



Food from Northern Laos

The Boat Landing Cookbook

ອາຫານຈາກພາກເໜືອລາວ: ປຶ້ມສູດອາຫານຂອງເຮືອນພັກທ່າເຮືອ

Dorothy Culloty
Photographs by Kees Sprengers



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Dorothy Culloty
Photographs by Kees Sprengers

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Top: Akha steamed green beans with sawtooth herb and ginger, page 142

Bottom, left to right: A meal of sticky rice, *soop pak*, sour pumpkin soup with mushrooms, pork *lahp* Luang Namtha-style served with forest leaves

To Sompawn Khantisouk

What is to give light must endure burning

Viktor Frankl

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Foreword

This cookbook is the fruit of a special friendship which knows no distance, age, race, culture or religion, of a friendship where all have become as family, caring for each other in their joys and in their tribulations.

Food from Northern Laos: The Boat Landing Cookbook is the child of the confluence of the skills, knowledge and abilities of these special friends. Dorothy has brought her love of cooking and cookbooks, Kees his photography and Joy her talent for cooking. Pawn and I have contributed our abilities to eat and critique.

My passion for northern Lao food comes from my years of loving association with the people of Luang Namtha. Working and living with the locals found me sharing many a meal in their homes, at celebrations, festivals and as I passed by. Daily life with Pawn and Joy and their families opened up a vast new world of food for me. Joy's culinary skills and Pawn's discerning tastes made each meal a delicious adventure. Few outsiders have had the opportunity to explore the foods of northern Laos in such depth. When, in the course of time, we opened The Boat Landing Guest House and Restaurant, I knew our guests would want to partake in their own culinary adventures. I wanted more than anything to liberate travelers from the doldrums of the generic fare on offer in tourist restaurants and to enliven their palates with the rich flavors and aromas of local food. I also wanted to disabuse people of the notion that Lao food is but a poor stepchild of Thai cuisine. Laos has a culinary tradition that is vibrant, distinct and unique. It can easily stand on its own and deserves recognition. To help our guests who are limited by time and lack of familiarity, we worked to distill Luang Namtha's highlights into a menu that presents local cuisine in a way that is easily understood and palatable. This is one of the over-arching goals of The Boat Landing: to present local culture in a way that is accessible.

Advising on what Western tastes and sensibilities

would consider 'unpalatable', I worked with Joy to create a menu that would give our guests a window into a typical Luang Namtha table. The local villagers laughed at us for the 'peasant' dishes that we offered. Naturally, they wouldn't go to a restaurant to eat their own ordinary food; they would want something more exotic like Thai or Chinese food. Putting the menu together was great fun. The acclaim that we received from our guests filled us with pride and satisfaction. Sophisticated and worldly foreigners did indeed appreciate northern Lao 'peasant food'.

At about this point, Dorothy and Kees arrived on the scene to join our family. Attracted by the 'aroma' of our website, they were soon welcomed into the loving fold of The Boat Landing. They set about to record life in Luang Namtha which was on the verge of momentous change. Kees used his camera to capture the everyday life and rituals of the local villagers. And Dorothy, with great vigor and enthusiasm, proceeded to document what was happening in the kitchens and by the cooking fires.

Good cookbooks on Lao food are scarce, and there are none which really attempt to describe northern Lao food. Dorothy has done the world a delectable favor by describing the dishes and cooking arts of a scarcely known cuisine. With this cookbook, may Lao cooking gain the recognition it deserves.

Let there be no doubt. The main ingredient in this cookbook is LOVE, without which it would have never been.

Bill Tuf n
Bangkok
August 2009



Introduction

My husband, Kees, and I first met The Boat Landing Guest House family in 2002. We had previously travelled in Laos several times, but comments from those we had met who had ventured up North to Luang Namtha were heavily in the ‘there be dragons’ camp regarding the difficulty of getting there and lack of anything to do once one arrived. Then we stumbled across the Boat Landing’s website, at the time one of the few reliable sources available to tourists about Lao PDR’s northernmost region. The website told us something different – that here was an interesting ecolodge on the banks of the Nam Tha River. It was set up, owned and run by a young local family, Sompawn (Pawn) and Joy Khantisouk, with lots of involvement from their extended families and Bill Tuffin, a visionary American development worker, who had a long-term friendship and mentoring role with the young couple.

The Boat Landing’s website communicated a warm family atmosphere and the green and keep-everything-local values the lodge and its restaurant held. There was a feeling of openness and information-sharing. The proud desire to expose outsiders to the region’s culture and natural wonders underscored the site. The restaurant’s menu was included. The food looked delectable!

At the time, we had no idea that our desire to visit

The Boat Landing would result in deep involvement with regional friendships, photography and cuisine which now exceeds seven years. Since our initial visit, Kees has photo-documented many of the local ethnic groups and much of the rapid, on-going social change in the province, gifting many printed photographs to the villagers. I have worked with Joy, her restaurant staff and local villagers to record the food of Luang Namtha. For half of these last seven years, I worked as an advisor with the Rural Research and Development Training Center, Vientiane.

This cookbook arose from Bill Tuffin’s vision and Joy’s desire to make Luang Namtha’s cuisine more widely known and valued for its rich cultural diversity. Because The Boat Landing Restaurant features food from local ethnic groups, we have illustrated the book with Kees’ photographs.

It has been an honour and exhilarating experience for me to document the recipes as I observed them being cooked in either the restaurant or nearby villages, testing them in my Western kitchen and then translating the ingredients and methods into instructions for this book. I dearly hope that the reader will gain as much pleasure by using the book to explore wonderful northern Lao food as I have had in creating it.



The Boat Landing



The Boat Landing Guest House and Restaurant

When we first visited Luang Namtha province there was no electricity. The Boat Landing used solar power for heating water and cabin lighting. They also ran a generator for three hours a night, just as some other guest houses in the country's remote countryside still do. But there, the philosophy and style of The Boat Landing diverged from virtually all other accommodation in Laos.

That philosophy and the history of The Boat Landing are described by Bill Tuffin on the website. Opened in December 1999, the guest house was the province's first ecotourism lodge. "We want our visitors to come away with a greater appreciation of Luang Namtha's culture and natural resources, and we hope the locals will gain a greater understanding of the outside world in addition to economic benefit from tourism," he writes.

Bill, from Colorado, had arrived in Laos in 1991. His first work was establishing a primary health care project supported by the French NGO *Enfants et Développement*. He hired Sompawn, then a high school student, to run office and home errands and to garden. Later, Sompawn continued his education by studying architectural drawing.

By the mid-'90s, Bill was working in Luang Namtha and Sompawn, a native of that province, had moved back there. He brought with him his wife, Joy, and young son, Liam. Pawn's family was interested in building a hotel for the growing number of tourists. Bill had spent a lot of time thinking about appropriate tourism in the region which would preserve the beauty of the environment and educate travellers on the culture and ecosystems around them.

The original concept of a French colonial building in town was discarded in favour of something radically different on wooded property along the river. Bill suggested the architecture be greatly simplified to reflect local styles and to make the most of the property's riverside beauty. Pawn drew up the concept, based on Bill's suggestions, and that became The Boat Landing.

Bill writes, "Beyond the local-style architecture, The Boat Landing needed to be comfortable enough that people would want to relax and spend time there. It also needed to provide the guests a window into the locality. This could be achieved through the decoration of the rooms, the menu and the availability of information about the local area and most of all through the family who would live at The Boat Landing." That was Pawn, Joy and their son.

The new guest house received a boon. "In the first year The Boat Landing was opened and running, the Nam Ha Ecotourism Project was started. The project has

helped to guide our vision and provided us with a framework to develop our business beyond what we could have ever imagined. And for our part, we have worked closely with the project helping to develop programs and activities," Bill explains.

"With the coming of the ecotourism project and our involvement in it, we saw that we could easily become more than a simple guest house and could become an ecolodge – a thing that we only learned of after starting the guest house. It seemed the natural way to go. But we did not want to just jump on the ecotourism band wagon; we really wanted to do it. So, through friends in the business, we found out about Green Globe, an international body which certifies ecotourism operations. We were benchmarked in 2006." Other awards The Boat Landing has received are *Highly Commended Best Hotel* for the First Choice Responsible Tourism Awards (2005), the Responsible Tourism's *Ethical Escape Excellence Award* and Ecoclub.com's Ecolodge membership.

The Boat Landing Restaurant serves authentic Lao cuisine, in particular the local dishes of Luang Namtha. The menu includes recipes from surrounding rural villages. The emphasis on authenticity has ensured The Boat Landing Restaurant's reputation throughout Laos for offering an excellent selection of traditional food. Asian dishes of a broader ancestry have been adapted with local flavour. Vegetarian dishes are also available.

The Boat Landing Guest House and Restaurant also acts as a hub of information about local ecotourism, side trips, activities and other accommodation and restaurant options.

Opposite: The Boat Landing Guest House and Restaurant on the Namtha riverbank in Ban Khone
Below: The Boat Landing team, 2004



Meet the people at the Boat Landing

Sompawn (Pawn) Khantisouk and, his wife, Patsanee (Joy), are the owners and operators of The Boat Landing Guest House. The property on which the guest house is located belongs to Pawn's father, a retired Nam Tha River boatman.

