

FOREIGN FEASTS

Lentils

Heather Littrell

¾ cups dried lentils
1 tsp bouillon
bay leaves and whole unpeeled garlic cloves
1 or 2 potatoes
2 carrots
oil
2 small, thin slices French bread or 1 large slice
½ cup chopped onion
¾ cup tomato sauce
1 tsp. paprika
2 garlic cloves, peeled
½ tbsp. parsley

Bring the dried lentils to a boil in lightly salted water. Boil two minutes and then remove from heat, cover, and let sit one hour. (or let soak overnight) Drain and rinse lentils and return to the pan and add about 4 cups water. Bring to a boil and then reduce heat, stir in the bay leaves, unpeeled garlic, and bouillon and let simmer, uncovered.

Peel and coarsely chop the potatoes and carrots and add to the simmering lentils, bring back to a boil, and continue simmering uncovered.

In a small frying pan, heat some oil, enough to cover the bottom of the pan. When the oil is hot, fry the one or two slices of bread until they are golden on both sides. Drain on paper towels.

In the same oil you used for the bread, dumping some off if necessary, cook the onions until soft, about ten minutes. Stir in the tomato sauce and paprika and cook for five to ten more minutes. Set aside.

Using the mortar and pestle (or the food processor which is much faster and easier) grind up the fried bread slices, the two peeled garlic cloves and the parsley.

Add the tomato and onion mixture and the fried bread mixture to the lentils and continue cooking over low heat, stirring frequently, until the vegetables and lentils are tender and much of the water is absorbed, about one hour total.

Season if needed and fish out the bay leaves and whole garlic cloves before serving.

Rice Soup with Ground Pork Mun

This is the soup that Mun usually serves to overnight guests for breakfast in our house. It is often also used as a way of using leftover rice that is no longer so good to eat plain. This soup is meant to be very thick, more of a hearty rice porridge than a traditional soup.

As with almost all of Mun's recipes, the types and amounts of the ingredients used is always "to taste". You use whatever ingredients you have, and add them in the amounts necessary to end up with what you want to eat at that moment. To think that you could restrict the cooking process to a strictly defined set of rules borders on insult.

So, here is a list of the most common ingredients and maybe an idea of how much of them you will need. Read through the process of how to prepare the soup, and use your own good sense to decide how much of each of them you need. I would only add that you should start with small amounts, adding more later if necessary. Don't be afraid to add your own ingredients (cabbage? celery?).

Ground Pork (about one pound?)

Cooked Rice (remember, this is a kind of porridge, and rice is the main ingredient)

Cilantro (one bunch)

Garlic (a clove or two)

Celery Leaves (found at the top of celery stalks)

Thin Soy Sauce

Fish Sauce

Seasoning Sauce

Black Pepper

White Pepper

Sugar

Prepare the Ground Pork:

Take a few sprigs of the cilantro and steam them. Chop a garlic clove. Mix a pinch of sugar, some of the seasoning sauce, some of the thin soy sauce, a fair amount of the black pepper, the steamed cilantro and the chopped garlic to the ground pork. Put this mixture in a blender and mix it up very well. When finished, form the ground pork mixture into bite sized balls.

Prepare the Broth:

Add some thin soy sauce and some fish sauce to a pan of water and bring to a boil. Keep tasting and add more of whatever you think is needed (either more of the ingredients I've listed, or your own ideas).

Make the Soup:

When the broth has come to a boil, add the ground pork balls and the cooked rice (remember: it is a porridge!). Continue to boil until the ground pork is cooked and the rice begins to “open up”. Keep tasting to see if it needs something. If it tastes salty, add a pinch of sugar. If it is too bland, add a little fish sauce. Add the celery leaves a minute or two before you plan to serve the soup.

Serve the Soup:

Add the soup to serving bowls. Sprinkle some white pepper in, and garnish with more sprigs of fresh cilantro. Set the white pepper and cilantro out on the table for guests to add more if they like more. Serve immediately.

