



NINH BINH COOKING CLASS

Recipes from Ninh Binh

The dishes from our cooking classes, written down so you can cook them at home

ninhbinhcookingclass.com · Tam Coc, Trang An and the Ninh Binh countryside, Vietnam

Welcome back to the kitchen

You cooked these dishes with a local host in Ninh Binh: on a terrace in Tam Coc, in a family kitchen in the countryside, with the karst mountains outside. This book is so you can do it again at home, and try the dishes you did not get to. The recipes are our hosts' everyday versions, written for a European kitchen. Quantities are a starting point; Vietnamese cooking is done by tasting.

YOUR VIETNAMESE PANTRY

Six things from an Asian shop cover almost every recipe in this book. Buy them once; they keep for months.

Fish sauce (nước mắm)

The backbone of the cuisine. Buy a Vietnamese brand from Phú Quốc or Phan Thiết if you can; Thai brands are fine. It smells stronger in the bottle than it tastes in the dish.

Rice noodles

Thin vermicelli (bún) for rolls, salads and bún chả; flat noodles (bánh phở) for soup. Dried ones are good; fresh ones better if you find them.

Fresh herbs

Mint and coriander from any supermarket, Thai basil and perilla from an Asian shop. Herbs are not a garnish here but a vegetable: use handfuls, not sprigs.

Rice paper (bánh tráng)

Round sheets, 16 or 22 cm. Keep them dry and flat. The same sheets are used fresh and for frying.

Lemongrass, ginger, garlic, chilli

The aromatic base. Lemongrass freezes well; buy a bunch and freeze the stalks.

Sugar and lime

Vietnamese cooking balances salty fish sauce with sugar and lime in almost every dish. Taste, then adjust: a pinch of sugar or a squeeze of lime fixes most things.

Steamed rice. The way it is done in the class: rinse jasmine rice until the water runs almost clear. Put it in a pot with cold water up to the first joint of your finger above the rice (about 1.2 times the rice by volume). Bring to the boil, cover, turn the heat to the lowest, cook 12 minutes, then leave it 10 minutes off the heat with the lid on. Fluff with a fork.

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BASICS

Nuoc cham, the dipping sauce

Nước chấm

Almost everything in this book is eaten with this sauce. Salty, sour, sweet and a little hot, all at once. Make it first, taste it, and adjust until it makes you want to dip something in it.

- Makes about 250 ml
- 5 minutes

INGREDIENTS

4 tbsp fish sauce

4 tbsp lime juice (about 2 limes)

3 tbsp sugar

125 ml warm water

2 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1 red chilli, finely sliced

Optional: 2 tbsp grated carrot

METHOD

1. Stir the sugar into the warm water until it has dissolved.
2. Add the fish sauce and the lime juice. Taste: it should be pleasantly salty and sour with a sweet edge. Too strong? Add a little water. Too flat? A little more fish sauce or lime.
3. Add the garlic and chilli last, so they float on top. Add the carrot if you like the colour.
4. Serve in small bowls for dipping, or spoon over noodles and rice. Keeps 3 days in the fridge.

Host's tip. For fried spring rolls, our hosts make it a little sweeter. For fresh rolls, some use hoisin sauce with crushed peanuts instead: 3 tbsp hoisin, 1 tbsp water, 1 tsp peanut butter, warmed together.



STARTERS AND SALADS

Fresh spring rolls

Gỏi cuốn

The roll you learned to make on your first try: rice paper, a handful of herbs, noodles and something from the pan, wrapped tightly. No cooking skill needed, only patience with the rice paper.