Pawn, born in 1975, studied architectural drafting in Vientiane, and soon after finishing his studies, he moved back to Luang Namtha. He designed and built The Boat Landing. Prior to January 2007, Pawn had been a lead guide for the Nam Ecotourism Project, the designer of Luang Namtha's river docking facilities and other local buildings, the owner and operator, along with Joy, of The Boat Landing and a partner in Green Discovery.

On January 23, 2007, Pawn was called to the local police station to discuss a failed arson attempt on his house the day before. Pawn never arrived at the police station. Witnesses say he was stopped on the road and forced into a car by four men. Since that day, there has been no word of Pawn.

Joy was born in 1979 in Luang Namtha, although her family is originally from Luang Prabang. She grew up in the same village as Pawn. Joy is renowned for her excellent cooking. While Pawn studied in Vientiane, Joy cooked at Just for Fun, the former vegetarian icon there. In Sompawn's absence, Joy has continued to run The Boat Landing with the help and support of extended family.

Liam is Joy and Sompawn's oldest son. Lum, Liam's younger brother, was born in 2000. His full name is Lumtahn, which is a poetic word for river. It's a fitting name for a boy living by a river, don't you think? Liam and Lum have a younger sister, La. Her full name, Namthip, means the source of water. She was born during a flood in 2002 which led to her name.

Visitors see a number of other people around The Boat Landing including Pawn's mother and father and Joy's parents. Between them, Pawn and Joy have a dozen brothers and sisters many of whom are also parents. The Boat Landing is the quintessential family business!

This page, top: Sompawn and Joy with their children Liam, Lum and Namthip

Bottom: Joy in Kalom dress

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Joy and the children with Sompawn's parents, Khanti and Awn; *baci* ceremony at The Boat Landing; The Boat Landing staff, from left: Suliya, Peng, Chan, Noi, Tuey, Toum and Nang





Culturally rich Luang Namtha



Luang Namtha province is located in the far northwest of Lao PDR, sharing a Mekong River border with Burma (Myanmar) in the northwest and a land border with China's Yunnan province to the north. To the south lies Bokeo province which also shares a Mekong border with Burma and adjoins Thailand to its south.

The development of Luang Namtha has been shaped by its location and geography for several thousands of years. Mountainous, rich in rivers and heavily forested, the province also has arable valleys suitable for settlement and its supporting agriculture. Muang Sing in the

north, Luang Namtha town, the provincial capital, and Vieng Phouka, further south, are the chief valleys and population centres.

Tourists arriving in Luang Namtha may feel that they are among the first foreigners to discover 'out of the way' Luang Namtha, but in fact, the province has long been a crossroads of ethnic migration. Regional settlement and subsequent epic power struggles were underscored by trading caravan movements through Luang Namtha from Yunnan into Nan in Thailand and through the province from Burma into Vietnam and China.



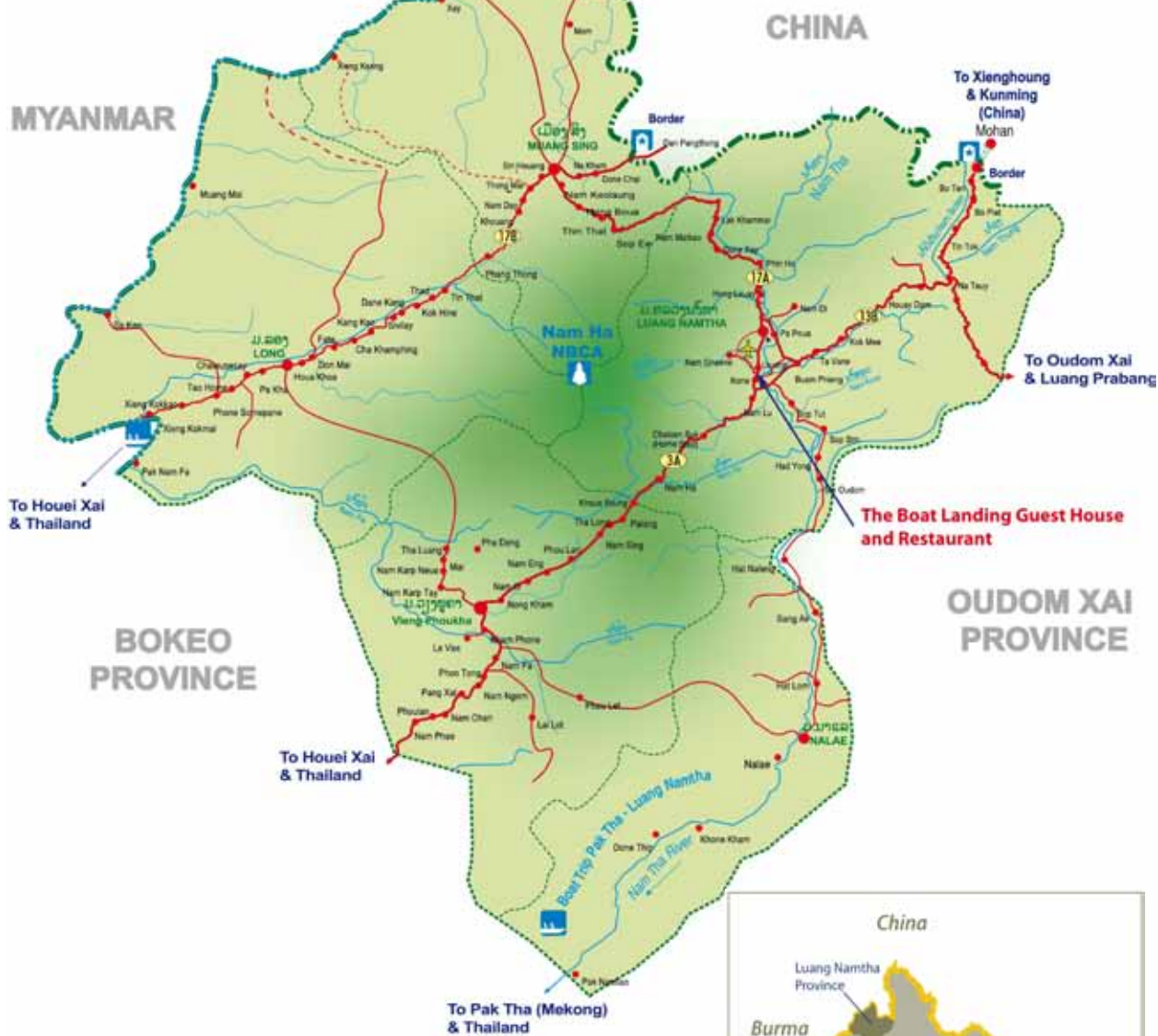
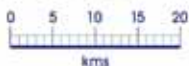
Luang Namtha province is home to an amazing 29 different ethnic groups. Ethnic Lao make up only about three percent of the provincial population. According to Laos' 2005 census, Akha are the largest ethnic group with 36,531 or 25.1 percent of the population. The second largest ethnic group are the Kmhmu,' who comprise 24.5 percent of the population, followed by the Tai Lue who make up some 12.2 percent and who were very early settlers around Muang Sing. Other Tai groups, including the Tai Dam, Tai Kao and Tai Daeng, account for 10.1 percent of the population and live mostly in the Namtha

Valley. Other populous ethnic groups living in the province are Hmong, Lahu, Tai Yuan, Yao (Iu-Mien), Lanten and Lamet.

