

KOHLRABI SLAW

One of my favorite things to do is wander through our weekend greenmarket. I like to pick up unusual vegetables and figure out what to do with them. Kohlrabi, with its weird tentacles, is one of those challenging vegetables I just can't resist. It's part of the

cabbage family, so it's perfect for grating, and it remains fairly crunchy once dressed.

I've given this a bit of an Asian twist and kick with the addition of wasabi mayonnaise.

INGREDIENTS

1 large kohlrabi, peeled, stemmed and grated

$\frac{1}{2}$ head Napa cabbage, grated

2 carrots, peeled and grated

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

3 scallions sliced into 1" pieces

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup wasabi mayonnaise (available in many Asian markets or on-line)

1-tablespoon vinegar

1-tablespoon honey

1-teaspoon salt

Freshly ground pepper

PREPARATION

Combine kohlrabi, cabbage, carrots, onion and scallions in a large bowl. Mix with hands to combine.

In a small bowl, whisk together wasabi mayonnaise, vinegar,

honey, salt, and pepper.

Pour the dressing over the salad and gently toss, fully coating the salad.

Place in refrigerator for at least two hours before serving.

FIVE INGREDIENT MARINATED SKIRT STEAK

I'm not a huge red meat fan, but when I do eat it, I tend towards the cheaper cuts. If you marinate it, skirt steak is pretty hard to screw up. Because it's such a thin cut, it holds the flavors of the marinade throughout, even if you overcook it. But try not to overcook it.

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds skirt steak

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup duck sauce

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup soy sauce

salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

To tenderize the meat, use the dull side of a chef's knife and do quick chops at 45 degrees against the grain. Turn the meat 180 degrees and chop at the same 45 degree angle. Flip the meat over and repeat above.

Generously season steak with salt and pepper. Place in plastic Ziplock.

In separate bowl, combine duck sauce and soy sauce.

Pour mixture into Ziplock. Seal Ziplock and massage meat until mixture covers steak. Marinate in fridge for 4 – 6 hours, flipping it over in the fridge half way through.

Remove Ziplock from fridge 45 minutes before ready to grill, allowing meat to come to room temperature.

Heat grill to 400 degrees. With tongs, take out skirt steaks and place on grill. Discard sauce. Grill two to three minutes each side. Remove from grill and let rest for five minutes before slicing.

THE SPICE MARKET

It took me over four months to discover the most incredible spice market on full display just three blocks from my flat. I had been living and working in Singapore, but was so busy that I would often eat or pick up groceries near my office, rather than my own neighborhood. On a rare day off, I decided to explore on foot and was thrilled with what I found.

I was living in Little India, one of the less affluent neighborhoods in town. It's always busy with tourists trying to find a good deal and locals pouring into the many restaurants for fish head curry and cheap beer. Just along the main drag, there was a market – Tekka Centre – that I must have walked past at least twenty times without going in. What a mistake! From the outside it didn't seem like much, but inside was an international food fest. There were aisles upon aisles of food stalls with every Southeast Asian cuisine and dish you can imagine – everything from *Pak Kashmiri Delight's Aloo Gobi* (a simple Indian vegetarian dish made with potatoes,

cauliflower, spices and herbs) to Whampoa's Prawn Noodles, (a Hokkien noodle soup made with pork bones and prawn stock).



People sat at communal tables slurping their soups and dipping

their *chapati* (Indian flat bread) into colorful, aromatic sauces. It didn't matter that the inside temperature was ninety-degrees and rising. Somehow the spices from the dishes seemed to regulate everyone's body temperature.



After filling my belly with some *murtabak*, (a thin dough stuffed with minced meat, onions, and eggs), I headed deeper into the market past the stalls into the shopping area. From on high, it's a cavernous space selling every ingredient known to mankind, and then some. Exotic vegetables, glorious ripe fruits, local chickens and fish, a butcher shop with lamb carcasses dangling on hooks, dried anchovies, teas and coffees from around the globe, and dried spices so brilliant in color you could wet them and use them as paint.



Stopped in my tracks, I eyed the gorgeous spices wondering which ones I would need to make a lamb *korma*.

“Can I help you?” asked the handsome merchant.

“Well, I’ve been trying my skills at different curries, but I never really get the right balance. I was hoping to make a lamb *korma*.”

“Ah, that’s one of my favorites too. I’ll put together my secret mix for you.”



I wondered if he says that to all the ladies, but just as the thought crossed my mind, he started to spoon out at least a dozen different spices into one bag, then proceeded to recite the recipe to me.

