth of soy, oyster sauce, and hot oil-bloomed five-spice. It's a rich, umami-bomb of a gravy that conjures the exact smell of a bustling Saigon morning in about ten minutes.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>1 tsp</b>	Sriracha
<b>1 large</b>	shallot <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	five-spice powder	<b>1/2 cup</b>	water
<b>4 oz</b>	pork liver pate	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	Maggi Seasoning	<b>1 tsp</b>	cornstarch <i>mixed with 1 tbsp cold water</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce		

## PREPARATION

- **Prepare your mise en place.**

Measure out your liquid ingredients before you start cooking. The five-spice powder blooms rapidly and can burn if you don't immediately follow it with the pate and liquids.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bloom the aromatics in hot oil.**

Heat the neutral oil in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add the minced shallot and sauté until softened and fragrant, about 2 minutes.

- 2. Awaken the five-spice powder.**

Drop the five-spice powder directly into the hot oil with the shallots. Stir constantly for exactly 15 seconds. Do not skip this; blooming the spices in fat awakens the essential oils and is the key to making your kitchen smell exactly like a Vietnamese street cart.

- 3. Build the emulsion.**

Immediately add the pate to the pan, breaking it up with a wooden spoon. Add the Maggi Seasoning, oyster sauce, Sriracha, sugar, and water.

**1. Simmer and reduce into a gravy.**

Bring the mixture to a gentle simmer. Whisk vigorously as the pate melts into the liquid, forcing it to emulsify rather than split into a slick of oil. Let it bubble gently for 3 to 5 minutes until it reduces and thickens.

**2. Blend for a luxurious, vendor-style finish.**

For the ultimate smooth texture—just like the pros do it in Vietnam—use an immersion blender right in the pot and blitz until completely smooth. If the sauce feels too thin, stir in the optional cornstarch slurry and simmer for 1 more minute until glossy. Stir in the black pepper and keep warm.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **The Weekend Sticky Rice Bar.**

To serve this properly for a gathering, cook a large batch of sweet glutinous rice in your rice cooker. Set out bowls of sliced pan-fried Chinese sausage (lạp xường), Vietnamese bologna (chả lụa), pork floss (chà bông), crispy fried shallots, crushed peanuts, and scallion oil. Let guests build their own bowls, finishing each masterpiece with a heavy pour of this hot, savory liver sauce.

● **Sourcing the pate.**

Don't overthink the pate. A good tub from your local Vietnamese deli, a French canned pate like Henaff, or even a high-quality chicken liver mousse from the supermarket perfectly mimics the street-vendor shortcut without sacrificing authentic flavor.



# Bò Mỡ Chài

*baw muh chai*

For those who grew up navigating crowded Vietnamese banquet halls, the smell of Bò Mỡ Chài is the smell of celebration. It is the undeniable crown jewel of the legendary Seven Courses of Beef—a savory, aggressively seasoned sausage tightly wrapped in caul fat that melts into a paper-thin, crispy crust as it cooks. While the old guard insists on charcoal pits, the modern Vietnamese secret for pulling this off on a busy weeknight is the air fryer. Paired with a funky, pineapple-spiked *mắm nêm* dipping sauce, this is the unapologetic, uncompromised taste of Sài Gòn, engineered for the reality of an American suburb.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	lean ground beef	<b>2 small</b>	garlic
<b>1/4 lb</b>	ground pork	<b>clove</b>	<i>minced</i>
<b>1/2 lb</b>	pork caul fat	<b>2 med</b>	Thai bird's eye chilies
<b>3 tbsp</b>	lemongrass	<b>1 tbsp</b>	<i>minced</i>
	<i>tender pale bottoms only, finely minced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	lime juice
<b>2 med</b>	shallots	<b>1 tbsp</b>	coarse salt
	<i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	rice paper
<b>4 small</b>	garlic	<b>package</b>	
<b>clove</b>	<i>minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	bánh hỡi
<b>1 tsp</b>	five-spice powder	<b>package</b>	<i>prepared according to package instructions</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fish sauce	<b>1 med</b>	green leaf lettuce
<b>1 tsp</b>	sesame oil	<b>head</b>	<i>washed and separated</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	sugar	<b>1 med</b>	fresh mint
<b>1 tsp</b>	chicken bouillon powder	<b>bunch</b>	<i>washed</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1 med</b>	fresh cilantro
	<i>freshly ground</i>	<b>bunch</b>	<i>washed</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	mắm nêm	<b>1 med</b>	perilla leaves
<b>1/2 cup</b>	crushed pineapple	<b>bunch</b>	<i>washed</i>
	<i>finely minced</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	scallion oil
<b>2 tbsp</b>	sugar	<b>2 tbsp</b>	roasted peanuts
			<i>crushed</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Massage the caul fat with coarse salt to neutralize impurities, then rinse thoroughly and pat completely dry.**

This is a non-negotiable step to remove any lingering odors from the fat before you cut it into two-by-three-inch rectangles.

- **Whisk together the mẳm nẳm, crushed pineapple, two tablespoons of sugar, two cloves of minced garlic, chilies, and lime juice.**

The sauce should be aggressively pungent, sweet, and tangy, perfectly balancing the rich fat of the beef.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Aggressively mix the ground beef, pork, and aromatics by hand until the meat becomes slightly tacky.**

Combine the beef, pork, lemongrass, shallots, four cloves of minced garlic, five-spice, fish sauce, sesame oil, one tablespoon of sugar, bouillon, and black pepper in a large bowl, then cover and chill for 30 to 60 minutes.