** Source: Luang Namtha population and housing census, 2005, cited in Schipani, S., 2008.*

**Opposite: Lanten planting rice in Muang Sing district
Above: Tai Dam dancers at the Tai Dam Festival, 2008**

ແຂວງ ຫລວງນໍ້າທາ
Luang Namtha Province

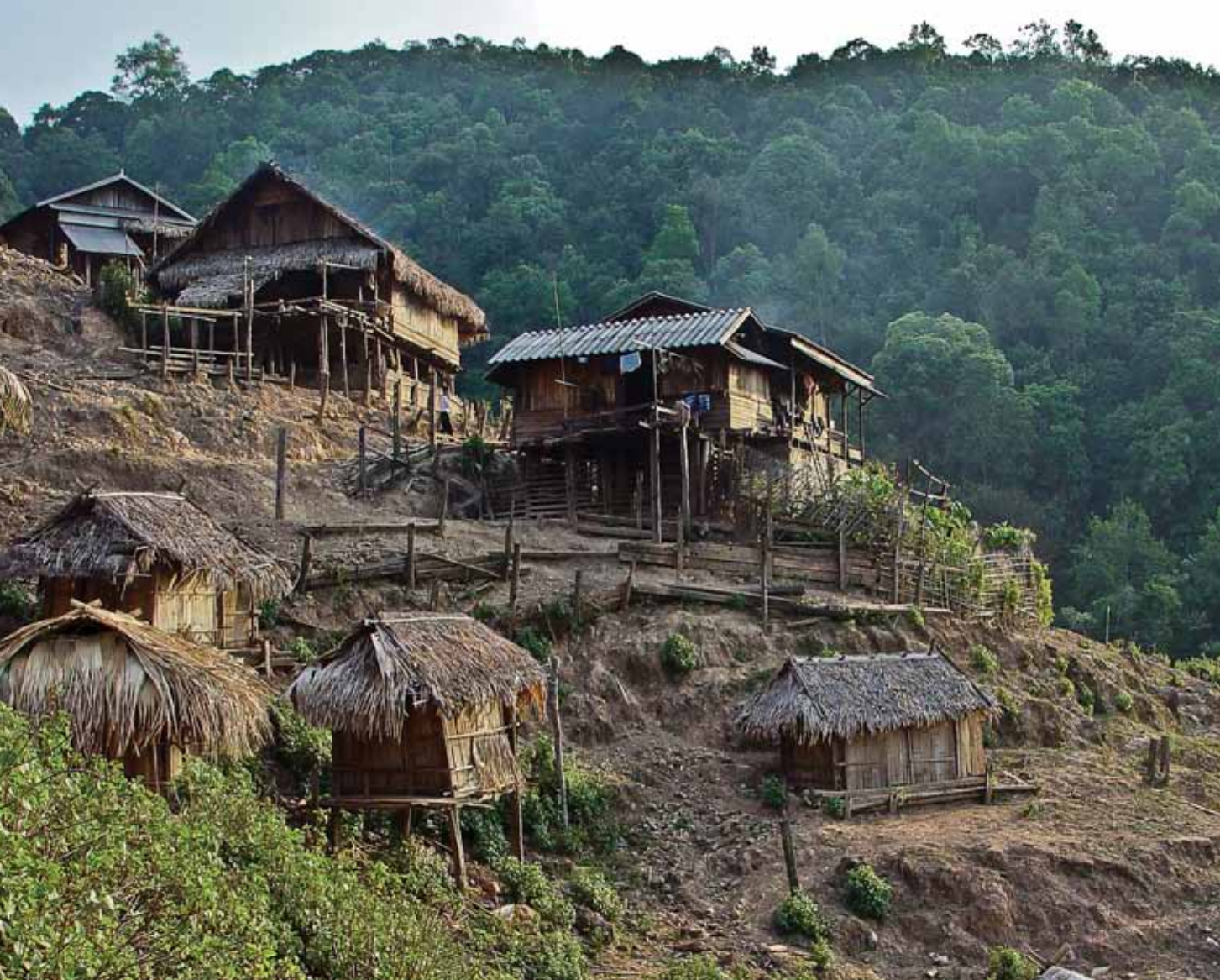




Contemporary technology in rural traditional settings,
Top: A boatman and his family at Ban Khone Kham
Bottom: Satellite dish in kitchen garden, Ban Khone Kham



The rich resources and low population density of the province still easily support traditional subsistence lifestyles in many regions. Tradition, however, is being strongly influenced by the impact of satellite television, improved telecommunications, road construction in previously isolated areas and dynamic changes in local agricultural practices, including the introduction of commercial, settled farming and the establishment of vast tree plantations. Young people now see alternatives to their traditional lifestyles and are becoming more materialistic and less interested in maintaining their ethnic group's customs and practices.



Akha ອັກຄາ

The Akha first came to Laos in the 1850s; there was a second wave of immigration from Burma and Yunnan in the 1900s. They live mainly in the Long and Muang Sing districts, in the north of Namtha district and in the east of Vieng Phoukha district. As animists, Akha follow an extensive ritualistic and ethical code of behaviour which governs every action. Passed on over generations, it is called The Akha Way (*Akha zhang*). The Akha Way enables people to live in balance with the spirits and souls of the natural world, as well as those of humans and their ancestors. Akha beliefs engender strong respect for human life and natural resources. Family history is transmitted orally as part of The Akha Way.

Traditionally, Akha practice swidden agriculture in upland fields. They cultivate a mixture of plain rice, maize and millet, as well as cotton used for spinning and

weaving. Secondary crops are soybeans, indigo, vegetables, peanuts and sesame seed. Historically, poppies were cultivated, and opium was processed and enjoyed. The Akha are also expert forest hunters and gatherers, wise in the ways of the natural world.

In the years Kees and I have been visiting Luang Namtha, we have observed many changes in the lifestyle and economics of upland Akha villages. Kees' photographs over this time have created a valuable historical archive. In 2003, during our first trips to Ban Nammat Mai and Ban Nammat Gao villages, we observed a prosperous, thriving culture. At the time, the villages were several hours trek into the Nam Ha National Protected Area (NPA). Stakeholders in the first ecotourism trekking project in the province, the residents provided local knowledge and overnight food and accommodation to



the limited number of trekkers permitted into the NPA.

In 2004, however, the villagers from Ban Nammat Gao were resettled on lower land beside the road linking Luang Namtha and Muang Sing at kilometre 23. This was part of a government strategy to protect the province's flora and fauna, to improve villagers' proximity to services and to stop swidden agriculture by the year 2015. Villagers have since become hired workers on newly created rubber plantations; the site of their relocated village does not provide enough land for them to grow rice. While access to medical care and education is better than before, the quality of traditional lifestyle and access to forest resources have been affected. Sister village, Ban Nammat Mai, has also been resettled closer to a town, but this resettlement was voluntary because it provided better opportunities for the young people. Ban

Nammat Mai remains involved in ecotourism, but from its new, non-forested village it provides visitors only with food for a picnic in the forest rather than an overnight stay. On the other hand, in Muang Sing district many Akha villages now host ecotourism visitors with great success and economic benefit.

Several recipes in this book (Akha pork balls, beans with garlic and sesame, sawtooth herb *jeow* and ginger chicken soup) were taught to The Boat Landing staff by women from these villages who had come to The Boat Landing for training in food preparation to better host ecotourists.

Opposite: Ban Nammat Gao

Above, clockwise from left: Akha family from Ban Nammat Gao; eating breakfast, Ban Nammat Gao; Akha meal on an Akha Experience trek, Muang Sing district
Food from Northern Laos



Kmhmu' ກິມມຸ *Khmu*

The Kmhmu', the preferred academic spelling¹, have several subgroups. Most in Luang Namtha are Kwen or Rok. *Khmu* (pronounced K-hmu), *Kammu*, *Kamu* or *Khamu* are also common spellings. *Khamu* is the spelling used by Lao in Luang Namtha.

The Kmhmu' are thought to have settled in the area several thousand years ago. They are now one of the country's largest ethnic groups. Kmhmu' have their own form of animism. Many Lao believe the Kmhmu' have power over the spirits of the land and use sorcery. The Kmhmu' traditionally lived in hills and forested valleys. Now, through a combination of relocation and development of the road system, many villages are on roadsides.

Kees and I have close ties with one family in the largely Kwen village of Chalensouk. We regard their

1 E. Preisig, personal communication, May 5, 2009.

daughter, Khamsouk, as our honorary granddaughter. Khamsouk was the first person in her village to go to university. She has demonstrated Kmhmu' recipes for us which are included in the book on page 105 and page 106.

Chalensouk is undergoing enormous change. In 2006 – 2007, the road going past the village was upgraded as part of the new Route 3 highway linking Yunnan with northern Thailand via Laos. The increased number of shops and stalls in roadside villages has created new sources of income. Further, an upland Akha village has been relocated close to Chalensouk, and a new bridge and area school have been built. The village today is very different from the isolated settlement of Khamsouk's childhood. Then, the lack of a village school caused the determined girl to run away from home to live with her uncle and aunt in Luang Namtha town in order to be



educated. Chalensouk is now a home-stay ecotourism destination as it is at the head of a trekking route.

Ban Goop, also written Ban Koop, is another favourite Kmhmu' village of Kees' and mine. We visited it in 2003 as part of an authorised trek survey. It is the reward at the end of a three-hour uphill walk from Ban Khone Kham on the Nam Tha River, which is itself a one-day boat journey from The Boat Landing. There, the rhythm and practices of traditional Kmhmu' life are still upheld. We have treasured memories of the wonderful hospitality shown us by its subsistence economy villagers.

In Luang Namtha province, the Kmhmu' villagers grow paddy or upland swidden sticky rice, hunt, fish and gather forest products for trade or for their own use. Most of the recipes using rattan in this book were tested using rattan gathered from the forest by Khamsook's

family. Kmhmu' also produce a rice alcohol called *lao hai*. See page 179.

An increasing number of Kmhmu' villages in Namtha and Vieng Phoukha districts are involved in tourism. The people's knowledge of medicinal plants and the forest and their skill at weaving rattan and bamboo baskets have led to many tourists visiting Kmhmu' villages, experiencing Kmhmu' home stays. Companies employ the Kmhmu' as trekking guides.

Opposite: Ban Chalensouk. The post in foreground is used to shape rattan before it is made into stools
Above, clockwise from top: Kmhmu' village, Nalee district; Kmhmu' woman smoking pipe; Khamsook cooking meal while Dorothy records the recipes, Ban Chalensouk



Tai Lue ໄຕລື (ໄທລື in Luang Namtha)

The Tai Lue are part of the same Tai branch of the Tai-Kadai language family as the Lao but are more numerous in Luang Namtha than the Lao. They began settling present-day Muang Sing in the fifteenth century, moving into valleys and establishing settlements near rivers or streams to grow their main crop, glutinous rice, in irrigated paddies. The Tai Lue have small kitchen gardens and fruit trees and raise a variety of domesticated animals.

Tai Lue practice Theravada Buddhism mixed with a belief in spirits, called *phi*, as well as souls and the after-life. Every village has a Buddhist temple and monks, and every Tai Lue male is ordained for at least a short time at some point in his life. Each village also has its sacred tree which harbours the village's guardian spirit. Tai Lue were originally matrilineal, and the women have more freedom and stronger decision-making powers than in other ethnic groups.