- Makes 12 rolls
- 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

12 sheets of rice paper (22 cm)

100 g rice vermicelli, cooked and cooled

200 g firm tofu, cut into fingers and fried golden, or 12 cooked prawns halved lengthways, or 200 g pork belly, boiled and thinly sliced

1 small cucumber, cut into thin sticks

1 carrot, cut into thin sticks

A big handful of mixed herbs: mint, coriander, Thai basil, perilla if you can find it

12 leaves of soft lettuce

Optional: bean sprouts, chives

Nuoc cham or peanut hoisin sauce, for dipping

METHOD

1. Prepare everything before you start rolling: cooked noodles, sliced vegetables, herbs picked from the stems, filling ready. Rolling goes fast; preparing does not.
2. Fill a wide bowl with lukewarm water. Dip one sheet of rice paper for about 5 seconds, until it is just soft but still holds its shape. Lay it flat on a plate or a clean board. It keeps softening while you work.
3. On the third closest to you, lay a lettuce leaf, then a little noodle, cucumber, carrot and herbs. Keep the pile small and narrow: a fat roll tears.
4. Fold the bottom edge over the filling, fold in both sides, then place the prawn halves or tofu on the sheet just above the roll and keep rolling tightly to the end. The filling shows through the last layer.
5. Set aside seam down and do not let the rolls touch, they stick. Serve within the hour with the dipping sauce.

Host's tip. Rice paper tears when it is too wet, not when it is too dry. Five seconds in the water is enough; it finishes softening on the board.



STARTERS AND SALADS

Fried spring rolls

Nem rán

In the north these are nem rán, in the south chả giò. Crisp outside, a juicy pork and mushroom filling inside, eaten wrapped in lettuce and herbs and dipped in nuoc cham.

- Makes about 20 small rolls, for 4
- 1 hour

INGREDIENTS

300 g minced pork

100 g raw prawns, finely chopped (optional)

50 g glass noodles (mung bean vermicelli), soaked 10 minutes and snipped short

4 dried wood ear mushrooms, soaked and finely chopped, or 4 shiitake

1 carrot, grated

1 small onion or 3 spring onions, finely chopped

1 egg

1 tbsp fish sauce, black pepper

20 sheets of rice paper (small, 16 cm) or 10 large sheets cut in half

Oil for frying

To serve: lettuce, herbs, nuoc cham

METHOD

1. Mix the pork, prawns, glass noodles, mushrooms, carrot, onion, egg, fish sauce and pepper into a sticky filling.
2. Soften a sheet of rice paper briefly in water (or brush it with water mixed with a little sugar, which helps browning), lay it on a board, put a finger of filling near the bottom edge, fold in the sides and roll tightly. Do not overfill: thin rolls fry through, fat ones burst.
3. Heat 3 cm of oil in a wok or deep pan to medium heat, about 160 degrees. Fry the rolls in batches without crowding, turning, for 6 to 8 minutes until deep golden and crisp. Too hot and the paper blisters before the pork is cooked.
4. Drain on paper. For extra crispness, fry once more for a minute at a higher heat just before serving.
5. Serve with lettuce leaves and herbs to wrap each roll, and nuoc cham to dip.

Host's tip. Rice paper rolls can be fried from raw and frozen, so make a double batch. Fry frozen rolls straight from the freezer, a few minutes longer.



STARTERS AND SALADS

Vietnamese salad, three ways

Gỏi

The salad in almost every class: crunchy vegetables, herbs, peanuts and a sharp dressing. The base stays the same; what you shred changes with the season. Green mango, banana flower, or cabbage with chicken.

- Serves 4 as a starter
- 25 minutes

INGREDIENTS

The dressing: 3 tbsp fish sauce, 3 tbsp lime juice, 2 tbsp sugar, 1 clove garlic chopped, 1 chilli sliced

Green mango version: 1 large green (unripe) mango and 1 carrot, cut into fine matchsticks

Banana flower version: 1 banana blossom, outer leaves removed, finely sliced and kept in water with lime juice so it does not brown, plus 1 carrot

Chicken version: 300 g poached chicken breast, shredded, with a quarter of a white cabbage finely sliced, 1 carrot and half a red onion in thin rings

A big handful of mint and coriander, roughly torn

3 tbsp roasted peanuts, roughly crushed

2 tbsp fried shallots (from an Asian shop, or fry your own)

Optional: 100 g cooked prawns or a little boiled pork belly

METHOD

1. Stir the dressing together until the sugar has dissolved. Taste: it should be sharper than you think, the vegetables will soften it.
2. Put the shredded vegetables (and chicken or prawns) in a bowl. If you use onion, soak the rings 10 minutes in cold water first to take out the sting.
3. Just before serving, pour over the dressing and toss with your hands. Let it sit 5 minutes, no longer, so it stays crunchy.
4. Add the herbs, toss again, and pile onto a plate. Top with peanuts and fried shallots. Serve with prawn crackers if you have them.