- 2. Roll a generous tablespoon of the chilled meat mixture inside a rectangle of caul fat.**

Mold the meat into a small cylinder, place it on the bottom third of the fat, and roll it upward, folding in the sides exactly as you would a spring roll so the fat seals itself.

- 3. Render and crisp the sausages in the air fryer.**

Lightly oil the basket and arrange the rolls in a single layer. Air fry at 320°F for 10 minutes, then carefully flip them and push the heat to 350°F for 5 more minutes until the fat is golden and crispy.

- 4. Garnish the hot beef rolls and assemble the table.**

Transfer to a platter, brush generously with scallion oil, and hit them with crushed peanuts before serving immediately alongside the rice paper, noodles, fresh herbs, and dipping sauce.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing caul fat is easier than it sounds.**

Do not be intimidated; you can easily find it in the freezer section of pan-Asian markets like 99 Ranch, or by simply asking the butcher at a local Mexican carniceria.

- **Trust the process with the mắm nêm.**

This fermented anchovy sauce is opaque and far funkier than standard fish sauce.

The smell is intense when you open the bottle, but the fresh pineapple works magic to balance it into the authentic dip this dish demands.



# Chả Tôm Bọc Mía

*chow tohm bahk mee-uh*

If you grew up in a Vietnamese household, you know chả tôm is the ultimate flex at a family gathering. Visually stunning and deeply aromatic, it is meant to be rolled up in greens and devoured by hand. Historically, achieving that signature dai—the bouncy, springy texture that separates real Vietnamese seafood from the rest of the world—required hours of pounding shrimp in a heavy stone mortar. For a modern cook craving the homeland on a Tuesday, the food processor is a godsend, but there is a catch: friction heat cooks the proteins prematurely and ruins the bounce. The aunties' secret? Freeze the shrimp until it is icy before blending, use a touch of pork paste to bind

it all together, and pre-steam the skewers. You get a crispy, sweet-and-savory bite that stays locked onto the sugarcane and tastes exactly like home, no carpal tunnel required.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	fresh white shrimp <i>peeled, deveined, and dried completely</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	kosher salt
<b>4 oz</b>	raw pork paste <i>chilled</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil
<b>1 large</b>	egg white	<b>20 oz</b>	canned sugarcane sticks <i>drained, rinsed, and quartered lengthwise into 4-inch sticks</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	tapioca starch	<b>1 lb</b>	thin rice vermicelli <i>cooked according to package instructions</i>
<b>3 med</b>	garlic <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1</b>	rice paper wrappers
<b>1 med</b>	shallot <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>package</b>	
<b>2 med</b>	scallion whites <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 head</b>	butter lettuce <i>separated into leaves, washed and dried</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	high-quality fish sauce	<b>1 bunch</b>	mixed fresh mint, cilantro, and Thai basil <i>washed and dried</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>1 cup</b>	sweet chili fish sauce
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground white pepper		

## PREPARATION

- **Moisture is the enemy of a good shrimp paste.**

Make sure to obsessively pat your peeled shrimp dry with paper towels before placing them in the freezer.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toss the thoroughly dried shrimp with the kosher salt and place in the freezer for 45 to 60 minutes.**

The shrimp must be icy and stiff, but not frozen solid. This prevents the food processor's friction from cooking the proteins, ensuring the authentic bouncy texture.

- 2. Pulse the garlic, shallot, and scallion whites in a food processor until minced.**

- 3. Add the icy shrimp to the processor and pulse a few times until roughly chopped.**

- 4. Add the pork paste, egg white, tapioca starch, fish sauce, sugar, white pepper, and neutral oil to the processor.**

Run it for just 30 to 45 seconds until it forms a smooth, sticky paste. Transfer to a bowl and vigorously slap the paste against the side in one direction for a minute to build elasticity, then refrigerate for 20 minutes.

- 5. Mold the chilled shrimp paste tightly around the sugarcane sticks.**

Rub a little oil on your hands to prevent sticking. Flatten a few tablespoons of paste in your palm, place a sugarcane stick in the center leaving an inch exposed at the ends, and shape the paste evenly with no air pockets.

- 6. Steam the assembled skewers in a lightly oiled steamer basket over boiling water for 4 to 5 minutes.**

This critical weeknight trick sets the exterior proteins, puffing the shrimp slightly and locking the paste firmly to the stick so it survives the pan without falling apart.

- 7. Heat a thin layer of oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat and sear the skewers for 2 to 3 minutes per side until deeply golden.**

Alternatively, you can brush them with oil and grill over charcoal, or air-fry at 390°F for 4 to 5 minutes.

**1. Serve immediately on a platter alongside the lettuce, herbs, noodles, rice paper, and dipping sauce.**

Slide the meat off the stick, wrap it in a lettuce leaf with herbs and noodles, roll it tightly in rice paper, and dunk it heavily into the fish sauce. Don't forget to chew the sugarcane stick at the end for a hit of savory-sweet juice.

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Raw pork paste (giò sồng) is easily found in the freezer section of most Asian-American supermarkets.**

If you absolutely cannot find it, substitute an equal amount of very fatty ground pork.

- **If you cannot find canned sugarcane, use lemongrass.**

Trim fresh lemongrass stalks to 4-inch pieces and halve them lengthwise to use as skewers. The floral aroma is a wonderfully authentic alternative.



