



Singapore Oodles:

The original fusion food

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Food in Singapore is not just satay and the eponymous noodles. It's much more than that – and more than the usual description of a combination of Chinese and Indian cooking. In fact it's nothing less than an eclectic mixture of all the Far Eastern cuisines you could name and then some, each borrowing techniques and ingredients from each other. Singapore invented fusion food.

When Stamford Raffles, its British founder, declared the little fishing village a free port in 1819, migrants swarmed in. Chinese from the southern coastal provinces of Fujian and Swatow followed other Chinese from settlements in Malacca, Java and Borneo. There was already a small contingent of British Army Indian soldiers, and when Singapore became an Indian penal

station many of their countrymen arrived to work on public buildings. Scores of Tamils from South India joined them as indentured labour. The Malay population ballooned with Javanese, Sumatrans, Boyanese from Madura and other Indonesian islanders, as well as Malays and Straits Chinese. From the Middle East came Arabs and Jews. The Armenians had a large community. And, of course, the colony's British administration was present from the start. All these migrants brought their own culinary traditions with them. And as soon as they came together, they began to hybridise.



Pineapple Curry

thin coconut milk – 250ml
 a just-ripe pineapple, peeled and cubed
 black peppercorns – 1/4 teaspoon
 whole star anise – 2
 cinnamon stick – 8 cm
 cloves – 2
 freshly grated nutmeg – about 1/4 teaspoon
 plump stalk of lemon grass, bruised – 1
 a lump of galangal the size of your thumb (if you can't find fresh galangal, use 2 teaspoons of powdered, or the same amount of fresh ginger), peeled and sliced
 tamarind juice – 1 tablespoon
 thick coconut milk – 125 ml

Spice Paste

dried red chillies, soaked to soften – 5
 coriander seeds, crushed – 1 teaspoon
 garlic – 2 cloves, peeled and chopped
 shallots – 6, peeled and chopped
 candlenuts – 2 (for thickening – use a teaspoon of ground almonds if you can't find any)
 turmeric – 1 teaspoon
 palm sugar – 1/2 teaspoon, chopped (or any dark brown sugar)

First make the spice paste. Grind all the ingredients together (if you like a milder curry, use only two chillies!) and then sauté in vegetable oil until fragrant. Add the thin coconut milk and bring to the boil, giving it a good stir from time to time. Then add all the other ingredients except the thick coconut milk. Reduce the heat and simmer until the pineapple is tender. Add the thick coconut milk and heat through.



Vegetables with Spicy Coconut

long beans or french beans – 100 g
 young fern tips or spinach – 100 g (The pre-packed mixed rocket, watercress and spinach salads, eg from Waitrose, are good here, or you could use asparagus or tenderstem broccoli)
 beansprouts – 100 g, blanched
 fried shallots to garnish
Sauce
 bird's-eye chillies – 7, sliced
 red chillies – 8, seeded and sliced
 dried shrimp paste – 1 tablespoon, toasted*
 garlic – 4 cloves, peeled and sliced
 shallots – 4, peeled and sliced
 turmeric – 1 teaspoon
 palm sugar – 1 tablespoon (or any dark brown sugar)
 freshly grated or desiccated coconut – 250g
 water – 250ml

Make the sauce first by grinding or blending the first seven ingredients. (If the amount of chillies looks alarming, feel free to use less!) Add the coconut and water – you can use the liquid out of the coconut and make it up to 250ml with water – and simmer until the sauce thickens, then cool to room temperature.

Slice the beans and fern tips, then boil or steam them until al dente. If using leaves, stir-fry until wilted. Drain, add the blanched beansprouts and arrange on a plate. Pour the sauce over the vegetables and garnish with fried shallots, if you like.

Note: Make coconut milk from a creamed coconut block. For thin, use equal quantities of creamed coconut and water. For thick, the proportions are one-quarter water and three-quarters creamed coconut.



Deep-fried Beancurd with Peanut Sauce

beancurd – 2-3 cakes, deep fried till golden brown
 beansprouts – 100 g
 a small cucumber, finely shredded
 spring onions – 2, shredded
Sauce
 shallots – 5, sliced
 garlic – 3 cloves, sliced
 red chillies – 5, sliced
 dried shrimp paste – 1/2 teaspoon*
 vegetable oil – about a tablespoon
 fried or roast peanuts – 200g, chopped roughly
 sweet black soy sauce – 3 tablespoons (if you can't find sweet black soy sauce, add a teaspoon of granulated sugar to the same quantity of regular soy sauce)
 tamarind juice – 1 tablespoon

Make the sauce first by frying the shallots, garlic, chillies and shrimp paste (if using) in oil until soft. (If you like a milder dish, use only two chillies.) Add the peanuts, soy sauce and tamarind juice. If you like a smooth sauce, whizz it in the blender. Otherwise leave it chunky. You can prepare this sauce in advance and either re-heat it or serve it cold.

Arrange the beansprouts, cucumber, spring onion and cubes of fried beancurd on a plate. Either dollop the sauce on top or serve it separately, if you prefer. This is real street-hawker food so it doesn't need to be pretty!

*If you are a strict vegetarian, omit dried shrimp paste from these recipes, as there is no real substitute.



Nonya Wedding Rice

rice – 330g
 dark soy sauce – 1 teaspoon
 water – 1/2 litre
 coriander seeds – 2 tablespoons
 cinnamon stick – 5 cm
 whole star anise – 2
 cloves – 2
 cardamom pod – 1
 raisins – 2 tablespoons (optional, for garnish)
Spice paste
 shallots – 3
 a lump of ginger half the size of your thumb
 garlic – 2 cloves

Rinse the rice in 2-3 changes of water to get the starch out, then crush the spice paste ingredients and fry them gently without browning in vegetable oil. Turn up the heat, add the rice and soy sauce and fry briefly. Then add all the whole spices and the water, stir well, cover, and simmer until the rice is done – about 10 minutes. Garnish with raisins, if you like.

Note: Most of the unusual ingredients can be found in Chinese or Asian supermarkets.

All recipes serve 4. Adapted from the *Periplus* range of cookbooks (Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd).