

The following is an excerpt from Quarantine Cookbook vol II: A Chef's Journey into the heart of Lanna (Jai Lanna); my yet unpublished book on Northern Thai Cuisine. - Zachary Mazi

Nam Phrik Hed



[June 11th, 2020] THE Rainy season has arrived in Northern Thailand, and with them, so have we. Having never been here during the dry season, I can only count on the stories that the locals tell (and the air quality reports) to know just how lucky we are to be here at this time. During the dry season, also referred as Burning Season, the north of Thailand can have--no exaggeration--the WORST air quality in the world on some days. Unfortunately for those of us passionate about wild mushrooms, there is a great deal

of controversy surrounding certain mushrooms, that are collected from the ground after burning the forests. There is a huge public outcry that is multi-pronged for the government to step in to prevent these fires, but also for the public to only purchase the small round truffle like mushrooms (Thai: Hed Thob; lat. *Astraeus hygrometrius*) from certified no burn collectors. That in itself is rife for speculation about who can be trusted and who is using these certifications to exclude other collectors, etc.

Hed Thob, which means "popping" mushroom, give a delightful pop (**Thob** is an onomatopoeia in Thai), literally, when chewed or smashed in the mortar, and it can be quite loud. They are related to puff ball mushrooms, and are the young variety, and being hypogeous mushrooms, needing to be found under the ground by squirrels and wild boar, their smell is pungent and strong, and the few I purchased as they ripened flavored the entire stock of veggies in the refrigerator. In other words, use immediately!

However, now that the rainy season is here, a few other species of wild mushrooms have begun to appear in the markets, with the promises of more in the near future. I finally saw the esteemed **Hed Har**--**Hed** is Thai for mushrooms, **Har** is Thai for stone--an enormous mushroom in the Boletaceae family that is dark black with yellow pores and yellow flesh. I find the Latin name for this mushroom pretty humorous: *Phlebopus colossus* These mushrooms can get as large as medium porcini, and have a similar dank, meaty flavor that is distinct and quite delicious, as many of the mushrooms in the Boletaceae family tend to be.

One of the easier recipes to make in Thai for exploring different mushrooms is called **Nam phrik Hed** which, literally translated, means: water chili mushroom. **Nam phrik** is a

generalized term for a huge range of chili pastes, with the third word qualifying the particular flavor of the chili paste. If you are familiar with Thai food as most Americans are, the chili pastes that you purchase to make coconut curries are technically a variety of nam phrik (**nam phrik gaeng**), which are specifically for making curry (**gaeng**), whereas the nam phrik of northern Thailand are eaten as a condiment (**nam phrik chim** where **chim** means "taste"), on sticky rice or leaves or a combination of both as part of a large number of dishes served at once for a meal.

I decided to invest some time in making single-mushroom variety nam phrik hed, and wanted to share the recipes with you all: The great thing is, the base for each of the dishes is the same, and this dish can be applied to any kind of mushroom to show off the differing flavors. Like many northern Thai dishes, there is no true recipe, per se, as the amount of the simple ingredients is really up to the tastes and desires of the maker. The name phrik variety used for nam phrik hed are of the fresh, green variety, almost identical to chilies used for salsa verde in Mexico, and will keep in the vegetable drawer of the fridge for about a week. (There are dry chili varieties of nam phrik as well, and like curry pastes, those can keep for a month or even several months.

Besides Hed Har and Hed Thob, I have have this recipe using Hed Nong Fah (Oyster Mushrooms), Hed Khai Han (Amanita hemibapha, replated to the Caesar Amanita), and I have used Hed Hom, shiitakes, in another nam phrik recipe, Nam phrik Ong Hed Hom that you can find here.

Nam phrik Hed

8 ea garlic cloves, smashed slightly
4 ea shallots, peeled and sliced
12-18 ea chilies, Thai bird's eye (very spicy)
-or-
2 ea Chilies, anaheim or other mild green chilies
-or-
some combination of the above chilies depending on desired spice level
.5 # Mushrooms of your choice



2 tsp fish sauce (**nam pla**) or shrimp paste (**kaphi**), or simply 1 tsp kosher salt if you can't find the other ingredients)

1. Roast the chilies, garlic and shallots in the oven at 450°F (with a fan if you have it) until the ingredients are browned, though not burned (or in a dry pan on the stove, or over open flame, skewered, as pictured above). You may peel the chilies if you like, which will result in a less stringy final product, or don't, it is up to you and I have had the dish prepared in Thailand both ways.

2. If you have a large granite mortar and pestle, use this to smash the ingredients together, the result of smashing is not meant to turn the ingredients into a smooth puree. If you



want to use a food processor (or that is all you have) pulse it on and off quickly to mix and break up thoroughly, but again, not to blend into a smooth puree.