# Cá Nướng Mỡ Hành

*cah noong muh hahn*

In the Mekong Delta, grandmothers used to bury a fresh-caught snakehead fish in rice straw and set the whole thing ablaze. We can't light a bonfire in a Midwestern backyard, but we can capture that exact intersection of sweet white flesh, blistering skin, and the savory slick of scallion oil in a standard oven. We swap the snakehead for an American catfish or snapper, utilizing a high-heat bake-and-broil technique to mimic the charcoal blister. Flake it apart at the table, roll it in translucent rice paper with a jungle of fresh herbs, and drag it through pungent fermented anchovy sauce. This isn't a watered-down adaptation; this is real, spectacular Vietnamese home cooking engineered for a modern weeknight.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>3 lb</b>	whole American catfish, walleye, or red snapper <i>scaled, gutted, and cleaned</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	roasted peanuts <i>coarsely crushed</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fish sauce	<b>1 package</b>	Vietnamese rice paper
<b>2 tbsp</b>	honey	<b>1 lb</b>	rice vermicelli noodles <i>cooked and drained</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>1 head</b>	green leaf lettuce <i>washed and separated</i>
<b>3 med clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1 large</b>	cucumber <i>cut into thin, finger-length sticks</i>
<b>1 med</b>	shallot <i>minced</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	mixed fresh herbs <i>mint, cilantro, perilla, and Thai basil, washed</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	lemongrass <i>tender bottom core only, finely minced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	canned crushed pineapple <i>with its juice</i>
<b>1 tsp</b>	ground black pepper	<b>1/3 cup</b>	mắm nêm
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	ground turmeric	<b>1/4 cup</b>	sugar
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	salt	<b>2 med clove</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>
<b>1 bunch</b>	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>2 med</b>	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1/3 cup</b>	neutral oil	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	salt		
<b>1/4 tsp</b>	sugar		

## PREPARATION

- **Set up your wrapping station ahead of time.**

The brilliance of this meal lies in the contrast of the hot, fatty fish and the cool, crisp botanicals. Wash your herbs and lettuce, chop your cucumbers, and arrange your platter before the fish goes into the oven so you're ready to roll the second the skin comes out blistering.

## INSTRUCTIONS

**1. Scrub the fish with coarse salt and score it deeply.**

Freshwater fish carry a muddy odor in their protective mucin layer. Vigorously rub the entire exterior with a handful of kosher salt, then rinse thoroughly under cold water and pat completely dry. Make three to four diagonal slashes down to the bone on both sides so the marinade can penetrate.

**2. Massage the wet rub into the fish and let it rest.**

Whisk together the fish sauce, honey, 1 tablespoon neutral oil, 3 cloves minced garlic, shallot, lemongrass, black pepper, turmeric, and 1/2 teaspoon salt. Lay the fish on a foil-lined baking sheet fitted with a wire roasting rack. Work the paste deep into the scored cuts and the belly cavity. Let it sit at room temperature for 30 to 60 minutes.

**3. Bake the fish until cooked through, then broil to blister the skin.**

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Roast the fish on the center rack for 25 to 30 minutes until the flesh is opaque. Turn your oven to broil and watch it like a hawk for 3 to 6 minutes. The honey will suddenly catch the high heat, caramelizing into a gorgeously crisp, golden-brown crust.

**4. Flash-fry the scallions with screaming-hot oil.**

Place the chopped scallions, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon sugar in a heatproof bowl. In a small saucepan, heat 1/3 cup neutral oil until it lightly smokes, then pour it directly over the scallions. They will violently sizzle and turn vibrant green instantly.

**5. Whisk together the dipping sauce.**

Combine the crushed pineapple, mắm nêm, 1/4 cup sugar, 2 cloves minced garlic, chilies, and lime juice. Stir aggressively until the sugar dissolves into a bold balance of sweet, funky, and spicy.

## 1. Dress the fish and build your rolls.

Transfer the roasted fish to a large platter, spoon the sizzling scallion oil generously into the crevices, and shower with crushed peanuts. Serve centrally with the herbs, vermicelli, rice paper, and warm water. Dip the rice paper, layer the greens and noodles, add a chunk of crispy fish, roll it tight, and drag it through the sauce.

### CHEF'S NOTES

- **A note on choosing your fish.**

Snakehead is traditional but illegal to sell live in many states. Whole American catfish provides the perfect skin-to-fat ratio for this high-heat method. If your catfish has black outer skin, ask the fishmonger to scrub it white, or give it a quick 1-minute blanch at home to scour the pigment off.

- **Dipping sauce alternatives.**

If the intensely funky, fermented anchovy paste (mắm nêm) eludes you or your palate, a standard sweet chili fish sauce (nước mắm pha) is a perfectly acceptable vehicle for dipping.



# Mắm Nêm Thơm

*mahm nem tohm*

If clear nước mắm is the everyday table wine of the Vietnamese kitchen, mắm nêm is the cask-strength bourbon. It is an unapologetic, opaque, fiercely pungent sauce made by fermenting whole anchovies. Straight from the bottle, it is a bully. The grandmother's secret is to tame it with crushed canned pineapple, utilizing the fruit's enzymes to break down the harsh proteins. A quick sizzle of lemongrass and garlic mellows the raw funk into a deeply savory, perfectly balanced sauce that turns a simple summer roll into a profound event.