Mainly lowland sedentary farmers growing glutinous rice and vegetables and raising pigs, poultry and buffaloes, the Tai Lue supplement their food and resources from the forest. Their villages are relatively large.

Lue women spin their own cotton yarn. Using frame looms, they create cloth for garments, blankets and bed coverings. They also weave Buddhist ceremonial textiles.

We often stay at Ban Khone Kham, a Tai Lue and Kmhmu' boatmen's village on the Nam Tha River. Besides fishing and gathering river weed (*kai paen*), villagers maintain extensive gardens which provide a wealth of ingredients for their delicious food. With a proposal to dam the river in a few years' time, ecotourism's two-day Nam Tha boat trip may not be available for long. When it and other haulage cease, the main sources of income for the village will be eliminated.

Tai Dam ທາດາ (ໄທດາ in Luang Namtha)

The Tai Dam (Black Tai) in Luang Namtha came into Laos from northwestern Vietnam, migrating to the Namtha Valley in the late nineteenth century. The Tai Dam are one of the province's main ethnic groups; there are thirteen Tai Dam villages in Luang Namtha. There are Tai Dam living across the river from The Boat Landing. Tai Dam are not Buddhists. They practice a form of spirit worship that predates Buddhism and is the earliest form of religion (and social organisation) for all Tai groups. This spirit worship traditionally functioned on three levels: the traditional Tai state (ie, the *muang*),



the village and individual households. Spirit worship is deeply embedded in all Tai groups and can still be found even among Tai who have embraced Buddhism.

The Tai Dam originally settled in upland valleys, growing both paddy and upland swidden rice. Today, families also cultivate small vegetable gardens, hunt and fish. The women produce fine quality silk and cotton textiles on frame looms. In the late 1990s, many of Luang Namtha's local Tai Dam women began exporting directly to markets in Japan and the US.



Kalom ກະລອມ, Tai Yuan ໄທຍວນ (ໄທຍວນ in Luang Namtha)

The Kalom are closely related to the Tai Lue. They first settled in the Luang Namtha Valley in the late sixteenth century, arriving from what is now China. A second resettlement after a long exodus took place in 1890. Kalom religion is Theravada Buddhism overlaid with animist traditions. The Kalom are chiefly paddy farmers. Ban Khone, where The Boat Landing is situated, has many Kalom families. *Gaeng bawt* (page 111) and *aeb bawn* (grilled taro leaf packets, page 130) are typical Kalom recipes which have been included in this book.



Opposite: Tai Lue woman weaving, Ban Nam Fa
Above, clockwise from left: Tai Dam woman with traditional headdress; a Tai Dam forest cemetery; a Kalom Buddhist funeral



This page: Lanten extended family at home
 Opposite, clockwise from top left: Lanten woman wearing celestial crown (wedding headdress); copying Lanten sacred script; shaman conducting ceremony for the spirits of the dead; Lanten men at New Year's ceremony, all at Ban Nam Lue

Lanten ລາວແຕ່ນ *Lantaen*, Kim Moun ອີມມູນ *Kim moun*

The Lanten (Kim Moun or Lao Houay) belong to the Mien (Yao) branch of the Hmong-Mien language family and came originally from China. The Lanten moved into Lao PDR during the nineteenth century. Main settlements are in the Long and Namtha districts.

The Lanten typically practice swidden and paddy agriculture for their rice and vegetable production and raise some small domestic animals. They supplement their diet and income by hunting and gathering forest products. Food is basic with plain, rather than sticky rice, as the staple. Kitchens, simple and centred around a hearth, are capable of producing a large amount of food for ceremonial occasions. Many Lanten ceremonies

include ritual food offerings.

The Lanten have been strongly influenced by long contact with the Chinese. The Lanten have patrilineal clans and lineages and practice a mixture of ancestor worship and Taoism. Their writing system is based on Chinese characters. It is used primarily to write religious texts and local histories. Men are the ritual specialists and maintain the written traditions. Lanten books and manuscripts are written on a durable bamboo paper made by the women. The women also produce thick, high quality, indigo-dyed cotton cloth. Wooden ceremonial maskmaking and silver and blacksmithing are still practiced.



The northern Lao kitchen



In the past, most of Luang Namtha province was covered with dense, triple-canopy, subtropical monsoon forests. Those forests have gradually been reduced through logging and, to a much lesser extent, the slash and burn practices of the upland villagers. The incursion of sedentary farming, human habitation and tree plantations have also affected the countryside.

Luang Namtha has the fourth largest National Protected Area in Laos, which covers almost a quarter of the province. Thirty percent is virgin primary forest. It is popularly thought that only untouched forest is environmentally valuable. However, for the local people, many food and material resources come from secondary forest and uplands. The three to seven year-long resting/regenerative part of the swidden farming cycle is crucial for providing elements of traditional diets and producing supplies for construction, fishing and homewares.

The natural environment of Luang Namtha

has played a significant role in developing its cuisine. The deep forests and secondary growth areas yield a wide variety of foods, many of which are described in Ingredients. Wildlife, such as insects, birds, tree squirrels, monitor lizards, snakes and larger prey, is eaten fresh or dried. Bamboo borer moth larvae are collected and either eaten dry-fried or sold. Rattan, bamboo shoots, ferns, banana flower, mai sakah, cardamom and a variety of leaves and fungi are also eaten and traded.

Kitchen and swidden gardens provide gourds, pumpkin, several varieties of eggplant, galangal, ginger, mak ken, chillies, green peppercorns, limes, long and yard-long beans, garlic, sesame seed, peanuts, cucumbers, spring onions, tomatoes, lemongrass, coriander and various basil and mints. Turkeys, fowl, ducks and pigs are raised. Valley dwellers also have cattle and water buffalo. All are eaten. Around the paddies, locals collect rice paddy herb,



frogs, tiny fish and giant water beetles. From the upland swidden fields and lowland paddies come sticky and plain rice of many varieties, most from indigenous seed. Additional edible crops include maize and soybeans plus the many vegetables grown for domestic consumption or for trade.

Locally grown fruit includes bananas, mangoes and papayas. Many other fruits are imported from China and Thailand.

The rivers provide indigenous fresh water fish and rock algae. Tilapia is farmed. Fish is eaten fresh, dried or made into padek, Laos' infamously pungent fish sauce. Padek, however, is not as widely used in Luang Namtha as it is in central and southern Laos.

Influences from China and Vietnam cuisines can be seen in kao soi (page 76). The Vietnamese noodle soup phở has been completely integrated into Lao culture as fer. Stir frying techniques and the pervasive use of MSG

and other taste enhancers have permeated local food practices via China, Vietnam and Thailand. The colonial French also made their contribution to the cuisine of Laos through the introduction of delicious baguettes that still are baked and sold throughout the country. In Luang Namtha baguettes made with Chinese flour are often eaten for breakfast or lunch filled with slices of Vietnamese-influenced pork sausage, an Asian version of bologna, and/or pâté, tomato and onion. Further, the French are to be thanked for establishing coffee plantations in Laos which today produce some of the world's best beans.

Opposite: Overlooking Ban Chalensouk, 2006
This page, clockwise from left: fish drying in Kmhmu' village; fishing contest on Nam Tha River; Akha boys on their way to set bird traps in the forest

A Lao meal

A well balanced Lao meal will include dishes of different cooking methods and foods which present a variety of textures and tastes. This is done even when food is scarce. Few recipes are considered strictly breakfast, lunch or dinner dishes.

The essential components of a typical Lao meal are:

- Sticky rice (or plain rice for Akha, Hmong or Lanten)
- *Jeow*, a thick chilli dipping sauce
- Soup
- A meat dish
- A vegetable dish

A simple upland meal would include sticky rice, a thin or thick soup which may have gourd, eggplant and/or rattan in it and a *jeow* made from chillies, salt and some grilled ingredient, such as a small fish, animal part or fruit. Cucumber or apple eggplant and collected raw vegetables and leaves would be served with the *jeow*. Insects and meat from hunted or village-raised animals can be used in the meal in a variety of ways. They may be made into a *lahp*, added to the soup, stew, or *jeow* or grilled and eaten on their own. This will depend on the type of food and the number to be fed.

No Lao meal is complete without a *jeow*, the essential Lao chilli-based dipping sauce. *Jeow* have great depth.



Kmhmu' lunch for visitors in the swidden fields, a three-hour walk from the village, featuring dry-fried bamboo borer moth larvae, chicken *gaeng*, vegetable *gaeng*, a chilli *jeow* and fresh greens

Some are quite spicy; others are not.

A richer meal would have more protein added to a variety of dishes, but the staple sticky rice and the principles of having a variety of dishes would remain the same.

Whether the meal is simple or more elaborate, if guests are present, Lao hospitality dictates that there should be more food served than could possibly be eaten to ensure that all visitors go away full and happy.

The Akha, Hmong and Lanten eat plain rice in preference to sticky rice, but, as with other ethnic groups, most of the rest of the meal comes from local gardens or the forest, domestic animals and hunted prey.

Who prepares the food and serves it depends on the ethnic group and gender roles. In a Kmhmu' village, men usually cook for visitors. Other than Kmhmu', women do most of the cooking in Laos, but many men can cook and know a tremendous amount about food.