Host's tip. Cannot find green mango? A tart green apple or a firm kohlrabi gives the same crunch and sourness.

Green papaya salad

Gỏi đu đủ

Unripe papaya is crisp and almost neutral, like a cucumber with more bite, which makes it the perfect carrier for a garlic, chilli and lime dressing. The Vietnamese version is milder and more herby than the Thai one.

• Serves 4 • 20 minutes

INGREDIENTS

1 small green papaya (about 500 g),
peeled, seeds removed, cut into fine
matchsticks

1 carrot, cut into matchsticks

6 cherry tomatoes, halved (optional)

Dressing: 3 tbsp fish sauce, 3 tbsp lime
juice, 2 tbsp sugar, 1 clove garlic, 1 or 2
bird's eye chillies

A handful of mint, Thai basil and
coriander

3 tbsp roasted peanuts, crushed

Optional: dried shrimp (1 tbsp, soaked
and chopped) or strips of beef jerky, as
in Hanoi

METHOD

1. Soak the papaya matchsticks in cold water for 10 minutes; they become extra crisp. Drain and pat dry.
2. Pound or finely chop the garlic and chilli, then stir with the fish sauce, lime juice and sugar until dissolved.
3. Toss papaya, carrot and tomatoes with the dressing. Leave 5 minutes.
4. Fold in the herbs, top with peanuts and dried shrimp if using. Eat straight away.

Host's tip. A julienne peeler makes the matchsticks in minutes. Without one, slice the papaya thinly, stack the slices, and cut across into threads.

Morning glory with garlic

Rau muống xào tỏi

The green vegetable on every Vietnamese table. Hollow stems, tender leaves, cooked for a minute over the highest heat with a lot of garlic. The whole point is speed.

- Serves 4 as a side
- 10 minutes

INGREDIENTS

400 g morning glory (water spinach),
tough lower stems removed, cut into 10
cm lengths

5 cloves garlic, roughly chopped

2 tbsp oil

1 tbsp fish sauce or 1 tsp salt

Half a tsp sugar

Optional: 1 chilli, sliced; a squeeze of
lime

METHOD

1. Wash the morning glory well and shake it dry; water in the pan means steaming instead of frying.
2. Heat a wok until it smokes. Add the oil, then the garlic, and stir for 10 seconds until it smells good but is not brown.
3. Throw in all the greens at once. Toss constantly for 1 to 2 minutes until the leaves wilt and the stems turn bright green but still snap.
4. Season with fish sauce and sugar, toss once more, and serve immediately. It waits for nobody.

Host's tip. No morning glory at home? Tenderstem broccoli, green beans or spinach stems work the same way. Same heat, same garlic, same speed.

MAINS

Tofu with lemongrass and chilli

Đậu phụ xào sả ớt

Golden fried tofu tossed in a lemongrass, garlic and chilli paste. The trick is to fry the tofu dry and crisp first, so it soaks up the flavour without going soft.

- Serves 4 with rice
- 25 minutes

INGREDIENTS

500 g firm tofu, pressed dry and cut into 2 cm cubes

3 stalks lemongrass, outer leaves removed, the tender lower part very finely chopped

3 cloves garlic, chopped

1 or 2 red chillies, chopped

1 small onion, sliced

2 tbsp soy sauce (or 1 tbsp fish sauce for a non-vegetarian version)

1 tsp sugar

Half a tsp turmeric (optional, for colour)

4 tbsp oil

Spring onion and coriander to finish

METHOD

1. Pat the tofu dry. Heat 3 tbsp oil in a wide pan and fry the cubes over medium-high heat, turning now and then, until golden on all sides, about 8 minutes. Remove.
2. Add the last spoon of oil, then the lemongrass, garlic, chilli and onion. Fry 2 minutes until fragrant and the onion softens.
3. Return the tofu, add soy sauce, sugar and turmeric and toss so every cube is coated. A splash of water helps the sauce cling.
4. Finish with spring onion and coriander. Serve with steamed rice and a bowl of nuoc cham.