## INGREDIENTS

**1 tbsp** neutral oil

**1 med stalk** fresh lemongrass  
*tough outer leaves removed, tender inner core finely minced*

**4 med clove** garlic  
*finely minced*

**2 med** Thai bird's eye chilies  
*finely minced*

**1/2 cup** Mắm Nêm base

**8 oz** canned crushed pineapple  
*undrained*

**2 tbsp** granulated sugar

**1 tbsp** fresh lime juice

## PREPARATION

- **Sourcing the right fermented anchovy sauce.**

Look for bottles labeled 'Fermented Anchovy Sauce' or 'Mắm Nêm' at your local Asian market. Excellent regional brands include Dì Cẩn, Bà Duệ, or the Thai Pantai brand which features a yellow label and a picture of an old man.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sauté the aromatics to tame the raw funk.**

Turn on your stove's exhaust fan. Heat the neutral oil in a small saucepan over medium heat, then add the minced lemongrass and garlic. Sauté for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring constantly until the garlic turns a light golden brown and is intensely fragrant, being careful not to let it burn.

- 2. Simmer the sauce to meld the flavors.**

Carefully pour the Mắm Nêm into the saucepan, standing back slightly as it will sputter. Immediately add the entire contents of the crushed pineapple can, the minced chilies, and the sugar, stirring thoroughly to combine. Bring the sauce to a very gentle simmer and let it bubble for exactly 2 to 3 minutes, allowing the pineapple enzymes to mellow the fermented fish.

- 3. Cool and finish with fresh acid.**

Turn off the heat, taste the sauce, and add another tablespoon of sugar if it feels too intensely salty. Transfer the mixture to a heat-proof bowl to cool to room temperature, then stir in the fresh lime juice to provide a necessary acidic finish without turning the sauce bitter.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **Pair it with rich, fatty elements.**

The robust nature of this sauce demands pairings with ingredients that possess high fat content or neutral starch. Serve alongside boiled pork belly, whole grilled fish, or vinegar beef fondue.

- **Storage deepens the flavor.**

Because the sauce is cooked, it keeps exceptionally well. Store leftover sauce in a glass jar with a tight-fitting lid in the refrigerator for up to 3 weeks.



# Nem Lụi Bọc Sả

*nem loo-ee bawk sah*

The smell of pork fat and lemongrass hitting the heat is the universal signal that people are coming over. In Huế, the former imperial capital, this dish is a sophisticated culinary art form. But the secret to pulling it off in a modern American kitchen on a busy weeknight isn't a specialized charcoal brazier—it's respecting the science of the emulsified meat and using a brilliant, unapologetic shortcut for the legendary peanut-pâté dipping sauce. It delivers flawless authentic flavor, the undeniable bounce of a proper sausage, and the interactive joy of the weekend gathering table.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	ground pork (80% lean)	<b>3 tbsp</b>	pork liver pâté
<b>1/2 lb</b>	giò sồng (pork paste)	<b>2 tbsp</b>	creamy peanut butter
<b>3 stalks</b>	lemongrass <i>white parts only, finely minced</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	hoisin sauce
<b>3 cloves</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	fish sauce
<b>2 med</b>	shallot <i>minced</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sugar
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fish sauce	<b>1/2 cup</b>	cooked white rice <i>blended with 1/2 cup water until smooth</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce	<b>2 tbsp</b>	crushed roasted peanuts
<b>1 tbsp</b>	honey	<b>1 tbsp</b>	toasted sesame seeds
<b>1 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>15 large</b>	rice paper wrappers
<b>1 tbsp</b>	annatto oil	<b>1 large</b>	butter lettuce <i>leaves separated</i>
<b>10 large</b>	lemongrass <i>tops trimmed, root ends lightly smashed</i>	<b>1 cup</b>	fresh mint <i>leaves picked</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	annatto oil	<b>1 cup</b>	fresh cilantro <i>leaves picked</i>
<b>1 med</b>	shallot <i>minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	cucumber <i>cut into thin matchsticks</i>
<b>2 cloves</b>	garlic <i>minced</i>	<b>1 med</b>	Granny Smith apple <i>cut into thin matchsticks</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Making your own pork paste.**

If you cannot find store-bought giò sồng, blend half a pound of semi-frozen ground pork with a tablespoon of cornstarch, a tablespoon of cold water, and a half teaspoon of single-acting baking powder in a food processor until it turns into a sticky paste.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. **Mix and chill the meat.**

Combine the ground pork, pork paste, minced lemongrass, garlic, shallot, fish sauce, oyster sauce, honey, pepper, and annatto oil in a bowl, then freeze for 30 minutes to prevent the fat from melting.

### 2. **Knead the chilled mixture.**

Vigorously knead by hand for 3 to 5 minutes until the mixture looks pale, cohesive, and intensely sticky to ensure the signature bounce of the sausage.

### 3. **Form the skewers.**

Lightly oil your hands, press about 3 tablespoons of the cold meat mixture firmly around the bruised root end of each whole lemongrass stalk, and roll it into a tight 4-inch sausage.

### 4. **Cook the skewers.**

Cook at 330°F in an air fryer or 375°F in an oven for 15 minutes, then brush with a little extra honey and annatto oil and blast at 400°F for 4 to 5 minutes until deeply caramelized.

### 5. **Build the legendary sauce base.**

Heat the remaining annatto oil in a saucepan over medium heat, sauté the shallot and garlic until fragrant, then mash in the liver pâté until it breaks down completely into the oil.

### 6. **Thicken and simmer the sauce.**

Stir in the peanut butter, hoisin, fish sauce, and sugar, then pour in the blended rice mixture and simmer gently for 5 minutes until glossy and thick enough to coat a spoon.