Traditionally, meals are served on a low, round rattan table. Diners sit either on low stools or on a floor mat. Men sit with legs crossed or to one side while women gracefully bend their legs to the side. In restaurants, chairs or stools and tables have become the norm.

Food is usually served family-style, with eaters helping themselves from small, communal plates or bowls holding portions sufficient for four to six people. If the group is larger, another set of communal bowls is put out. Food is served all at once, and it need not be served at a piping hot temperature. Dishes are sampled one at a time and in small amounts.



Simple sticky rice meal from Ban Goop, a Kmhmu' village, comprising apple cucumber, a chilli *jeow*, grilled game *moke*, yellow eggplant *sa* and vegetable soup, *gaeng pak*



A bit about the dos and don'ts

- It is impolite to pile food on a plate unless the occasion is a modern-style buffet or the dish is like *kao poon* where everything has to be mixed together before eating. In normal circumstances, however, take only enough for a bite or two. If someone places food on your plate, it is considered a sign of friendship.
- In Luang Namtha chopsticks are commonly used for picking up morsels off serving plates. However, only the Lanten and Yao use them to eat steamed plain rice.
- Outside of rural villages, plain rice is usually eaten with a fork and spoon. The spoon is held in the right hand; the fork, in the left hand, is used to move the food onto the spoon.
- Sticky rice is eaten with the fingers, not with a spoon or chopsticks. When served sticky rice, only use the fingers of the right hand when transferring a small ball of rice to your mouth. The left palm may be used to rest a larger ball of rice. Use the ball of sticky rice to scoop up a morsel of food.
- The proper method of taking plain rice from the serving bowl is to spoon from its side, not the middle.
- A Chinese soup spoon is used for sipping very thin liquid dishes.
- Don't leave the communal spoon in the soup bowl. That's considered impolite.

Your Lao foodstuffs

Many foods used in Lao cooking are widely available in supermarkets, farmers and ethnic markets and Asian food stores. The Internet is a great source for locating hard-to-find ingredients. The Ingredients section suggests substitutes for difficult to obtain foods. Do *not* substitute dried herbs for fresh herbs with the exception of lemongrass and kaffir lime leaves (and only if really desperate). It is far better to omit the herb, use a substitute or cook something else than to use dried herbs.

Flavouring agents

Padek (Laos' version of fermented fish sauce), soy sauce, fish sauce, chilli wood (*mai sakahn*), prickly ash berries (*mak ken*, a dried berry similar to Sichuan pepper), black pepper, salt, chillies, galangal, ginger, sesame seeds and lime and tamarind juice are all integral elements of Luang Namtha cookery. Locals almost always add MSG and /or Knorr instant stock to dishes.

Herbs

- Dill
- Coriander
- Basil – three types are commonly used
 - a small, often lemon-scented, but not lemon-tasting, basil with white flowers called *pak i tou Lao*
 - sacred basil called *bai kapow* or *bai sapow*
 - anise-flavoured, Asian sweet basil, *bai boualapha*
- Sawtooth herb
- Lemongrass
- Mint and laksa mint
- Kaffir lime leaves
- Many other often bitter, wild leaves such as *bai yanang*, *bai som lom*, rice paddy herb and pepper (betel) leaves

Rice and noodles

- Medium to long grain sticky rice (glutinous rice)
- Plain rice (non-glutinous)
- Rice vermicelli noodles
- Rice noodles, either fresh (*kao soi*) or dried, the width of fettuccini
- Fermented rice noodles for *kao poon*
- Egg noodles, fresh or instant

Vegetables

- Shallots, brown and/or red
- Spring onions

- Garlic
- Long beans
- Morning glory
- Various Chinese cabbages, particularly the stalky, yellow or white-flowering varieties
- Pumpkins and gourds, including their flowers and tendrils
- Eggplants, primarily the apple eggplant varieties, including the small pea eggplant, *mak keua phoung*
- Tomatoes, cherry and large
- Cucumber
- Banana flower
- Lettuce
- Watercress
- Mushrooms
- Bamboo shoots
- Rattan

Meats and other proteins

- Pork
- Chicken
- Duck
- Beef
- Buffalo
- Turkey
- Forest and field game, birds, anything that moves
- Tofu

Below: Raised herb garden in a Kmhmu' village
Opposite: Smoking meat, Ban Don Khoune



Measurements

Western standard measurements, such as cup and tablespoon, vary between countries. This cookbook uses a cup (C) of 250 ml/8 fluid oz which is the standard measure for New Zealand, UK, Australia and Canada. The standard US cup (C) equals 237 ml. American cooks should use their US cup measures. There is nothing critical in these recipes that would warrant worrying about the differences.

All measurements are level, not heaped.

Measures used	Standard measures by country	Notes
1 cup (C) = 250 ml	237 ml in US; 250 ml in UK, NZ, Canada and Australia	Don't worry which cup measure you have; just use it consistently.
1 tablespoon (T) = 15 ml	15 ml in US, UK, NZ and Canada; 20 ml in Australia	Australians, please use 3 teaspoons instead of a 20 ml tablespoon so as not to overdose on strong flavourings!
1 teaspoon (t) = 5 ml	5 ml in each country	

Lao cooks measure with their hands and eyes. Ingredients are added proportionally, taking into account the sourness of the lime, the complexity of the fish sauce and the amount and type of vegetables and meat available. These factors are combined with the cook's knowledge of the dish to produce the final outcome. Except where stated, recipes in this book were initially observed being prepared *in situ*, either at The Boat Landing or in a nearby village. They were cooked Lao-style with little, if any, precise measurement. The recordings of those preparations were then transcribed into standard Western measures and tested, using original ingredients and any recommended substitute. Adjustments were made to replicate the way the original dish tasted. The recipes were then retested.

Measurements given here have been kitchen-tested, but are given as a guide only. As a cook, the final tasting and adjustments are yours.

Substitutions

In Laos, the essence of the traditional northern Lao stew *aw lahm* is captured in the flavours and texture of the rattan, pulped eggplant, a chilli-favoured wood from the forest named *mai sakahn* and special herbs. How can the cook without access to these Lao basics still create a reasonable preparation of the recipe? Is it possible? Even in Laos, not all ingredients are available year round. Cooks have learnt to adapt traditional recipes with seasonal substitutions. In other instances, omissions are acceptable without compromising the integrity of the dish.

In some countries, a cook may face serious supply constraints trying to create authentic Asian recipes. On the other hand, that same cook may have access to alternative ingredients which would be completely acceptable and would be used by a Lao cook were they only known. The challenge, for those wishing to produce the recipes in this collection who do not have access to the bounty of Southeast Asia, is to think like overseas Lao facing the same constraints. They would manage to find an approximation to the needed taste from what is at hand. So, for example, if the apple eggplants in a dish are to be pulped and the dish does not depend on having small, round eggplant globes bobbing up and down in it, use peeled purple or long eggplants.

Seek out Lao or Thai residents in your community and see if they are willing to share their secrets for creating the taste of home. In my experience, talking about food is the next best thing to eating it!







Ingredients

Acacia fronds ພັກລະ *pak la*

Pak la have long fronds and are used in bamboo soup. They may be chopped and fried into an omelette. Another variety of acacia with shorter fronds, *pak ka*, may be substituted. Outside of Luang Namtha, the long fronds are also called *pak ka*. Acacia fronds are readily available year round in Laos and Thai wet markets.

Ant (red, weaver) eggs ໄຂ່ມົດເຮຮງ *kai mot daeng*

Available fresh only between March and May, these eggs are added at the end of cooking soup or stew, or cooked into an omelette or scrambled eggs. Their texture is like a plump orange vesicle (juice sac); they burst in the mouth. The taste is pleasantly savoury and mildly sour.

Baby corn ສາລີອອນ *sali orn*

Use in stir fries. These ears are very expensive in Laos and require a lot of environmentally damaging chemicals to grow well. They may be used as a substitute for rattan in *aw lahm* (page 108), but not in *awm nyot wai* (page 117).

Baguette ເຂົ້າຈີ່ *kao jee*

A vestige of the French colonial period, this bread is omnipresent in Laos.

Clockwise from top left:

Acacia fronds ພັກລະ *pak la*

Ant (red, weaver) eggs ໄຂ່ມົດເຮຮງ *kai mot daeng*

Baby corn ສາລີອອນ *sali orn*

Bamboo shoots ຫົ່ມໄມ້ *naw mai*, species *naw lan* and *naw van*

Baguettes ເຂົ້າຈີ່ *kao jee*

Bamboo shoots ຫົ່ມໄມ້ *naw mai, no mai*

Several edible varieties are used in Laos. The photographs show bamboo species *naw lan* (*Sirundinaria microphylla*) and *naw van* (*Dendrocalamus hamiltonii*) on sale in Ban Khone market in Luang Namtha.

Fresh shoots need to be boiled and shredded before frying with meat, most commonly pork. Add them to soups and stews. Some shoots can be bitter. The addition of *yanang* leaf juice to a recipe reduces the bitterness. Fat, new shoots that have been teased apart with a needle may be stuffed with pork. Shoots can be pickled with salt. After fermenting, they are used in soup with fish and pork. Villagers boil and sun dry shoots to sell to restaurants or companies for export. It is one way the forest provides cash income for subsistence farmers.

