

BUN RIEU SHRIMP AND TOMATO VERMICELLI SOUP

Another classic Vietnamese street food, this pungent noodle soup has a few key components. The first is the tomato- and seafood-based broth, which is brightly colored thanks to annatto seeds. The second is the rieu, shrimp and crab that is blended into a paste, then dropped into the soup to cook, almost like a dumpling. Like many Vietnamese dishes, we add rice vermicelli and fresh vegetables to make a complete meal.

10 cups water
1 pound pork neck bones
Canola oil
1/3 cup minced shallots
1 tablespoon minced garlic
1/2 teaspoon minced Thai chile
1/2 teaspoon ground annatto seeds
1 pound large ripe tomatoes, peeled and quartered
10 ounces ground pork
3 tablespoons fish sauce
6 ounces large dried shrimp
4 teaspoons shrimp paste
4 teaspoons crab paste
1 tablespoon sugar
Pinch of ground black pepper
1 tablespoon thinly sliced green onions, white and light green parts

RIEU
3 ounces shrimp, peeled and deveined
2 eggs
5 teaspoons crab paste
1 1/3 teaspoon fish sauce
1/3 teaspoon tapioca starch
4 cups cooked vermicelli (page 250)
1/2 cabbage, shredded
15 mint leaves, sliced crosswise
2 limes, quartered
4 Thai chiles, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon shrimp paste

Serves 6 to 8

1. In a large stockpot, bring the water to a boil over high heat. Add the pork neck bones, turn down the heat, and simmer for about 1 hour.
2. Meanwhile, coat the bottom of a medium, heavy pot with oil and heat over medium-high heat until the oil is shimmering. Add the shallots, garlic, chile, and annatto seeds, and stir for about 30 seconds. Add the tomatoes, ground pork, fish sauce, dried shrimp, shrimp paste, crab paste, sugar, and black pepper and stir until the meat is browned. Add the contents of the pot to the broth in the stockpot and turn up the heat to high. Bring to a boil, lower the heat, and let simmer for another 30 minutes.
3. To make the rieu, using a knife, chop one third of the shrimp into small pieces and place in a large mixing bowl with the eggs, 4 teaspoons of the crab paste, 1 teaspoon of the fish sauce, and tapioca starch. Stir together and set aside.
4. To make the rieu balls, place the remaining shrimp, crab paste, and fish sauce and the sugar in the bowl of a food processor and blend until a firm, sticky paste forms.
5. While the soup is simmering, drop the rieu into the broth 1 tablespoon at a time. Repeat with the rieu ball mixture. Simmer until the rieu is cooked through and rises to the surface.
6. To serve, divide the vermicelli among soup bowls and ladle the soup and rieu over the noodles. Garnish with sliced green onions. Serve with the shredded cabbage, mint, lime wedges, chile slices, and shrimp paste.

FRIED TOFU

2 cups canola oil
6 ounces medium-firm tofu, patted dry,
cut into 3 by 3-inch squares, ¼-inch thick

Makes about 1 cup

In a 7- or 8-inch wide high-sided pot, heat the oil over high heat until it reaches 350°F on a candy thermometer. Carefully add the tofu squares, working in batches if necessary. Turn once or twice and fry until golden brown. Using a slotted spoon, remove the tofu and place on a paper towel-lined tray. Let drain and cool. Cut into ¼-inch-wide strips. Serve immediately.

RICE VERMICELLI

2½ quarts water
1 pound dried rice vermicelli

Makes about 3 cups

In a 10- to 12-inch pot, bring the water to a boil at high heat. Add the rice noodles and cook for about 3 to 4 minutes. Drain the noodles in a colander and rinse under cold water then hot water, then cold water again, to prevent the noodles from sticking together. Serve at room temperature.

PEANUT SAUCE

1 cup sweet glutinous rice
½ cup roasted peanuts
2 cloves garlic
1 Thai chile, stemmed
3 tablespoons red miso
3 tablespoons ketchup
3 tablespoons canola oil
3 tablespoons sugar
2 tablespoons vegetarian stir-fry sauce
½ teaspoons lemon juice
½ teaspoon toasted sesame oil

Makes about 2 cups

1. Cook the rice in a rice cooker based on the manufacturer's instruction. Spread the cooked rice out on a baking sheet to let cool.
2. In a food processor, combine the cooled rice and the remaining ingredients. Process until the mixture becomes a fine paste. Thin the sauce with ½ cup of water and continue processing until the sauce is smooth and creamy. Transfer into a bowl and serve immediately, or cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

CARAMEL SAUCE

2 pounds light brown palm sugar,
coarsely chopped
2½ cups fish sauce

Makes about 4 cups

In a medium saucepan, melt the sugar over medium-low heat until melted, about 10 to 12 minutes. Turn off the heat, and slowly stir in the fish sauce, taking care as the sugar will bubble. Let cool completely. Store in an airtight container for up to one month.