### 7. **Assemble and eat.**

Dip a sheet of rice paper in warm water, lay down lettuce, herbs, and an apple matchstick, add a skewer, grip firmly to slide the stalk out, roll tightly, and dip heavily into the warm sauce.

## CHEF'S NOTES

- **The secret palate cleanser.**

The tart astringency of the Granny Smith apple perfectly mimics the green banana or star fruit traditionally used in Hué, cutting right through the rich, fatty pork so you can keep eating.





# Linh HỒN Việt: Foundational Condiments and Mother Sauces

*The pantry anchor of the cookbook, featuring unapologetically authentic dipping sauces, pickles, and garnishes.*

Look at any proper Vietnamese table, and you won't just see a center plate—you'll see an arsenal of little bowls. This is the architecture of the meal. The unapologetic funk of fermented anchovy, the sharp, clean snap of pickled

daikon, the slick, green sheen of scallion oil. Without these crucial counterpoints, a dish is just cooked food. With them, it becomes a lineage.

These are the mother sauces and daily pickles of the home kitchen. They are potent, uncompromising, and absolutely necessary. They bridge the gap between a hurried Tuesday night and the deliberate, time-tested kitchens of grandmothers past. Stock this pantry, understand these rhythms, and the rest will follow.





# Đậu Hũ Chiên Giòn Chấm Mắm Tôm

*dow hoo chee-en jyon chum mum tom*

Mắm tôm separates the tourists from the locals. It is aggressively pungent in the jar, but the grandmother's trick is pure chemistry: hit it with citrus, a splash of cheap booze, and a spoonful of boiling shallot oil, and it physically transforms into a frothy, caramelized mother sauce. Paired with tofu that's been salt-brined to draw out the water and fried to an agonizingly perfect golden crisp, this is Northern Vietnamese street food stripped down to its absolute essentials. It tastes exactly like home.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>14 oz</b>	firm water-packed tofu <i>cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	clear rice wine or vodka
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>1 small</b>	Asian red shallot <i>finely minced</i>
<b>1 cup</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>2 small</b>	Thai bird's eye chilis <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fermented shrimp paste	<b>1 cup</b>	fresh perilla, Vietnamese balm, and cucumber slices
<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar		
<b>1 tbsp</b>	fresh kumquat or lime juice		

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Dissolve the salt in a large bowl of warm water and submerge the tofu cubes for 30 minutes.**

This osmotic brine draws out excess surface moisture, which is the absolute secret to achieving the airy, splintering crust of traditional Hanoi street tofu without the violent oil splatter.

- 2. Remove the tofu from the brine and pat it aggressively dry with paper towels.**

Any lingering moisture is the enemy of a proper fry.

- 3. Heat a half-inch of neutral oil in a skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering, then add the tofu in a single layer.**

The hardest part is leaving it completely undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes. Do not touch it until a distinct golden crust sets on the bottom, then gently turn to brown all sides. Remove to a wire rack.

- 4. Whisk together the shrimp paste, sugar, citrus juice, and rice wine in a small heatproof bowl.**

Whip it vigorously with a fork or chopsticks until the acid reacts with the paste, turning the dark liquid into a lighter, thick, bubbly foam.

1. **Heat a tablespoon of the hot frying oil in a small pan, fry the minced shallot until golden, and pour the boiling mixture directly into the frothy shrimp paste.**

The hot oil flash-cooks the paste, mellowing the intense funk and caramelizing the sugar into a deeply savory, approachable sauce. Top with the sliced chilis.

2. **Serve the tofu immediately while the crust is still audibly crisp, alongside the whipped sauce and fresh herbs.**

#### CHEF'S NOTES

- **Use an air-fryer for a low-mess weeknight alternative.**

If a pan of hot oil isn't happening on a Tuesday, pat the brined tofu completely dry, toss gently with a tablespoon of oil, and air-fry at 320°F for 15 to 20 minutes, shaking once. It won't puff as dramatically, but the chew and crispness still deliver.

- **Do not skip the hot oil flash-cook.**

Pouring boiling shallot oil over the raw paste instantly neutralizes the harsh fermentation, making it an umami bomb even unaccustomed palates will devour.

- **You can prepare the paste base ahead of time.**

The shrimp paste mixture, without the hot oil, can be whisked together and stored in the fridge for up to a week.



# Bún Thịt Xào Sả Ớt

*boon tit sow sah uht*

While the smoky allure of grilled bún thịt nướng gets all the Hollywood glory, bún thịt xào sả ớt is the unsung workhorse of the Vietnamese home kitchen. Hailing from the lush Mekong Delta, it is the unapologetic, weeknight answer to cravings for the homeland. There is no firing up a grill here; thin ribbons of pork shoulder are aggressively stir-fried in a scorching skillet with a paste of pounded lemongrass, garlic, and chilies. Dressed in a vibrant, flawlessly balanced mother sauce, it bridges the gap between the frantic pace of modern American life and the deep, comforting soul of Vietnam. It is an exact replication of grandmother's kitchen, brilliantly reverse-engineered for a Tuesday night in Ohio.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1/2 cup</b>	hot water	<b>2 med</b>	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>roughly chopped</i>
<b>3 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar	<b>1 1/2 tbsp</b>	fish sauce
<b>3 tbsp</b>	premium fish sauce	<b>1 tbsp</b>	oyster sauce
<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice	<b>1 tbsp</b>	sweetened condensed milk
<b>2 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 tsp</b>	tapioca starch
<b>2 med</b>	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>thinly sliced</i>	<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper
<b>1 cup</b>	daikon radish <i>julienned</i>	<b>2 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil
<b>1 cup</b>	carrot <i>julienned</i>	<b>1/2 med</b>	yellow onion <i>cut into thin wedges</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar	<b>12 oz</b>	dry rice vermicelli noodles
<b>1 tsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>2 cup</b>	fresh bean sprouts
<b>1 tbsp</b>	rice vinegar	<b>1 med</b>	English cucumber <i>cut into matchsticks</i>
<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	pork shoulder <i>thinly sliced against the grain into bite-sized strips</i>	<b>1 med</b>	butter lettuce <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>3 med</b>	fresh lemongrass stalks <i>tender pale bottom sections only, roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	fresh mint <i>leaves picked</i>
<b>3 small</b>	garlic cloves <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	fresh cilantro <i>leaves picked</i>
<b>2 med</b>	shallots <i>roughly chopped</i>	<b>1 bunch</b>	fresh Thai basil <i>leaves picked</i>
		<b>1/2 cup</b>	roasted peanuts <i>roughly crushed</i>