3. Dry sauté mushrooms in a pan, or even simmer briefly in water or stock to soften, and then allowing the water or stock to dry, dry sauté the end result so that all the liquid is gone and the mushrooms brown slightly. If using shiitakes (Hed Hom in Thai), you may need to cook them longer in water and cut them small, as they are tough little buggers to make

palatable). After the mushrooms are fully cooked, use the mortar and pestle to smash them, put them into the food processor separately from the other ingredients and pulse, or use a knife to cut them to the desired size and consistency per your preference.

Mix together the chili paste and the processed mushrooms, taste and add the salt, fish sauce, or shrimp paste to season, and viola, you have made **NAM phrik HED**.

Nam Prik Gaeng Panaeng Muaeng

For the making of the first Quarantine Quookbook, I was relying a lot on the pre-made pastes to make curries, not dissimilar to cooking Thai food at home: we usually find a can or jar of Thai curry paste (Nam Phrik Gaeng) and then add vegetables and coconut milk and voila, a curry. But having spent the better part of the last 4 months using the mortar and pestle (**kroak lae sahngk**) to make all manner of pastes and dressings--basically every single meals requires pounding--that it seemed disingenuous to make another Panaeng curry without actually making the past from scratch.

I did actually do this many many years ago in the best 3 weeks we had of French Culinary School, International Cuisine. Looking back at the absolutely incredible amount of dishes we prepared for each of the days is astounding. For one, I was exposed to Northern Thai Cuisine without knowing it in 2005, and there are numerous recipes there that we made (As a group, or team) that are seen at just about every market here in Chiang Mai. In addition, that invaluable recipe book has recipes for each of the several curries used in Royal Thai cooking, the pastes I was purchasing already made while in lockdown in Phang Nga province.

As I have surely mentioned, when I am cooking I tend to create what I call "suites of ingredients" that go together in my head. This doesn't exist formally anywhere but to understand what that means, consider just how natural pumpkin spice blend and pumpkin flavor go together... so much that those spices are now called "Pumpkin Spice." That is the type of association that I have created for any number of ingredient groups.

It just so happens that we are moving around in that same grouping as the example above: Panaeng Curry, which is very often served with pumpkin, red pepper, chickens, duck is

especially good. Take a look at the ingredients, and notice that a dry spice blend with mace and nutmeg is favored in this recipe, you got it: pumpkin spice. Flavor pairing and identification of similar volatile chemicals is one way we say that foods "go together." Or so goes the theory with Flavor matching. I recently came across a book that a scientist and chef put together with the IBM SuperCOMputer Watson, where they were able to analyze the volatile compounds of many foods that explained the reason certain foods are obvious matches, but also revealed some previously unexplored pairings, such as mushrooms and strawberries. [The Flavor Matrix](#) by James Briscione. Because Science.

In my mind, chanterelles fall within the above category as well, being fruity, but mossy, nutty, but sweet like fresh wood, these mushrooms are also a fall mushroom in the Pacific Northwest, as are duck, pumpkin and the like. We don't realize how much we actually understand flavor pairing until we start to examine our favorite meals. It is something we do naturally. And so naturally, being so drawn to place chanterelles in this grouping, I will not be surprised to learn that chanterelles share similar volatile chemicals as some many or all of the ingredients listed above.

It is commentary like this example above that is missing from many (all) of the cookbooks on mushrooms: we have yet to unlock the flavors within to truly understand, with art and with science, how to combine the right ingredients to bring out the flavors of our mushrooms, like chanterelles. Until then, we must rely on our senses or on the pairings as mastered by the many chefs that have come before, as Karen Page did in [The Flavor Bible](#).

Pastes from scratch

Here is the recipe for Panaeng Curry from that book, with a special mention to my Chef Instructors Josh Watson and Bikhram Vaidya, who have to be given credit for one of the most comprehensive and compact views into global cuisine I have seen in my 2 decades of cooking.

Panaeng Curry Paste (Chefs Watson and Vaidya, Oregon Culinary Institute)

Dry Spice Blend

2 tsp coriander seeds - toasted

½ tsp cumin seed – toasted

3 ea mace, pieces – toasted

2 cardamom pods – toasted

½ tsp black peppercorns

½ tsp salt

Curry Paste

15 large red dried chilies – seeds removed and soaked in hot water for 10 minutes

2 tsp galangal, minced

2 tbsp lemongrass, minced

1 tsp kaffir lime zest

1 tbsp cilantro roots and stems, minced

3 tbsp shallots, sliced

2 tbsp garlic, sliced
1 tsp shrimp paste
3 tbsp peanuts, toasted

Instructions

Grind the spices in a mortar and pestle. Add remaining items to mortar and pestle and grind until a paste is achieved. A blender may be used as well; however, water will need to be added to allow the paste to form.

Making it Northern Thai:

And here is my recipe adaption using spices and flavors that are more common to the Chiang Mai flavor palette, as well as using dry sauteed mushrooms to make the curry even more flavorful.. again the use of these dried spices fits with the narrative assigned to the chanterelles, and as with other panaeng curries, this one will be a pumpkin curry.. you can't go changing all the variable and make any scientific discoveries, now can you?