Tortilla de patata (Spanish potato omelet)

Heather Littrell

4 medium potatoes, peeled and cut into small slices, about the size of a quarter (3-4 cups)
½ cup oil (preferably olive oil) or enough to thoroughly cover the bottom of frying pan
½ cup chopped onions
½ tbsp salt
4 large eggs

Heat the oil in a non-stick pan. It’s very important that the pan is in good shape and is non-stick, otherwise the omelet will not end up in one piece. Add the potatoes and onions and cook over low/ medium low heat until the potatoes are tender and starting to brown a little bit, stirring every 15 minutes- 30-45 minutes total. Add the salt during one of the stirring times. When the potatoes are cooked, drain off the oil and reserve. Add the eggs to the potatoes one at a time and stirring immediately with each egg so the egg doesn’t start to cook in the hot potatoes. (if there’s time, let the potatoes cool some before adding the eggs) Heat some of the reserved oil in the frying pan and add the potato egg mixture. Cook for five minutes or so, until the pan side of the omelet is browned. Bubbles should start forming on the top of the omelet. To turn the omelet: Set a large plate on top of the frying pan. Fold a dish towel in half diagonally and set it over the plate. Grab the plate and the pan all together, holding on to the hot pan using the sides of the dish towel that are hanging over the plate. Very carefully, flip it over so the plate now is on the bottom and the pan is on top. Pull off the pan- the omelet should be sitting on the plate. Add more of the reserved oil to the pan if necessary. Slide the omelet back into the pan and finish cooking until both sides are browned. To get the omelet out of the pan you can use the method described above, or you can just carefully dump the omelet onto the plate.

Spicy Sauce

Dave Matern

Fish Sauce
Lime Juice
Sugar
Garlic
Salt
Pepper
Chile Peppers
Cilantro

The philosophy of making the sauce is to get balance of spicy, salty, sour and sweet flavors.

Start with equal parts fish sauce and lime juice. These liquids will provide the base of the sauce, so use as much of each as you need to arrive at the quantity of sauce you think you will need. Fresh squeezed lime juice is better, but not essential. The fish sauce provides the salty flavor, and the lime juice provides the sour flavor. Add a little bit of each at a time, and taste frequently until you get a balance of these flavors.

Add some sugar. Sugar is important, because it balances the fish sauce. Again, add a little bit of sugar at a time, and taste the results until you get a balance, and no single flavor dominates.

Add a little salt and pepper. Actually you can probably do without salt and pepper, but it wouldn't hurt to add a little bit.

Chop up some chile peppers and throw them in. This is another point at which you add a little bit at a time, tasting frequently until you get it where you want it. I like it burning hot, and so add a lot of the spiciest chiles I can find. Other folks may prefer it not quite so spicy. I have found that the small, Thai chiles work the best, but you can use whatever chiles you have available.

Mince some fresh garlic, and throw that in. Instructions that tell you to add a little at a time, tasting frequently, would seem redundant by now, but it's too late, since I've already given them.

Mun and I differ about how the cilantro should be used. I chop up the cilantro, and throw that directly into the sauce. Mun serves fresh, whole sprigs alongside the sauce.

Mix the ingredients, and taste it one last time. If you are unhappy with the taste because one particular flavor is dominating, then add whatever you think it needs to balance out that flavor. You are now done. If you are using the sauce in a meal and it begins to run low, you can add some more ingredients on the fly.

You can use this anywhere a hot sauce is appropriate. Mun taught me to drizzle this sauce directly on steaks and shrimp and other grilled meats. You can add some of this sauce to a lettuce salad, and add tomatoes and cucumber, and top with grilled steak. You can dice tomatoes and onions and cilantro and add to this sauce to make salsa. Mmmmm!

Homemade Taco Shells

Kate Littrell

2 cups cornstarch
1 cup milk
1 tsp salt
½ cup margarine, melted
¼ cup cornmeal
4 beaten eggs

Mix together the cornstarch, milk and salt. Mix together the margarine, cornmeal and eggs and add to the cornstarch mixture. Stir until combined. Spray a nonstick frying pan and turn to medium to medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, pour ¼ cup batter into the hot frying pan, cook until slightly brown on one side, flip, and cook until done on both sides.

White Beans

Heather Littrell

3 15.8 oz. cans white beans, undrained (eg. Great northern)
3-5 whole unpeeled cloves garlic
bay leaves
Bouillon cube
1-2 potatoes peeled and chopped
2 carrots peeled and sliced
½ cup chopped onion
1 Tbsp. olive oil for flavor (optional)

Dump the beans and their liquid into a large saucepan. Add the rest of the ingredients and additional water to cover a couple of inches. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are tender and much of the water has been absorbed, about an hour.