

Real Thai Cooking: Recipes and Stories from a Thai Food Expert

Chawadee Nualkhair

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Tuttle Publishing (May 16, 2023)

Hardcover \$25.99 (160pp)

978-0-8048-5558-7

Intimate, vibrant, exuberant, and with elements of a travelogue, Chawadee Nualkhair's cookbook *Real Thai Cooking* introduces regional specialties with flair.

Surveying four Thai regions and their unique cooking styles, flavors, and cultural influences, the book includes bits of history, cultural information, and personal food memories too. The Central region reflects a sophisticated mélange of Asian and European cuisine, stemming from the Bangkok royal palace and courtly use of dining as diplomacy. The cooler climate of Northern Thailand along the Chinese border informs a cooking style that uses more pork and bitter greens and vegetables, while the northeastern Isaan area features Vietnamese-Thai fusion with spicier, fermented flavors and pounded fruit and vegetable salads. Southern Thai cooking incorporates more seafood and curries thanks to an extensive Muslim population.

There are suggested substitutions for local vegetables, spices, and other ingredients. And there's an accessible overview of Thai cooking secrets, helping newcomers to coax out layers of complex aromas and textures and the distinctive Thai balance of sweet, salty, sour, and spicy. A useful visual primer covers authentic ingredients like amaranth and wild ginger to help novices source and cook traditional recipes.

No Thai food book would be complete without ample discussion of essential condiments and dipping sauces. Here they include recipes for homemade Nam Pla Prik (fish sauce, garlic, chilies, lime) and Isaan's Jaew sauce (ground toasted rice kernels are key). An absorbing chapter on Thai drinks and not-too-sweet, sometimes even funky desserts focuses on street vendors of iced drinks, sticky rice concoctions, and the strangely tempting Thai Ice Cream Sandwich: coconut ice cream popped into a hot dog bun and slathered with condensed milk.

With eye-popping photographs of food markets, street vendors, and finished dishes, *Real Thai Cooking* is a visual, informative treat that dives into Thailand's rich food culture.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (May / June 2023)

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