When preparing fresh bamboo shoots, wear gloves to avoid their spiky hairs while removing the outer leaves. A twisting motion helps pull off in one piece. What remains is the fresh, cream-coloured shaft. If the shoot base is dry, chop it off. Cut the bamboo in vertical sections. Put in a pot, top with water and bring to the boil. Let boil for 5 minutes, then remove the bamboo. Throw out the water which will be bitter from the shoots' hydrocyanic acid. Repeat twice. The bamboo is now ready for use. Certain types of shoots do not need this priming when they are fresh, very young and fast-growing with a low acid content. They can be cut to size as required by the recipe and used straight away.

For tinned bamboo shoots, it is best to buy whole or halved shoots rather than pre-sliced, which have been exposed to more processing. Rinse well and cut in pieces to suit the recipe. Both blanched and tinned bamboo can be stored in the refrigerator for a week



Clockwise from top left:

Large sweet bamboo shoots ຫົ່ມໄມ້ຫວານ
naw mai waan

Banana leaves as wrapping ໃບກ້ວຍ *bai guay*

Banana flowers, green and purple
ໜາກປີ *mak bpee*

Lao basil ຜັກອີດູ່ *pak i tou* (whole plant)
Lao basil (close-up)



covered with water in a closed container, providing the water is changed daily.

Bamboo shoots, large, sweet ຫົ່ມໄມ້ຫວານ *naw mai waan*

Treat as above. These bamboo shoots are mild and sweet-tasting.

Banana flower ໜາກປີ *mak bpee*

This is the sterile male organ at the end of the banana bunch. The bunch grows from the female, self-fruiting flower above the male flower. Two species of banana flower are commonly used for cooking, one a green flower, the other purple. The long green flower is better as it does not go brown when cut, whereas the less expensive purple flower discolours very quickly. To prepare the flower for a *sa*, *lahp* or *kao poon* (a Lao noodle dish), remove the tough, outer petals and any large stamen until the creamy, inside leaves are exposed. Finely slice from the tip across the width of the flower directly into a bowl of water that has a little bit of salt or lime juice added. If using in a soup or stew, simply hand shred the leaves into pieces and immediately add to the pot. Do not use the outside stamen, but the inner ones may be cooked. Banana flower is also a traditional medicine for maternal health care as it encourages lactation.

Banana leaves ໃບກ້ວຍ *bai guay*

Used whole, the leaves may be a tablecloth or place mat. Often large disks are cut to cover the centre of a serving dish, creating a decorative green rim between plate and food. Wrapping food in banana leaf pieces for steamed, grilled or roasted dishes imparts a fragrance and also moulds and protects the food. See *Haw* (page 66) for in-

structions on how to make the parcels. Use squares of tinfoil or galangal leaves as substitute wrapping.

BASIL

There are over 504 varieties of basil, including many hybrids, so identifying those used in Laos can be confusing. Lao like to use small, young basil leaves whereas Thais seem to prefer larger, more mature basil.

Lao basil ຜັກອີດູ່ *pak i tou*

The most common basil used for cooking in Laos, rather than for eating raw, is *pak i tou*. This basil has been identified definitively as *Ocimum africanum*. Lour. by Dr Somrun Suddee in a full revision of the tribe *Ocimeae* subtribe *Ociminae* (S. Suddee, personal communication, Jan 20, 2009; Suddee *et al*, 2005). This basil is most commonly put in Lao *gaeng* (soups) and *aw* (stews), such as *gaeng bawt* (page 111), *aw lahm* (page 116), pumpkin soup, fish *moke* (page 133) and stuffed bamboo (page 129). For soup, add at the end of cooking. The nutlets (seeds), which produce mucilage when wet, are used for making soup or a sweet dessert. In this book, Lao basil is referred to as *pak i tou Lao* to distinguish it from the variety in Laos called *pak i tou Tai* (sacred basil, holy basil or *krapow* in Thai) or *pak boualapha* (sweet basil, Thai basil or *pak horapha* in Thai). *Pak i tou Lao* has green leaves and stems and white flowers, but the leaves and calyx, which cups the flower, may have a purplish tinge. Raw *pak i tou Lao* does not have a strong taste; the flavour emerges upon cooking. The stems are slightly hairy. The basil may, but not necessarily will, have a slight citrus smell, but not taste. This basil species is of hybrid origin, derived from a cross between *Ocimum americanum* and *Ocimum basilicum* (Paton & Putievsky, 1996). It freely



Clockwise from top left:
 Holy basil ຜັກກະເຜົາ *pak kapow*
 Sweet basil ຜັກບົວລະພາ *pak boualapha*
 Bean sprouts, mung ຖົ່ງງອກ *tua ngok*
 Blood (salad) ເລືອດ *leuat*
 Bitter melons ຫາກໃຊ້ໃຫ້ຍ *mak sai nyai*

hybridises with *O. basilicum* in cultivation; intermediates are not uncommon. In the Thai language, *pak i tou Lao* is one of the basil varieties called *maenglak*. A mild lemon basil or Western sweet basil may be substituted.

Holy basil, sacred basil *Ocimum tenuiflorum*, *Ocimum sanctum* ຜັກກະເຜົາ *pak kapow*, ຜັກສະເຜົາ *bai sapow*, ຜັກອີດູ່ໄທ *pak i tou Tai*

This is a big, bushy red variety with purple-pink flowers. It has a peppery clove or allspice taste. Freshly picked, it can be tongue-numbing. The green-stemmed variety with green leaves tinged with red is most commonly used in Laos. When put in soup, it is added at the end of cooking. It is used for Thai stir fries; pork with basil leaves is a common dish. In Lao dishes, it is stir fried with ginger or onion as a flavouring component. This basil is called *bai krapow*, or simply *krapow*, in Thai.

Sweet basil, Thai or sweet basil, Asian *Ocimum basilicum* ຜັກບົວລະພາ *pak boualapha*, *pak boula phe*

This basil has an anise or licorice taste. It has purple stems and flower heads and long, narrow leaves. It is the most common basil accompanying *lahp* and Lao noodles. In Laos it is rarely used cooked. In Thailand, however, it frequently appears in green curries and other sauced dishes. This basil is called *horapha* in Thai. It is used as a medicine for dizziness. *Pak boualapha* (Lao) may also be used to identify *Ocimum gratissimum* called *niam* in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

Bean sprouts, mung ຖົ່ງງອກ *tua ngok*

In Laos these are used in *kao poon*, traditionally a fermented noodle dish which today is often made with rice vermicelli. They are also used in beef soup and occasion-

ally in beef *lahp* (page 150). Use with pork in Chinese and Vietnamese stir fries. Use as a garnish for *fer* (page 78).

Bitter melon ຫາກໃຊ້ໃຫ້ຍ *mak sai nyai*
 ຫາກກອຍ *mak hoi*

Most frequently these are stuffed with minced pork and then steamed. Stuffed pieces of melon are also poached in a clear soup (page 111). Also, they are added to soups or served steamed or stir fried as a vegetable. These melons are good for aiding digestion.

Blood, usually duck or pig ເລືອດ *leuat*

Eating blood or blood products is extremely common in Laos. Noodle soups, especially *kao poon*, frequently contain cubes of boiled blood cake as does a sidewalk staple, cold glass noodles with vegetables. Akha pork balls (page 109) usually contain fresh duck blood. Specialty duck restaurants serving a salad based on fresh blood are massively popular. If you are game and have access to a freshly killed duck which is far from any whisper of avian flu, here is how to make the salad.

Drain the blood from the duck and set aside. Cook the duck liver and mince it, adding a little bit of salt. Make a liver *lahp* by adding mint, chopped red and green chillies, spring onion greens, garlic and basil. To the duck blood, add fish sauce and 5 tablespoons of water. Mix together and pour over the *lahp*. Sprinkle roasted sticky rice powder over the mixture and enjoy. To ensure blood is fresh, put a drop in a bowl of water. Try to cut the drop with a toothpick tip. If the blood stays whole, the blood is fresh. If it can be cut, it is congealed and not fresh. Do not eat it!



Clockwise from top left:

Buffalo skin ຫັງຍາ *nung yam*

Cabbage ຜັກກະລຳປີ *pak kalampee*

Cassava flowers ດອກມັນຕົ້ນ *dok man ton*

Chilli wood, pepper wood ສະຄານ *mai sakahn*

Chilli flakes ຫາກເຜັດເຫັງ *mak pet haeng*



Bottle gourd ຫາກນ້ຳ *mak nam* See Gourds.

Buffalo skin ຫັງຍາ *nung yam*

Buffalo skin is used in the traditional Luang Prabang version of *aw lahm* (page 108) and *jeow bong* (page 46). Although its texture is a bit chewy, it is mild in flavour.

Buffalo skin is fermented for one or two days, and then dried in the sun for another day or two. It is sold either with or without the hair intact and covered in rice husks to keep it dry. Although it is a staple of every market in northern Laos, I have never seen it in the West. Try to get the hairless type. If only skin with hair is available, rinse off the rice husks. Cook the skin by putting it directly into a charcoal fire. Scrape off the burned parts. Cut the skin into small pieces and soak them in water. This is a smelly and difficult mission best done outdoors. If the buffalo skin has not been cooked, simmer for two hours before using. Should all this feel too daunting, omit the skin from the recipe. *Aw lahm* ingredients vary throughout northern Laos. Many of these stews are cooked without buffalo skin.

Bunching onions See Spring onion.