Chiang Mai Panaeng Curry Paste with Chanterelles



Dry Spice Blend

.5 tsp cumin seed
1 ea black cardamom pod, opened
2 ea long pepper seed
2 tsp maekwahn seeds*
1 tsp coriander seeds
½ tsp salt

Curry Paste

15 large red dried chilies – soaked in hot water for 10 minutes
1 Tbsp galangal, minced
1 tsp finger ginger
2 Tbsp lemongrass, minced
2 tsp kaffir lime zest
1 Tbsp cha-om or other pungent herb**
2 tbsp garlic, sliced
3 tbsp shallots, sliced
.5 cup chanterelles, dry sauteed
1 ea Tua nao (toasted fermented soy disc)***
3 tbsp peanuts, toasted



1 tsp shrimp paste

Toast all the spices in a dry pan until pungent.

1. Grind the spices in a mortar and pestle.
2. Put cleaned chanterelles and 1/2 cup of water in a wok or similar pan and cook on low heat to bring out the liquids from the mushrooms, and then reduce those liquids to nothing. We want all the flavor of the chanterelles and none of the water.
3. Add remaining items to mortar and pestle in the order they are listed, grinding well between each addition for best results.
4. Keep the nose on the grind until a paste is achieved.
 - a. NOTE: The paste will thicken considerably when the tua nao and peanuts are added. Make sure you mix all ingredients well.

*Maekhwan is a seed that is rarely seen outside of Thailand, but it is related to the Szechuan pepper corn, and if you can find these as a substitute, the effect will be similar. Similarly, Long Pepper, one of my favorite spices, is also called Balinese Long Pepper and can be found on spice outlets on the internet. It's the secret sauce of spices.

**Instead of cha-om, which I have never seen outside of Thailand, use cilantro stem or root, as in the first of the panaeng curry recipes above.

***Tua nao is effectively dehydrated miso paste, that is then ground into a powder as part of the mix. I have never tried to dehydrate miso paste and use it in such a manner, but I think it would work. Beware because miso (condiment) is much more salty than Tua nao (unsalted ingredient).

UPDATE: 9/19/20: I went on and used the curry paste to make a Chiang Mai Chanterelle Panaeng Curry with pork and pumpkin. Pumpkin is very often served with Panaeng, and the dry spice blend that we used above illustrates the suite of foods I was discussing above, in which I put chanterelle, pumpkin and these winter-y warm silk road spices.

Ingredients:

- 2 oz Panaeng Curry Paste (see above recipe)
- 4 oz Coconut milk solids
- 2 T coconut oil
- 1 ea onion, julienned
- 350 g ground pork (3/4 pound ish)
- 1 ea small Thai pumpkin, cut into large squares
- 6 ea Thai eggplant, cut into quarters
- 10 ea Long bean, cut into 4cm lengths
- 3 ea green peppercorn strands, stems removed
- 1 cup chopped basil, cilantro, green onion or other herbs



[As in Quarantine Quookbook vol 1--actually because of QQv1--I followed the steps as they were outlined there for making a curry paste into a coconut curry dish. Download the first version at thefoodbender.com/recipes]

Instructions

1. Sauté the curry paste and the thickest part of settled, cold coconut milk in a ration of about 1:2, coconut to curry paste.
2. Heat this mixture and continue to cook until the mixture breaks, and a slick of oil starts to emerge on the surface, allowing the mixture to brown, but not to burn.
3. When you are satisfied, add sliced onions (I have not seen this is a technique used by Thais, but I find it develops the flavor of the curry to have both well-cooked onions and fresh onions to finish.)
4. Allow the onions to melt somewhat into the mixture, then add your protein, and cook it to 80% done before moving on.. In this case, I added frozen ground pork*, which takes a little more time than, say, shrimp.
5. When the meat is nearly cooked, add your coconut milk and your harder vegetables, in this case the pumpkin. Bring to a boil, reduce to simmer.
6. Again cook until about 75% done, and add the second set of harder vegetables, such as Thai eggplant (unless you like them more crunchy-raw), carrots etc. Cook for 5-10 minutes more.
7. Remove from heat and toss in the final vegetables, like snow peas, broccoli, long beans, etc. Anything that will cook to perfection in residual heat alone.
8. Serve immediately with fresh herbs over rice or pasta or eat with a spoon, dip leaves or cabbage and enjoy! (We ate it too fast and I didn't get a final service picture! So silly.



*In retrospect, I would not use ground pork again if this dish were to be served as a curry, but as a filling for a pie, or on a more western style pasta dish, then absolutely yes. The ground pork thickened the coconut milk much more than expected and the final result was a bit more like bolognese--a delicious spiced and coconut version of it--than a standard Thai curry. I think bits of pork belly would have been quite nice, as well as tender cuts of loin. I will have to experiment again.

