

# Oriental cookery doesn't have to be mysterious

Restaurants have long purveyed the delights of Oriental cookery to an avid American public. With Cantonese restaurants leading the way, before many of the staunchest devotees of the Oriental way of dining were even born, there has been an endless stream of restaurants introducing adventurous diners to an ever-fascinating succession of dishes and cuisines.

Thus, Americans are eating with confidence the foods of countries as diverse as India and Japan, Korea, Thailand and Vietnam.

However, all too often, that confidence falters when it comes to cooking. Individuals who prepare Mexican, Italian, French and Greek foods as a matter of course, and even descend on occasion to work up a simple, stir-fried Chinese dish, still hesitate when it comes to taking up the chopsticks to re-create the cuisines of China's neighbors, near and far.

This occurs for a variety of reasons. Many of the ingredients are unfamiliar, the techniques confusing, the necessary equipment daunting.

However, this need not be so, as Jennifer Brennan proves in her recently published volume, "The Cuisines of Asia" (St. Martin's/Marck, \$19.95).

Brennan sets out to and succeeds in demystifying Oriental cookery, making it more accessible to the many eager home cooks by breaking it down by technique rather than country of origin, and by creating recipes around

ingredients which are widely available across the country. The result is to instill a feeling of confidence and the ability to improvise, mix and match.

**THE COUNTRIES** covered in Brennan's volume are China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, The Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

The techniques which provide the backbone for these varied cuisines range from barbecuing to stir-frying, and include methods as diverse as currying and deep frying, steaming and simmering, plus baking (a brief excursion into Oriental bread-making) and creating dishes around the array of Oriental noodles which are currently gaining favor in this country.

Brennan begins by carefully discussing the necessary equipment for Oriental culinary endeavors, and goes on to provide sketches of the countries and cuisines covered in the volume. An attempt to stimulate the taste buds and the imagination, to bring to life the cuisines of the East, to simulate a sensory journey through the Orient.

General techniques — boning a chicken, cutting methods, creating vegetable garnishes — are covered next, then Brennan swings into the area of basics — sauces, marinades, spice mixes, won ton dough.

The chapters that follow are the meat of the book. "Souped Up" takes

the reader/cook from China (Hot and Sour Meat Soup) — to India (Mulligatawny, or Indian Curry Soup), by way of Japan (Spinach Soup with Eggs) and the Philippines (Hearty Chicken Soup from the Philippines).

"The Knack of Snacking" seizes as its subject the wide range of Oriental finger foods — made in advance and sold by vendors in markets, food shops and on the street, to be eaten "on the run."

Chinese Egg Rolls are perhaps the most familiar of these savories. Others which Brennan includes are Malaysian Curry Puffs, Steamed Pork Dumplings and Cooked Shrimp Sushi.

**ENTICING AND** still largely unknown in North America are Oriental salads, the subject of the chapter "Dressed to Fill."

The dressings Brennan recounts are from all corners of the Orient, and range from Japanese Miso Dressing and Korean Thin Salad Dressing from Indonesia, and Indian Spiced Yogurt Dressings and a Malaysian specialty: Thick Coconut Salad Dressing.

Prepared salads include a Chinese Radish and Carrot Salad, Sweet and Sour Fresh Cucumber Salad from Thailand, and Japanese Turnip Chrysanthemum and Carrot Salad.

"Full Steam Ahead" focuses on Oriental steaming techniques, and the

dishes covered range from a Korean Stuffed Steam Squid with Dipping Sauce to Whole, Steamed Fish with Spiced Ginger Sauce from China.

Other chapters, other specialties, some more familiar, some less so. Thus, "Stirring Fried" brings us Philippine Chicken and Pineapple Adobo and Szechuan Stir-Fried Cabbage with Hot Peppers, and "Fried to a Crisp," Japanese Vegetable and Shrimp Fritters (Tempura) and Philippine Deep-Fried Stuffed Crabs.

Curry is not simply Indian in origin, a fact which Brennan resoundingly proves in her chapter entitled "Currying Favor," which ranges through Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia, as well.

Simmering is the subject of "Slow and Tender," which focuses on dishes as diverse as a Japanese Beef and Vegetable Fondue and the rich and savory Indian Whole Chicken with Spices, Moghul Style.

**SATAYS (SKEWERED, marinated meats)** from Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand are the stars of the Char-broiling chapter, in company with the renowned Indian Tandoori (Indian Oven-Barbecued Chicken).

Noodles are not simply pasta, Oriental style, and appear in a wide variety of guises, in broth (White Flour Noodles and chicken in Broth from Japan) and fried (Philippine Egg Noodles with Meats and Vegetables).

Preserves, Breads and Desserts round out the selection, providing the

punctuation to the meals and dishes at the heart of Brennan's volume.