Cabbage ຜັກກະລຳປີ *pak kalampee*

Eat raw as a salad vegetable; steam or use in stir fries with pork. It is made into a Lao fermented pickle.

Cassava flowers ດອກມັນຕົ້ນ *dok man ton*

The flowers are of a plant different than the cassava with an edible root but it shares the same Lao name. It may be cowslip creeper, *telosma cordata* or *t. minor*, *dok*

katchon in Thai. The flowers are delicious in *soop* (page 132), a cooked vegetable salad flavoured with pounded, roasted ginger and roasted sesame seeds. They are added to soup or steamed. The steamed flowers are also served accompanying a dipping sauce, *jeow*.

Chilli wood, pepper wood *Piper ribesoides* Wall., *Piper interruptum* Opiz. ໄມ້ສະຄານ *mai sakahn, sakhan, sakhaan, sakhahn, mai sakhaan*

A very spicy (peppery and chilli tones), woody vine with a lingering aftertaste. It is slightly numbing to the tongue. Used in Luang Prabang and Luang Namtha provinces in *aw lahm* (page 108), it enhances a dish's flavour. It is used in some river weed and taro (*bon*) dishes. It is also an appetite stimulant. It is sold in lengths of very thick vine trunk. Smaller sections – 3 cm x 1 cm (1½ in x ¼ in) – are chopped from the whole with a cleaver immediately before adding the bits to an *aw lahm*. If not used immediately, it will either dry or go black very quickly. Choose *mai sakahn* that is not dried out and which is insect-free. *Mai sakahn* can be kept in the freezer.

The closest substitute for a 3 cm (1½ in) *mai sakahn* piece is a combination of 1 teaspoon of whole black peppercorns, 5 Sichuan pepper berries (or the local version, *mak ken*), plus 1 dried red chilli and 1 bitter leaf, such as celery, placed together in a tea infuser.

CHILLIES

Chilli flakes ຫາກເຜັດເຫັງ *mak pet haeng*

Chopped dried chillies are sprinkled over noodle dishes or added to a recipe to increase its hotness. In *jeow bong*



(page 46), the flakes impart a deep red colour. Purchased chilli flakes are often old and have lost their colour and flavour.

To make fresh flakes, select deep red, almost burgundy dried chillies that smell of chilli and have no shrivelled yellow or brown tint to them. Choose ones that are either approximately 8 or 15 cm (3 or 6 in) long. Either dry fry or briefly shallow fry them until dark and crisp. Remove and cool. Break into pieces and remove seeds if desired. Pound or use a spice mill to create flakes. They store well for several months if the container is tightly sealed.

Chilli leaves ໄບໝາກເຜັດ *bai mak pet*

Use fresh, frozen or dried leaves of any chilli plant as flavouring for *gaeng* and *aw* (soups and stews). Substitute a chilli if leaves are not available. Alternatively, grow a chilli plant in your garden or in a pot.

Chillies, dried ໝາກເຜັດແຫ້ງ *mak pet haeng*

Medium-size dried red chillies are served deep-fried with *kao poon* (page 145) or the noodle soup, *kao piak*. Large dried chillies are boiled for 15 minutes and minced finely for *jeow* and *kao soi* sauce (page 76). Drying is a simple way to preserve chillies.

Clockwise from top left:

Chilli leaves ໄບໝາກເຜັດ *bai mak pet*

Chillies, dried ໝາກເຜັດແຫ້ງ *mak pet haeng*

Bird's eye chillies ໝາກເຜັດຂີ້ໜູ *mak pet ki nuu*

Chilli peppers, large ໝາກເຜັດໃຫຍ່ *mak pet nyai*

Hot chillies ໝາກເຜັດ *mak pet*

Pale green sweet chillies ໝາກເຜັດໃຫຍ່ *mak pet nyai*

Bird's eye chillies, scuds ໝາກເຜັດຂີ້ໜູ *mak pet ki nuu* (‘mouse droppings’)

Very small and hot, these may be used for *kao poon*, chicken and pork curries and green papaya salad. Fry for *pak bong fie daeng* (page 47). Use in any *lahp* or *sa*.

Chilli peppers, large ໝາກເຜັດໃຫຍ່ *mak pet nyai*

These long green or red chillies may be fried with pork or used in other stir fried dishes. Use in *jeow* and raw as a garnish. Peppers are dried and deep-fried as a garnish. The dried peppers are also soaked and finely chopped to make a spicy *kao soi* topping (page 76).

Hot chillies ໝາກເຜັດ *mak pet*

The most commonly used chillies in Laos, they are bigger and less hot than bird's eye chillies. They are picked and sold at all stages of ripening – green, orange, turning red. Eat with *kapi* (shrimp paste) and noodles. They are added to *aw lahm* (page 108), *jeow* and many other dishes. Frequently they are strung on a strip of bamboo or a toothpick and grilled or roasted on hot ashes before using. See Cooking methods (page 70).

Long red chilli peppers ໝາກເຜັດແດງໃຫຍ່ *mak pet daeng nyai* See Chilli peppers, large.

Pale green sweet chillies ໝາກເຜັດໃຫຍ່ *mak pet nyai*

These are often stuffed with fried minced pork or filled with a mixture of pork, lemongrass and rice or rice vermicelli and then steamed. Sliced in diagonal pieces, these chillies are used in stir fries.



Chinese broccoli ຜັກກາດນາ *pak kaat naa*

This vegetable has a single, fleshy stem with dark green, rounded leaves and a small green head which opens into yellow flowers. Fry with wide rice noodles and pork. Use in stir fries; cook like morning glory.

Chinese cabbage, celery cabbage, Napa cabbage ຜັກກາດຂາວ ຫຼື ຜັກກາດຂຽວ *pak kaat kao, pak kaat kiao*

The elongated, barrel-shaped Chinese cabbage has two types. One is a pale green, almost white version, and there is a darker-leaved variety. Leaves go well added to a salad, stir fried with chicken or steamed to accompany other vegetables with *jeow*. Use in Lao hot pot (*sin dat*). Add to *soop*. The same Lao name, *pak kaat kao*, is used for *pak choi*, a glossy-leaved, non-heading cabbage with white or green crisp leaf stalks. This smaller, rounded-leaved green is used in Lao soup. The Chinese eat it steamed or stir fried.

Chinese cabbage, false *pak choi* ຜັກກາດກວາງຕຸ້ງ *pak kaat kuang tung*

This green has long stems and yellow flowers. The traditional seed, however, produces white flowers. Add to soup just before serving. Often steamed or stir fried, it is delicious stir fried with pork and sauced, wide, fresh rice noodles.

Chinese chives, garlic leaf ໃບຜັກທຽມ *bai pak thian*

Use raw with *lahp* or add chopped to a Lao omelette. Sometimes these chives are added to fried rice, noodle soups and *gaeng* or chicken *soop*.

Chinese flowering cabbage ຜັກກາດຊອມ *pak kaat som, pak kaat kiao*

This green has yellow flowers and long stems. It looks similar to *pak kaat kuang tung* only bigger, with longer stems. Steamed, it is used to scoop up *jeow*. It is also used in stir fried dishes. It can be used as a vegetable for *gaeng* or soups where a mixture of greens is required. It is an ingredient for vegetable *soop*, a cooked salad.

Chinese mustard greens, mustard greens ຜັກກາດຂຽວ *pak kaat kiao*

These are distinguished by yellow flowers and jagged leaves. With a strong mustard-tinged taste, the leaves are eaten fresh with *lahp* or are added to soup. They can be steamed, put in *aw lahm* (page 116) or pickled using salt and rice washing water. The resulting pickle is added to soup or used as a side dish. The seeds are used to flavour the condiment mustard.

To prepare pickled vegetables ຜັກກາດສົ້ມ *pak som* at home:

Cut 10 big plants of mustard or other Chinese greens into wide slices and add 1 cup salt for every 5 cups cut vegetable. Knead together. Put in a covered bowl or plastic bag for one or two nights. The pickled vegetables are ready when they taste sour. In the tropics, three nights is too long as the vegetable becomes very sour. When ready to use, rinse the greens and add chopped chilli, garlic and coriander. Mix together, taste to balance flavours and serve.



Chinese radish, daikon ຫົວຜັກກາດຂາວ *houa pak kaat kao*

Lao only use this root in soup, such as the mild soup served with fried rice dishes (page 167). Tops *can* be eaten, though Lao do not. In Laos the green tops are used for animal feed. The root is sliced and used in stir fries. The root is also used by Koreans to make kimchi. When making Chinese and Vietnamese pickle, the root is sliced and sun dried for one day before pickling.

Chinese squash, Chinese melon, Chinese zucchini
ໝາກໂຕ່ນ *mak ton*

This huge, round and smooth vegetable is used in chicken and pork soups. It can also be steamed or finely shredded to be used raw in salads. Use in chicken curry. If a newborn is sick, Lao will put the infant inside a melon to cool its fever. A melon can be that large!