## PREPARATION

- **Partially freeze the pork.**

Freezing the pork shoulder for 30 minutes prior to slicing firms up the fat and muscle, making it infinitely easier to cut paper-thin slices with a standard kitchen knife.

- **Utilize the velvet-ing matrix.**

The combination of tapioca starch and sweetened condensed milk forms a microscopic shield around the meat. This prevents moisture loss during the aggressive high-heat sear, tenderizing the lean muscles of American supermarket pork—a true grandmother's trick.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk together the mother sauce.**

In a medium bowl, completely dissolve the sugar into the hot water, then stir in the fish sauce and lime juice. Allow it to cool slightly before adding the minced garlic and chilies; adding them at the end ensures they float beautifully on the surface, a hallmark of a careful Vietnamese cook.

- 2. Massage the quick pickles.**

Combine the julienned daikon and carrot in a small bowl with the sugar, salt, and rice vinegar. Massage the vegetables gently with your hands for 30 seconds until they release their natural juices, then set aside.

- 3. Pulverize the aromatics into a paste.**

Skip the food processor and transfer the chopped lemongrass, garlic, shallots, and chilies to a mortar and pestle. Pound them aggressively until they form a coarse, highly fragrant paste, releasing the essential oils that a knife simply cannot.

- 4. Velvet and marinate the pork.**

In a mixing bowl, toss the sliced pork shoulder with the pounded aromatic paste, fish sauce, oyster sauce, condensed milk, tapioca starch, and black pepper. Let it rest at room temperature for 15 to 30 minutes to allow the marinade to penetrate.

- 5. Boil and rinse the vermicelli.**

Cook the dry noodles according to the package instructions until al dente. Drain and rinse them thoroughly under cold running water to remove the excess starch, which prevents clumping, and let them drain completely.

**1. Sear the pork over maximum heat.**

Heat a heavy cast iron skillet or carbon steel wok over high heat until it is smoking hot, then add the neutral oil and spread the pork into a single layer. Do not touch it for 1 to 2 minutes, allowing the meat to caramelize and char without steaming in its own juices.

**2. Add the onions to finish.**

Toss the meat rapidly, and when the pork is about eighty percent cooked through, add the yellow onion wedges. Stir-fry for another 2 minutes until the onions turn translucent, then remove from the heat.

**3. Assemble the bowls for contrast.**

Layer sliced lettuce, bean sprouts, and fresh herbs in the bottom of each bowl, topped with a generous nest of the cooled vermicelli. Crown with the blistering hot pork, cucumber matchsticks, quick pickles, and crushed peanuts, instructing guests to pour the mother sauce over the top immediately before eating.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Avoid crowding the pan.**

American residential stoves often lack the extreme BTUs of a commercial Asian wok burner. Cook the pork in two batches if your pan is small; overcrowding will drop the temperature, causing the meat to boil and turn gray rather than achieving the required savory sear.

● **Source the right lemongrass.**

If fresh stalks are unavailable, frozen minced lemongrass from the local Asian market is an excellent substitute. Avoid Western tubed lemongrass paste, which lacks the sharp floral notes essential to the dish.



# Sò Điệp Nướng Mỡ Hành

*saw d-yeap nyoong muh hahn*

If you grew up in a Vietnamese-American household, the smell of mỡ hành—scallion oil—is the undeniable smell of home. It is the shimmering green mother sauce that forms the absolute soul of the nhậu street stall, meant to be chased with cold beer on a humid night. Most modern restaurants take the easy way out, simply microwaving green onions in vegetable oil, but true homeland flavor demands rendered pork fat. Taking the extra ten minutes to render your own lard yields two miracles: a violent, savory flash-fry that strips the raw bite from the alliums, and crispy golden cracklings that provide an

addictive crunch. Spooned over sweet, briny scallops grilling right in their shells, this technique brings the smoky, savory noise of a bustling Saigon alleyway straight into your weeknight kitchen.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>12 large</b>	half-shell scallops <i>thawed if frozen, stomach sacks removed</i>	<b>1/4 tsp</b>	MSG
<b>1 1/4 tsp</b>	salt <i>divided</i>	<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral oil <i>chilled</i>
<b>1/4 cup</b>	lime juice <i>divided</i>	<b>1/3 cup</b>	roasted unsalted peanuts <i>roughly crushed</i>
<b>4 oz</b>	pork fat <i>diced into 1/4-inch cubes</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	premium fish sauce
<b>1 large bunch</b>	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	warm water
<b>3 tbsp</b>	sugar <i>plus 1/2 teaspoon, divided</i>	<b>2 small cloves</b>	garlic <i>finely minced</i>
		<b>2 small</b>	bird's eye chilis <i>finely minced</i>

## INSTRUCTIONS

### 1. Deodorize the scallops with a citrus wash.

Gently pry the meat from the shell and pull away any dark digestive tracts. Submerge the white meat in a bowl of cold water mixed with 1 teaspoon of the salt and 1 tablespoon of the lime juice for 5 minutes, then rinse, pat completely dry, and return to the cleaned shells.