As an overview of Oriental cuisines, the book is successful. As an attempt to integrate the sometimes confusing, sometimes daunting preparations into the routine of the American kitchen, it is even more so, making Brennan's work an important contribution to the culinary bookshelf.

## VIETNAMESE STIR-FRIED CHICKEN WITH VINEGAR

Preparation time: 25 minutes  
Serves 4 to 6 (with 1 other dish)

Cooking time: 20 minutes

### SHOPPING AND TECHNIQUE TIPS

You should use both dark and white chicken meat for this recipe. Boned thigh meat, as well as boned chicken breasts, is now available in many meat departments, although it is far cheaper to bone your own.

### INGREDIENTS

2 cup of chicken meat boned, skinned and cut into bite-sized pieces  
2 green onions finely chopped  
The peel of 1 lemon grated  
1/4 tsp. of salt  
1/4 tsp. of freshly ground black pepper  
3-inch piece of fresh ginger root peeled and grated or minced  
4 tbsp. of white vinegar  
2 tbsp. of vegetable oil  
5 cloves of garlic peeled and chopped  
1 small onion peeled and finely chopped

1/4 cup of water  
2 tsp. of Southeast Asian fish sauce  
1 tsp. of granulated sugar  
15-20 mint leaves

### METHOD:

1. Place the chicken meat, green onions, lemon zest, salt and pepper in a medium mixing bowl. Mix well and let marinate for 20 minutes.
2. Place the grated ginger in a small bowl and pour the vinegar over.
3. Heat the oil in a wok over medium-high heat and stir-fry the garlic and onion until the onion is soft but not golden. Add the chicken mixture from the bowl, turn the heat to high, and fry, stirring and tossing continually, until the chicken turns white and becomes firm (about 5 minutes).

4. Now add the ginger-vinegar mixture and the water and cover. Reduce the heat to medium-low and let the chicken simmer for 5 minutes.
5. Uncover, season with the fish sauce and sugar and stir well. Let it simmer for 5 more minutes, stirring occasionally, then sprinkle with the mint leaves and stir one more time.
6. Transfer to a serving bowl and accompany with plain, boiled rice.

**ADVANCE PREPARATION AND** nd transferred to a casserole, covered and left in a low oven. Do not stir in the mint leaves until 5 minutes before serving time if you are keeping it in the oven.



## 'New' eatery, old recipe

Lunch in Litchfield, Conn., is a unique experience. While the youngsters went down the street for pizza and a dose of video games, we ate at The Village Restaurant, which faces The Green.

The Village Green is old and looks much the same as it did in the 1770s, when it was laid out. The Village Restaurant is fairly new — it has been serving meals since 1890.

Like most of the buildings in the historic town, the restaurant is painted white. Inside, the place is packed: two dining rooms connected by a hallway in the back.

We dined on four orders of Veal Marengo, somewhat of a historic dish that dates back to 1800. Napoleon scored one of his greatest victories that June 14 at the Italian village of Marengo over the Austrians that led to the cession of northern Italy to France.

You'll find the recipe for Veal Marengo mostly in French cookbooks. It basically consists of cubed veal, usually cut from the less expensive shoulder, white wine, onion, tomatoes and mushrooms, cooked in a sauce.

I prepared the dish at home and served it over rice, just like at the restaurant. I also used more wine and less tomato flavoring; you can reverse the proportions.

If you happen to have dinner at The Village Restaurant, your meal will be cooked to order — just like at home.

### VEAL MARENGO

1/4 cup cooking oil  
2 lbs. boneless veal, cubed  
1 onion, finely chopped  
1 garlic clove, finely chopped  
1 cup dry white wine  
1 cup beef broth  
3 tbsp. tomato sauce  
1 bay leaf  
1 tsp. salt  
1/4 tsp. dried thyme  
1/2 tsp. dried rosemary  
1/4 tsp. black pepper  
1/4 lb. fresh mushrooms, sliced  
1 tbsp. lemon juice  
3 tbsp. butter

Heat oil in large Dutch oven, add veal, saute and remove cubes as browned. Add onion and garlic, saute 5 minutes. Stir in wine, broth, tomato sauce, bay leaf and seasonings, return veal, bring just to boil, reduce heat to medium low, cover and cook 1 hour. Toss mushrooms with lemon juice, saute briefly in hot butter in skillet, add to veal mixture and cook 15 minutes; remove bay leaf. Serve with rice, garnish with parsley. Serves 5-6.

## Fickle fashion follows famous

About the only safe prediction that can be made about fashion is that it is totally unpredictable. What's "in" today almost assuredly will be "out" tomorrow.

Fashion changes have been occurring on a regular basis since about the 1800s, and many were inspired by a prominent figure.

In the mid-1800s, King Louis XIII of France began wearing a wig to hide his baldness, and fashionable Frenchmen took to shaving their heads so they could wear a wig.

English women are said to have copied Queen Victoria's staid figure by wearing puffy dresses with padding underneath.

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