

Asian Black Bean and Asparagus Salad

I'm a big Costco fan. Knowing that I'm getting a bargain by buying in bulk is very satisfying, even if that means I have to convert my coat closet into an overflow food pantry. One day, behind the thirty rolls of toilet paper and eleven remaining paper towel rolls, I found an eight-pack of black beans. There's only so much chili a person can eat, so I came up with this recipe as an alternative. Now I have room for the ten-pound bag of basmati rice I just bought.

INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup red onion, thinly sliced

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup cilantro, chopped

2 cans black beans, rinsed and drained

2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar

2 teaspoons soy sauce

1 teaspoon Asian hot oil

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon Asian sesame oil

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sugar

1 bunch asparagus

$\frac{1}{2}$ red or yellow bell pepper, diced*

2 teaspoons white and black sesame seeds

PREPARATION

In a large bowl, combine onion, cilantro, and beans. In a small bowl, combine rice wine vinegar, soy sauce, oils, and

sugar. Pour vinegar mixture over bean mixture and gently mix. Marinate at room temperature for 20 – 30 minutes.

Steam asparagus until al dente, about five minutes. Run asparagus under cold water when ready. Cut asparagus spears into quarters.

Mix asparagus together with bean mixture and add in red or yellow pepper. Garnish with sesame seeds and serve.

**NOTE – If you like heat, substitute a hot red pepper for the bell pepper.*

SHRIMP LAKSA

One of my favorite Singaporean treats is a steaming bowl of Laksa. It's a spicy noodle soup that is made throughout Southeast Asia with each country having it's own spin on it. People will argue for hours over which version is the best, but my vote always goes to this classic Singaporean recipe.

To make it completely from scratch is quite a commitment, particularly since many ingredients can only be found in Asian markets or on-line. So my version has a few key cheats that will guarantee the flavor without losing too much authenticity, as well as saving you some time in the kitchen.

INGREDIENTS – serves 6

(Most of the unusual ingredients can be found in an Asian market or on-line)

2 Tablespoons *Better Than Bouillon* Lobster base

6 cups water

2 tablespoons cooking oil

1 7-oz jar of laksa paste

1 tablespoon sugar

1 tablespoon fish sauce

1 14-oz can of coconut milk

18 large shrimp, tails on, deveined

18 fish balls

6 tofu puffs, tau pok, halved

1 lb vermicelli rice noodles, cooked per package instructions

1/2 cup bean sprouts

3 tablespoons chopped scallions

3 tablespoons dried shallots

1 Serrano chili, sliced thinly (optional)

PREPARATION

Bring 6 cups of water to a boil. Add two tablespoons of bouillon base and dissolve. Lower to simmer for five minutes. *(NOTE: the bouillon is very salty, so no need to add any additional salt to dish.)*

Heat 2 tablespoons of cooking oil in a large saucepan. Add the laksa paste and cook for 5 minutes on low heat. Add sugar, fish sauce, coconut milk, and stock stirring to combine. Simmer the mixture for 15 minutes then add the shrimp, fishballs, and tofu puffs, cooking for 5 minutes to finish.

To serve, add cooked vermicelli noodles to bowls. Ladle in laksa, dividing the shrimp, fish balls, and tofu puffs between 6 bowls. Garnish with bean sprouts, scallions, and dried

shallots. For a little extra kick, garnish with sliced chili.

Enjoy!

SALSA FOR WIMPS

In honor of Cinco de Mayo, here's a fun recipe from my book, GETTING SAUCED. I had the great pleasure of working with Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken on a special for Food Network. While we were scouting, Susan took me down to the Grand Central Market in downtown LA and insisted I buy up every dried chili I could fit in my suitcase. When I got back home, I tried one of their salsa recipes, but idiotically mistook habaneros for chili de arbol. It was so hot, it nearly blew my head off. Eventually I got the dish right, but as the years have passed, I can't take the heat as well as I used to, so here's a much milder version.

INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound Italian Roma tomatoes

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound tomatillos, husked and washed

1 medium sweet onion

2 Tablespoons olive oil

3 garlic cloves, crushed

1/3 small can chipotles in adobo sauce, chopped

1 cup water

1 teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ bunch cilantro, leaves only, roughly chopped

PREPARATION

Preheat broiler. With a sharp knife, lightly pierce the skin on the tomatoes and tomatillos by making an "X" on each end. Quarter the onion. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Place all on a baking sheet and broil, turning occasionally until charred, 10 to 12 minutes. Set aside to cool for ten minutes.

Peel the tomatoes and tomatillos. Rough chop the tomatoes, tomatillos, and onions.

In a saucepan, heat the oil, then add garlic and cook for one minute until fragrant. Add in tomatoes, tomatillos, onion, the chipotles in adobo sauce, water, salt, and black pepper.

Bring to a boil and then simmer for 10 minutes. Turn off heat and let cool for 10 minutes.

Transfer to a food processor or blender. Puree and strain. Fold in the cilantro. Serve at room temperature or slightly chilled. The salsa can be stored in the refrigerator for 3 to 5 days, or frozen for weeks.