Host's tip. Lemongrass should be chopped almost to a powder, or it stays woody. Bash the stalk flat with the side of the knife first, then slice thinly and chop again.

MAINS

Chicken with lemongrass

Gà xào sả ớt

Same idea as the tofu, with chicken thigh instead. A 20-minute dinner that tastes like a Vietnamese kitchen.

- Serves 4 with rice
- 30 minutes, plus marinating

INGREDIENTS

600 g boneless chicken thighs, cut into bite-size pieces

3 stalks lemongrass, very finely chopped

3 cloves garlic, chopped

1 or 2 red chillies, chopped

2 tbsp fish sauce

1 tbsp sugar

Half a tsp turmeric or curry powder

1 onion, sliced

2 tbsp oil

Spring onion and coriander

METHOD

1. Mix the chicken with half the lemongrass, half the garlic, the fish sauce, sugar and turmeric. Leave 20 minutes, or overnight in the fridge.
2. Heat the oil in a wok over high heat. Fry the remaining lemongrass, garlic and the chilli for 30 seconds.
3. Add the chicken in one layer and leave it 2 minutes to colour before you start tossing. Cook 6 to 8 minutes until cooked through and slightly caramelised.
4. Add the onion for the last 2 minutes so it stays a little crunchy. Finish with spring onion and coriander. Serve with rice.

Host's tip. Thigh meat forgives a hot wok; breast dries out. If you only have breast, cut it thicker and cook it a minute less.



MAINS

Bun cha, grilled pork with noodles

Bún chả

Hanoi's lunch: smoky grilled pork patties and slices of belly, floating in a bowl of warm sweet-sour dipping broth, with cold rice noodles and a mountain of herbs. You dip the noodles into the broth as you go.

- Serves 4
- 1 hour, plus marinating

INGREDIENTS

400 g minced pork (not too lean)

400 g pork belly, thinly sliced

Marinade: 3 tbsp fish sauce, 2 tbsp sugar, 1 tbsp oyster sauce, 3 shallots and 3 cloves garlic finely chopped, black pepper, 1 tbsp oil

Broth: 4 tbsp fish sauce, 4 tbsp sugar, 4 tbsp rice vinegar or lime juice, 400 ml warm water, 2 cloves garlic, 1 chilli

Half a green papaya or kohlrabi and 1 carrot, thinly sliced, for the pickle

400 g rice vermicelli (bún), cooked, rinsed cold

Lots of herbs and lettuce: mint, perilla, coriander, Thai basil, soft lettuce

METHOD

1. Divide the marinade between the mince and the belly slices. Shape the mince into flat patties the size of a small biscuit. Marinate 30 minutes or longer.
2. Toss the papaya or kohlrabi and carrot with 1 tbsp sugar, 1 tbsp vinegar and a pinch of salt for a quick pickle.
3. Make the broth: dissolve the sugar in the warm water, add fish sauce, vinegar, garlic and chilli. It should taste like a lighter, sweeter nuoc cham. Add the pickle.
4. Grill the patties and belly slices over charcoal if you can, or under a very hot grill or in a cast iron pan, until charred at the edges and cooked through, about 4 minutes a side.
5. Serve each person a bowl of warm broth with the grilled pork dropped in, a plate of cold noodles and the herbs. Dip, slurp, repeat.

Host's tip. The broth is served warm, not hot: warm enough to soften the pork fat, cool enough that the herbs stay fresh when you dunk them.



MAINS

Pho bo, beef noodle soup

Phở bò

The soup that made Vietnamese food famous. The broth is everything: bones simmered for hours with charred onion and ginger, star anise and cinnamon. Make it once on a quiet Sunday and you will understand.