“And once you’ve tried the dish, I expect you to come back and let me know how it turned out,” he said smiling, handing me the bag, “Just ask for Rakesh.”

Rakesh did not steer me wrong. The *korma* was delicious and his recipe was spot on. Each week I would return to the market to let him know how my dishes were turning out and each week he would send me on my way with a new spice mix and recipe. He became my first friend away from the office and made me feel like a welcomed addition to the neighborhood.

STRAWBERRY MARGARITA

Sometimes the easiest things are the best. If you've got some ripe strawberries that are begging to be used, try this simple margarita. Just make sure you've got your Uber account up-to-date. No driving after downing one of these.

INGREDIENTS

6 large (or 12 small) strawberries, de-stemmed and rough chopped

4 oz tequila

2 oz Cointreau

1/2 lime, juiced (discard rind)

8 ice cubes

Mint sprigs for garnish

PREPARATION

In a blender, combine all ingredients until ice cubes have been crushed. Pour into margarita glasses and garnish with mint. Enjoy!

DIM SUM DISASTER

There's nothing better than a hot, steaming *char siu bao* to start the day. I've written about my love for them before, having consumed my fair share of these delectable barbecue pork buns while living in Singapore. It was common for me to pick one up with a cup of *kopi* on the way to the work, pretending that the extra few blocks of walking would counteract the high calorie intake.

But back home here in Brooklyn, they're not so readily available. Finding authentic *baos* requires a subway ride, getting hassled by suspect men trying to sell me counterfeit Gucci bags, and waiting behind a long line of 20-somethings in the heart of Chinatown. Don't get me wrong, they are worth the trouble, but I rarely have time for that kind of indulgence. So, I figured the next best thing would be to learn how to make them myself. How hard could it be?

I sifted through my extensive cookbook library and found a few books on Chinese cuisine that included some recipes for *dim sum* and *baos*. They were pretty straightforward with various recipes for the filling and a few for the dough. Unfortunately my pantry and fridge weren't fully stocked considering I had no oyster sauce, five spice or pork on hand. So I made a shopping list and downed a bagel with a schmear instead.

Eventually I got all of the ingredients together and started my prep. Everything came together perfectly. The *char siu* mixture was so close to what I remembered that it took everything in my power not to eat it before stuffing it into the dough.

The dough was resting by my windowsill, puffed up to nearly

double its size after a couple of hours. It was finally time to assemble and steam the *bao*. I gingerly rolled out the dough, placed a spoonful of mixture smack in the center and then attempted to twist the top of the *bao* closed, just as instructed. And that's when the trouble started.



They had no resemblance to the pictures, the pork mixture was oozing out of the seams, and once wet, the dough edges wouldn't stick together. Trying to salvage what I could, I did everything but staple them together. I placed them in the steaming basket and hoped for the best.

Thankfully, only my husband was here to witness the disaster. The buns had exploded, the mixture smeared all along the bottom of the basket, and the dough looked more like a chubby taco than a bun. Although not very pleasing to the eye, they didn't taste too bad. The filling saved the day, even if the dough was a bit tough due to my overworking it.



Even after a few more tries, I've still never quite perfected them. I can at least get them to stay closed, but somehow my mixture to dough ratio isn't quite right. Maybe it's time to head back into the city in search of the perfect *bao*. After all, who couldn't use a new Gucci bag?



MARY'S GUACAMOLE

My next-door neighbor, Mary, makes the best guacamole in all of Brooklyn. It's always perfect and no matter how many times I've made it, it's never as good as hers. I think it's a salt and cumin ratio issue. I tend to have a light hand when it comes to spices, but Mary is fearless. So, when making this,

definitely taste as you go and adjust the spices according to your taste.

INGREDIENTS

3 ripe avocados

2 ripe plum tomatoes, diced

$\frac{1}{2}$ jalapeno, finely diced

$\frac{1}{2}$ red onion, finely diced

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

Salt & pepper, to taste

Juice from $\frac{1}{2}$ a lime

Splash of Tabasco sauce

Tortilla chips

PREPARATION

In a bowl, scoop out avocados, setting the pits aside. Mash with a fork, then fold in tomatoes, jalapeno, and red onion. Sprinkle cumin, salt, pepper, lime juice and Tabasco over the mixture and then lightly mix to incorporate.

Spoon mixture into a serving bowl. Push down two of the avocado pits into the mixture. Cover with plastic wrap, pressing the wrap against the guacamole. The pits and the plastic wrap will help keep the dish from browning. Refrigerate for one hour before serving.

Serve with a bowl of tortilla chips.