### 2. Whisk together the dipping sauce.

In a small bowl, dissolve 3 tablespoons of sugar into the warm water. Stir in the fish sauce and remaining 3 tablespoons of lime juice, then float the minced garlic and chilis on top.

**1. Render the pork fat into liquid lard and golden cracklings.**

Place the diced pork fat in a small skillet over medium-low heat. Cook slowly for 8 to 10 minutes until the fat turns into liquid lard and the pork bits shrink into crispy cracklings, then scoop out the cracklings with a slotted spoon and set aside.

**2. Flash-cook the scallion oil.**

Place the chopped scallions, remaining 1/2 teaspoon of sugar, remaining 1/4 teaspoon of salt, and the MSG in a heat-proof bowl. Reheat the liquid pork fat in the skillet until smoking hot, pour it directly over the scallions so they sizzle violently, and immediately stir in the cold neutral oil to lock in the bright green color.

**3. Grill the scallops under high heat.**

Preheat a broiler to high and place the scallop shells on a sturdy baking sheet. Broil for 2 to 3 minutes until the natural juices bubble, then pull them out, spoon the scallion oil generously over each scallop, and return to the broiler for another 2 to 3 minutes until opaque but tender.

**4. Garnish with cracklings and peanuts to serve.**

Carefully transfer the hot shells to a serving platter. Top each scallop with the reserved crispy pork cracklings and crushed peanuts, serving immediately with the dipping sauce meant to be spooned directly into the shell before taking a bite.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Sourcing your scallops.**

Half-shell Japanese scallops are usually found in the freezer section of local Asian markets. If you can only find large, dry sea scallops, place them on small, crumpled squares of aluminum foil to catch the bubbling scallion oil under the broiler.

● **Do not substitute bacon for pork fat.**

Ask your butcher for pork back fat or buy unsmoked pork belly. The heavy smoke profile of American bacon will drastically alter the traditional flavor and overpower the delicate natural brine of the scallop.



# Thịt Ba Chỉ Luộc Cuốn Bánh Tráng Chấm Mắm Nêm

*thit bah chee loo-uhk koon bahng chang chum mum nem*

If clear fish sauce is Vietnam's polite global export, *mắm nêm* is the unfiltered, unapologetic soul of the grandmother's kitchen. Originating from the harsh, beautiful coastlines of Central Vietnam, this deeply pungent fermented anchovy sauce demands the cleanest, purest protein imaginable to balance its intensity: unseasoned boiled pork belly wrapped in a garden of fresh herbs. The secret here isn't just the sauce, but the ancestral trick of the "blanch and shock"—a non-negotiable method that guarantees sweet, snowy-white pork with a snappy, crunchy skin. Roll it up with crisp lettuce and tart apples, dip

it deep into the sweet, spicy, pineapple-laced funk, and you'll experience the exact, un-Hollywoodized taste of a family Sunday in Da Nang.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 1/2 lb</b>	pork belly <i>cut into pieces with distinct alternating layers of meat and fat</i>	<b>3 med</b>	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>thinly sliced</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	white vinegar	<b>2 tbsp</b>	fresh lime juice
<b>1 tbsp</b>	kosher salt	<b>3 tbsp</b>	granulated sugar
<b>1 small</b>	yellow onion <i>peeled and halved</i>	<b>1/4 cup</b>	hot water
<b>1 small</b>	fresh ginger <i>unpeeled and smashed with the back of a knife</i>	<b>1 med</b>	rice paper
<b>1 tsp</b>	sugar	<b>1/2 lb</b>	dried rice vermicelli noodles <i>boiled according to package instructions, rinsed in cold water, and drained</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fermented anchovy sauce	<b>1 large</b>	red or green leaf lettuce <i>washed and separated into leaves</i>
<b>1/2 cup</b>	fresh pineapple <i>very finely minced or crushed in a food processor</i>	<b>1 large</b>	English cucumber <i>cut into thin finger-length spears</i>
<b>1 tbsp</b>	neutral cooking oil	<b>1 large</b>	Granny Smith apple <i>cored and cut into matchsticks</i>
<b>2 tbsp</b>	lemongrass <i>finely minced using only the tender bottom 3 inches of the stalk</i>	<b>1 large</b>	fresh mint
<b>4 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1 large</b>	perilla leaves or Thai basil

## PREPARATION

- **Strain the fermented anchovy sauce.**

Press the bottled măm nêm through a fine-mesh strainer over a bowl, discarding any small fish bones or solids left behind.

- **Scrub the pork belly.**

Rub the exterior of the raw pork belly with a little coarse salt, then rinse it under cold water to remove any surface bacteria or impurities before blanching.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Blanch the pork belly to extract impurities.**

Place the scrubbed pork in a medium pot, cover with cold water, and add the white vinegar and salt. Bring to a rapid boil over high heat and let it boil aggressively for 3 minutes until a dirty, grayish foam rises to the top.