• Serves 6 • 4 hours, mostly unattended

INGREDIENTS

1.5 kg beef bones (marrow and knuckle) and 500 g beef brisket or shin

2 onions and a large piece of ginger (100 g), unpeeled

Spices: 3 star anise, 1 cinnamon stick, 4 cloves, 1 black cardamom pod, 1 tbsp coriander seeds

4 tbsp fish sauce, 1 tbsp sugar, 1 tbsp salt

600 g flat rice noodles (bánh phở), fresh or dried

300 g beef sirloin or fillet, sliced paper-thin (freeze it 30 minutes first)

To serve: spring onion, coriander, sliced onion, bean sprouts, Thai basil, lime wedges, chilli, hoisin and sriracha

METHOD

1. Cover the bones with cold water, bring to the boil, boil 5 minutes and pour everything away. Rinse the bones. This is the step that gives a clear broth.
2. Char the onions and ginger directly over a gas flame or under the grill until blackened in places. Toast the spices in a dry pan for a minute.
3. Put the bones, brisket, onions, ginger and spices in a big pot with 4 litres of water. Simmer gently, never boiling, for 3 hours, skimming the foam in the first half hour. Take the brisket out after 90 minutes, when tender, and keep it aside.
4. Strain the broth. Season with fish sauce, sugar and salt until it tastes rounded and a little sweet. It should be clearer and lighter than you expect.
5. Cook the noodles as the packet says and divide between big bowls. Top with sliced brisket and the raw sirloin. Pour over boiling broth: it cooks the raw beef in seconds. Add spring onion and coriander.
6. Serve with the herbs, sprouts, lime and chilli on the table so everyone builds their own bowl.

Host's tip. Northern pho, the Hanoi and Ninh Binh style, is simpler and cleaner than the southern one: fewer herbs, no hoisin, just spring onion, a squeeze of lime and chilli. Try it that way first.

MAINS

Stir-fried duck with pineapple

Vịt xào dứa

Duck and pineapple sounds like a 1970s menu, but in Vietnam the sweet-sour fruit cuts the rich meat beautifully. Quick, colourful, and a favourite in the class.

- Serves 4 with rice
- 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

2 duck breasts (about 500 g), skin removed or left on as you like, sliced thinly

Marinade: 1 tbsp fish sauce, 1 tsp sugar, 1 clove garlic, black pepper, 1 tsp cornflour

Half a fresh pineapple, cut into bite-size wedges

1 onion, cut into wedges

1 red pepper, sliced

3 cloves garlic, sliced, and a thumb of ginger in thin strips

2 tbsp fish sauce, 1 tbsp oyster sauce, 1 tsp sugar

2 tbsp oil, spring onion and coriander

METHOD

1. Toss the duck with the marinade and leave 15 minutes.
2. Heat the wok until very hot, add the oil and sear the duck in two batches for about 2 minutes each, just until browned. Remove.
3. Fry the garlic, ginger and onion for a minute, add the pepper and pineapple and stir-fry 2 minutes so the pineapple catches a little colour.
4. Return the duck, add the fish sauce, oyster sauce and sugar, toss for a minute until glossy. Finish with spring onion and coriander. Serve with rice.

Host's tip. Pineapple from a tin works in a pinch; drain it well and use a spoon less sugar.

MAINS

Fried fish with tomato and dill

Cá sốt cà chua

A northern home-cooking dish: fish fried until the edges are crisp, then finished in a quick tomato sauce with a lot of dill. Vietnamese cooks use dill with fish the way Italians use basil with tomato.

- Serves 4 with rice
- 35 minutes

INGREDIENTS

600 g firm white fish (tilapia, sea bass, cod), whole and scored, or thick fillets

Salt, black pepper, 2 tbsp flour or cornflour for dusting

4 ripe tomatoes, chopped

3 cloves garlic and 2 shallots, chopped

2 tbsp fish sauce, 1 tsp sugar

A big bunch of dill, chopped, and 2 spring onions

Oil for frying

METHOD

1. Season the fish and dust it lightly with flour. Fry in 1 cm of hot oil until golden and crisp on both sides, about 4 minutes a side for fillets, longer for a whole fish. Set aside.
2. Pour off most of the oil. Fry the garlic and shallots for a minute, add the tomatoes and cook 5 minutes until they collapse into a sauce. Season with fish sauce and sugar; add a splash of water if it is thick.
3. Slide the fish back in, spoon the sauce over and simmer 3 minutes.
4. Stir in most of the dill and the spring onion, cook one more minute, scatter the rest on top. Serve with rice.

Host's tip. Do not skimp on the dill. A whole bunch looks like too much and is exactly right.

MAINS

Fish braised in a clay pot

Cá kho tộ

Fish steaks simmered in caramel, fish sauce and black pepper until the sauce is dark, sticky and deeply savoury. The clay pot keeps the heat even; a heavy saucepan does the job too.

- Serves 4 with rice
- 45 minutes

INGREDIENTS

600 g fish steaks with the bone, such as catfish, mackerel or salmon, in 3 cm slices

2 tbsp sugar for the caramel

3 tbsp fish sauce

2 shallots and 3 cloves garlic, sliced

A thumb of ginger, in strips

1 tsp coarsely ground black pepper

1 or 2 dried or fresh chillies

150 ml water or coconut water

1 tbsp oil, spring onion to finish

METHOD

1. Make the caramel: heat the sugar with a tablespoon of water in the pot over medium heat, without stirring, until it turns the colour of dark honey. Immediately add the water (it will spit) and swirl until smooth.
2. Add the fish sauce, shallots, garlic, ginger, pepper and chilli, then lay the fish in one layer.
3. Simmer, covered, over low heat for 20 minutes. Uncover and cook another 10 minutes, spooning the sauce over, until it has reduced to a thick glaze that clings to the fish.
4. Finish with spring onion and a little extra pepper. Serve with a lot of plain rice: the sauce is meant to be salty.

Host's tip. Take the caramel further than feels comfortable. Pale caramel gives a sweet dish; dark caramel gives the bitter-sweet depth this dish is about.

MAINS

Caramelised pork in a clay pot

Thịt kho

Pork belly braised slowly in caramel and fish sauce, often with boiled eggs, until it is meltingly soft. Every Vietnamese family has its own version; this is a northern one, without coconut water.

- Serves 4 with rice
- 1 hour 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

700 g pork belly, skin on, cut into 3 cm cubes

2 tbsp sugar for the caramel

4 tbsp fish sauce

3 shallots and 3 cloves garlic, chopped

1 tsp black pepper

4 eggs, boiled and peeled (optional)

300 ml water

Spring onion and chilli to finish

METHOD

1. Blanch the pork 3 minutes in boiling water, drain and rinse. This keeps the sauce clean.
2. Make a dark caramel with the sugar and a tablespoon of water in a heavy pot. Add the pork and toss so every piece is coated and browned at the edges, 5 minutes.
3. Add fish sauce, shallots, garlic, pepper and the water. Bring to a simmer, cover, and cook on the lowest heat for 45 minutes, until the pork is tender.
4. Add the eggs, uncover, and simmer 15 minutes more until the sauce is a thick, dark glaze. Skim excess fat if you like. Finish with spring onion and chilli, and serve with rice and pickled vegetables or a plain cucumber.

Host's tip. It is better the next day. Make it ahead, chill it, lift off the fat, and reheat slowly.



NINH BINH SPECIALITIES

Ninh Binh goat with lemongrass

Dê xào sả ớt

Ninh Binh is famous for its mountain goats, which graze on the limestone karsts and taste of the herbs they eat. Every restaurant in Tam Coc has goat on the menu; this stir-fry is the simplest way to cook it at home.

- Serves 4 with rice
- 30 minutes, plus marinating

INGREDIENTS

600 g goat leg or shoulder, thinly sliced (or lamb, if goat is hard to find)

4 stalks lemongrass, very finely chopped

4 cloves garlic, chopped

2 red chillies, chopped

2 tbsp fish sauce, 1 tbsp sugar, 1 tsp curry powder or turmeric

1 onion, sliced, and a handful of Thai basil or perilla

3 tbsp oil

To serve: lime, salt and pepper mixed as a dip, sesame rice crackers

METHOD

1. Mix the goat with half the lemongrass, half the garlic, the fish sauce, sugar and curry powder. Marinate 30 minutes.
2. Heat the wok until smoking, add the oil and the remaining lemongrass, garlic and chilli. Fry 30 seconds.
3. Add the meat and stir-fry fast over high heat for 3 to 4 minutes; goat cooks quickly and goes tough if you keep going.
4. Toss in the onion and basil for the last minute. Serve with rice crackers, and a little dish of salt, pepper and lime juice to dip each piece.