- 2. Rinse the pork and clean the pot.**

Remove the pork, discard the dirty water, and wash the pork thoroughly under cold running water to ensure a perfectly clean exterior.

- 3. Simmer the pork with aromatics until tender.**

Return the clean pork to the clean pot and completely submerge it in fresh cold water. Add the halved onion, smashed ginger, and sugar, bring to a boil, then immediately reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Cover and cook for 25 to 30 minutes, or until a chopstick pierces the thickest part of the skin easily with no pink juices.

- 4. Prepare a heavily iced water bath.**

While the pork is simmering, fill a large bowl with cold water and two generous handfuls of ice cubes.

- 5. Shock the cooked pork in the ice bath.**

The exact second the pork is done, use tongs to lift it out of the boiling water and plunge it completely into the ice bath for 10 minutes. This instantly stops the cooking, tightens the skin to make it crunchy, and prevents the meat from oxidizing and turning gray.

- 6. Sauté the aromatics for the dipping sauce.**

In a small skillet, heat the neutral oil over medium heat, add the minced garlic and lemongrass, and sauté for 30 to 45 seconds until highly fragrant and just turning golden.

**1. Mix the mǎm nễm sauce and let it rest.**

Remove the skillet from the heat and carefully pour in the strained anchovy sauce, hot water, sugar, crushed pineapple, lime juice, and chilies. Stir vigorously until the sugar dissolves, then let it rest so the natural pineapple enzymes can mellow the funk.

**2. Slice the pork thinly and assemble the table.**

Remove the cold pork from the ice bath, pat it completely dry with paper towels, and cut it into very thin slices against the grain. Arrange the meat, vegetables, noodles, and herbs on communal platters alongside a wide, shallow bowl of warm water for dipping the rice paper.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Do not skip the ice bath.**

It is the only way to achieve the prized trắng giòn (white and crunchy) texture that defines proper Vietnamese boiled pork.

● **The brilliance of the Granny Smith apple.**

While traditional recipes demand sour star fruit or astringent green bananas, a tart green apple matchstick perfectly replicates the required crisp texture and malic acid needed to cut right through the rich pork fat.



# Tôm Càng Rang Me

*tom cang rang meh*

The sharp, mouth-watering tang of tamarind hitting sizzling garlic is the unmistakable scent of the Mekong Delta. Southern Vietnamese cooking is obsessed with the tightrope walk between sweet and sour, and this dish is its masterclass. Forget the restaurant shortcuts of butter or ketchup. The ancestral secret is simple: keep the shells on, flash-fry for crunch, and rely entirely on a dark, sticky glaze of pure tamarind pulp, palm sugar, and premium fish sauce. It's finger-licking, deeply comforting food that transports you straight back to the homeland, yet requires only ten minutes at the wok.

## INGREDIENTS

<b>1 lb</b>	head-on shell-on jumbo shrimp	<b>2 small</b>	Bird's eye chilies <i>finely sliced</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	fine sea salt	<b>2 med</b>	scallions <i>chopped</i>
<b>1/2 tsp</b>	black pepper	<b>1 tbsp</b>	annatto oil
<b>3 tbsp</b>	neutral oil	<b>2 oz</b>	tamarind pulp block
<b>1 large</b>	shallot <i>finely minced</i>	<b>1/2 cup</b>	boiling water
<b>4 med</b>	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>	<b>3 tbsp</b>	palm sugar
		<b>2 tbsp</b>	premium fish sauce

## PREPARATION

- **Prep the shrimp with their armor intact.**

Using kitchen shears, snip off the sharp rostrum and legs. To devein without peeling, insert a toothpick through the back shell joint, hook the vein, and gently pull it out. Pat the shrimp bone dry, toss with salt and pepper, and let sit for ten minutes.

- **Extract the tamarind water.**

Pour the boiling water over the tamarind pulp block. Let it steep for ten minutes, vigorously mash to separate the flesh from the seeds, and strain the thick liquid into a bowl, discarding the solids.

## INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Balance the mother sauce.**

Whisk the palm sugar and fish sauce into your strained tamarind liquid until dissolved; it should taste aggressively tart, deeply savory, and unapologetically sweet.

**1. Flash-fry the shrimp.**

Heat the neutral oil in a wok or large skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Sear the dried shrimp in a single layer for just over a minute per side until the shells blister bright orange, then immediately remove them to a plate.

**2. Bloom the aromatics.**

Turn the heat down to medium, leaving about a tablespoon of the fragrant shrimp oil in the pan. Add the annatto oil, garlic, shallot, and chilies, sautéing for barely a minute until golden and highly aromatic.

**3. Reduce the sauce into a syrup.**

Pour the tamarind mother sauce into the wok, cranking the heat back to medium-high to let it bubble and reduce for two to three minutes.

**4. Glaze the shrimp.**

Tumble the partially cooked shrimp and their resting juices back into the bubbling syrup. Toss vigorously for a minute or two until the meat is cooked through and the shells are completely coated in the sticky glaze.

**5. Garnish and serve hot.**

Kill the heat, toss in the scallions, and serve immediately with massive bowls of steamed jasmine rice to soak up the sauce and the rich tomalley squeezed from the shrimp heads.

**CHEF'S NOTES**

● **Leave the shells on.**

The shells protect the delicate meat from overcooking and act as a sponge for the sticky glaze; peeling them ruins the dish's texture.

● **Make the mother sauce in advance.**

Scale up the tamarind, sugar, and fish sauce ratio to keep in a mason jar in the fridge for instant weeknight meals.