Host's tip. In Ninh Binh the goat is also served as tái dê: quickly blanched, sliced thin, tossed with lemongrass, lime, sesame and herbs. If you find good goat, try that too.

Ninh Binh crispy rice

Com cháy

The other Ninh Binh classic: a golden cake of crisp rice, sold in every shop in Tam Coc, eaten with a spoonful of sauce on top. It began as the scorched rice at the bottom of the pot, and became a speciality.

- Serves 4 as a snack
- 1 hour, plus drying

INGREDIENTS

400 g cooked jasmine rice, a day old, or freshly cooked and cooled

Oil for deep frying

Salt

For the topping: 200 g minced pork or beef, 1 shallot, 1 clove garlic, 1 tbsp fish sauce, 1 tsp sugar, 1 tsp cornflour in 100 ml water, spring onion, dried chilli flakes

Optional: shredded dried pork floss (ruốc) to sprinkle

METHOD

1. Press the cooked rice into a thin layer, about 1 cm, on a tray lined with baking paper, and cut it into palm-sized squares. Dry them in a low oven (100 degrees) for 45 minutes, or in the sun, until firm and dry to the touch.
2. Heat 4 cm of oil to 180 degrees. Fry the rice cakes in batches until puffed, golden and crisp, about 2 minutes a side. Drain and sprinkle with salt.
3. For the topping, fry the shallot and garlic, add the meat and cook through, season with fish sauce and sugar, then add the cornflour water and simmer until it thickens to a sauce.
4. Serve the crisp rice with the warm sauce spooned over, and spring onion, chilli flakes and pork floss on top. Break, dip, crunch.

Host's tip. A day-old rice that has dried out in the fridge is exactly what you want here. Fresh rice needs the long drying time or it will not puff.

DRINKS

Coconut coffee and salted coffee

Cà phê dừa, cà phê muối

Vietnamese coffee is strong, dark-roasted robusta, brewed slowly through a small metal filter. Two of the newer classics: coconut coffee, a frozen coconut cream poured over espresso, and salted coffee from Huế, with a salty whipped cream on top.

• Serves 2 • 15 minutes

INGREDIENTS

4 tbsp Vietnamese ground coffee (Trung Nguyên or any dark roast), or 2 double espressos

For coconut coffee: 150 ml coconut milk, 2 tbsp condensed milk, a handful of ice

For salted coffee: 3 tbsp condensed milk, 60 ml whipping cream, a quarter tsp fine salt

METHOD

1. Brew the coffee: put the ground coffee in aphin filter over a glass, pour in a splash of hot water, wait 30 seconds for it to swell, then fill the filter and let it drip through, 5 minutes. Without aphin, make strong espresso or use a moka pot.
2. Coconut coffee: blend the coconut milk, condensed milk and ice into a thick slush. Pour the coffee into a glass and spoon the coconut slush over it. Stir as you drink.
3. Salted coffee: whip the cream with the salt until soft. Put the condensed milk in the bottom of a small glass, pour the hot coffee on top, and spoon the salted cream over. Stir from the bottom before drinking.
4. Both are also good iced: fill the glass with ice first.

Host's tip. Condensed milk is not a shortcut, it is the tradition: fresh milk did not keep in the tropics, so Vietnamese coffee grew up with the tin.

THANK YOU

Cook it again, and tell a friend

We hope this book brings a little of Ninh Binh into your kitchen. If you make one of these dishes at home, we would love a photo: just reply to the e-mail you received from us. And if a friend is travelling to Vietnam, ninhbinhcookingclass.com is where they find a class with a local host in Tam Coc, Trang An or the countryside, with live availability and instant confirmation.

ninhbinhcookingclass.com · info@ninhbinhcookingclass.com