Choko, chayote, milton, vegetable pear ໝາກຊູ *mak su*

Steam, add to soup or fry with pork or beef. The tendrils can be stir fried the same way as morning glory, *pak bong*. Steamed, the tendrils are eaten with tomato *jeow*. They may also be added to soup.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left:

Chinese broccoli ຜັກກາດນາ *pak kaat naa*

Chinese cabbage ຜັກກາດຂາວ *pak kaat kao*

Chinese cabbage, false *pak choi* ຜັກກາດກວາງຕັ້ງ *pak kaat kuang tung*

Chinese chives ໄບຜັກທຽມ *bai pak thian*

Chinese flowering cabbage ຜັກກາດຊອມ *pak kaat som*

Chinese mustard greens ຜັກກາດຂຽວ *pak kaat kiao*

This page, clockwise from top left: Chinese radishes, daikon ຫົວຜັກກາດຂາວ *houa pak kaat kao*; Chinese squash, Chinese melon, Chinese zucchini ໝາກໂຕ່ນ *mak ton*; Chokos ໝາກຊູ *mak su*; Climbing spinach, vine spinach, Indian spinach, basella ຜັກປັ້ງ *pak pang*; Coriander, cilantro ຜັກຫອມມ້ອມ *pak hom pom*; Crab paste ນ້ຳປູ *nam bpoo*

Climbing spinach, vine spinach, Indian spinach, basella
ຜັກປັ້ງ *pak pang*

In Laos this vegetable is used only for soup or is steamed. Elsewhere, it is stir fried with slivers of garlic and chillies. Treat like spinach in Western recipes. It can become slightly slimy.

Coriander, cilantro ຜັກຫອມມ້ອມ *pak hom pom*

The small-leafed, short plant is the Lao version; the variety with larger stems and leaves grows from Chinese seed. It is a standard accompaniment for *lahp*. Use the plant, root removed, as a salad vegetable. The leaves are added to soups just before serving. Use in young chilli pepper *jeow* (page 89). Lao do not cook with the seed.

Crab paste, f eld crab paste ນ້ຳປູ *nam bpoo*

This is a local product distinctive to Luang Namtha and northern Thailand. Small field crabs are collected in the rainy season and used to make the pungent, sticky black paste. The crabs are pounded with lemongrass and guava (*mak sida*) leaves. A bit of water is added to facilitate the mashing but then removed by squeezing when the mixture is integrated. The paste is put in a bowl and then left for one night. The next day the mixture is boiled for 24 hours on very low heat. After cooling, it is stored. Smooth the paste surface after use to reduce its exposure to air. Crab paste keeps indefinitely in a tightly sealed jar or plastic container. For a substitute, use a moist shrimp paste or other Asian freshwater crab paste.



Cucumber ຫມາກແຕ່ງ *mak taeng*

Most are grown to about 15 cm (6 in) but sometimes are left to grow twice that size. Smaller, dill pickle-size cucumbers are also available in Laos. The main varieties in Laos have a thin, edible skin. Stuff with pork and put in a mild soup. Stir fry with meat or tofu. Eat raw as a salad vegetable with *lahp*. This is a frequent garnish and accompaniment for many other dishes. In the uplands, large, juicy apple cucumbers are grown and eaten raw or in soup. They can grow as large as pomelo, a local citrus larger than a grapefruit. Lebanese cucumbers or telegraph cucumbers make good substitutes.

Dill ຜັກຊີ *pak sii*

Add to soup just before serving. It can be eaten fresh with *lahp* or added to *gaeng* and stews at the end of cooking. Dill is an essential herb for *aw lahm* (page 108). It is used in fish *moke* (page 133) and fish soup. Fennel leaves, which look similar to dill, are not used in Lao cooking and taste completely different.

Dried, fermented bamboo shoots ຫນັ່ງແຫ້ງ *naw heo*

Preserving makes seasonal shoots accessible year round. The dried shoots are readily available in Asian markets and resemble tobacco.

To prepare at home, finely shred fresh, raw bamboo shoots, and then soak them in rice water, with a pinch of salt, for one or two days in the sun in a plastic bag or on a banana leaf in a deep tray. If the sun is not hot, soak the bamboo shreds for three days. Squeeze the moisture out and dry the shreds in the sun or on a low heat in the oven until they look like dried, cut tobacco.

EGGPLANT S

Long eggplant, long aubergine ຫມາກເຂືອຍາວ *mak keua nyaow*

Grilled until soft, this variety is used in *jeow*. It can be stuffed.

A wonderful way to prepare aubergine is to cut the vegetable in 1 cm (½ in) slices across the waist. Partly slit and stuff each section with pork mince. Dip in a tempura batter and deep-fry. We sampled this dish in Vieng Phoukha, an ecotourism centre in Luang Namtha.

Apple eggplant, Thai eggplant ຫມາກເຂືອ *mak keua*

These small, round or slightly ovoid eggplants are green, white or green and white striped. Do not use overly mature ones. They are best while still pale cream inside, nutty and almost sweet. Left to get large or a few days older, apple eggplants turn bitter and the seeds go brown. In Laos these eggplants are grilled until black, pounded and added to *jeow*. They are also used in *aw lahm* (page 108) and other stews. Simmered and then pounded, they are used as a thickening agent in stews and soups. They are eaten raw with *lahp*. They can also be finely sliced and added to *lahp* or *sa*. There are bitter yellow eggplants which are made into an eggplant *sa* or added to green papaya salad. There is a small white variety which perhaps gave this vegetable its 'egg' name.

Clockwise from top left:

Cucumbers ຫມາກແຕ່ງ *mak taeng*

Dill ຜັກຊີ *pak sii*

Dried, fermented bamboo shoots ຫນັ່ງແຫ້ງ *naw heo*

Long eggplants (two photos) ຫມາກເຂືອຍາວ *mak keua nyaow*

Apple eggplants, Thai eggplants ຫມາກເຂືອ *mak keua*



Clockwise from top left: Apple eggplant variety ຫມາກເຂົ້ອ *mak keua*
 Pea eggplants ຫມາກເຄັງຫວານ *mak keng waan*
 Eggplant berries ຫມາກເຄັງຂົມ *mak keng som*
 Fermented bean paste Muang Sing ຫມາກຖົ່ວນ້ຳ *mak tua nao*
 Apple eggplants, prickly ຫມາກເຂົ້ອ *mak keua*
 Fermented fish sauce (overleaf)

Eggplant, pea ຫມາກເຄັງຫວານ *mak keng waan*;
Eggplant berry ຫມາກເຄັງຂົມ *mak keng kom*

These are used in bamboo soup, *aw lahm* (page 108), *phan miang bpa* (page 69) and curries without coconut milk. They are also steamed and eaten with *jeow*. The bitter variety, *mak keng kom*, is eaten with *lahp*.

Eryngo, culantro, long coriander, Mexican coriander, sawtooth herb, stink weed, ngo ngai, Eryngium foetidum ຜັກຫອມແດ້ນ *pak hawm pbaen*, ຜັກຫອມຫາມ *pak hom nham* ຜັກຫອມແດ້ນ *pak hom pan*, *pak hom thet* See Sawtooth herb.

Fermented bean paste, Muang Sing ຫມາກຖົ່ວນ້ຳ *mak tua nao*

This salty and chilli-flavoured fermented soybean paste is widely available in Luang Namtha markets. To create it, soybeans are steamed and then put in a plastic bag in the sun where they are left for a time. They are then pounded with dried chillies, rice alcohol and salt. The mixture is left for between a month and a year. The paste is used to make the sauce for *kao soi* noodles. Koreans make similar pastes called doenjang and gochujang. The closest equivalent is Chinese douban jiang, a spicy, salty paste made from fermented broad beans, soybeans, red chilli peppers, salt and spices native to Sichuan.

An easy substitute is to buy bottled fermented yellow bean sauce with whole beans, drain the liquid and mash 1 cup of the beans with 1 teaspoon chilli powder or 1 tablespoon chilli flakes. Miso, spiced up with chilli powder, can also be used.

Fermented fish sauce ປາເຄັກ *padek, paedek*

This extremely pungent, opaque fermented fish sauce incorporates chunks of fish. It is eaten raw or cooked in a variety of Lao dishes; it is used extensively in Thailand's Isaan province, home to many Lao. It is also made and used in northern and central Thailand. *Padek's* odour is so intense that *tam mak hoong* (papaya salad, page 141) made with *nam padek* (*padek* liquid) can be detected a room away. When the correct amount of *padek* is added to a Lao dish, however, the sauce magically transforms it, adding a depth not replicable by substituting fish sauce. The main ingredients of *padek* are salt, fish and rice bran or rice husks. The addition of other ingredients depends on preference, but is based on scale. The best *padek* has fermented for at least six months – a year is better – and comes from the North, according to northerners. It should be made in the dry season (around April) when the danger of spoilage is less.

Fresh water fish such as glass fish, Siamese mud carp or giant Mekong catfish, *bpa* *kao*, are commonly used. *Padek* made from Mekong fish in the South has the danger of containing liver flukes. There are no known ways to remove liver flukes from *padek*. Boiling it for 15 minutes may kill bacteria but cannot be guaranteed to kill the liver flukes, so it is best to avoid *padek* from southern Laos unless the fish origin is known to be safe. If using the fish pieces in the sauce, wash the bran or husks off first. Commercially produced *padek*, such as that sold in Isaan, is rumoured to sometimes have formalin added.

Bottled Lao or Isaan *padek* or Thai *pla ra* can be bought from some Asian food supply stores.

Another substitute is anchovy sauce or paste. Do not use



From left:
Vendor packaging a sale at Thong Khan
Kham market, Vientiane
Fermented fish sauce ບຸ້ວປາກັດ *padek*; the
best quality *padek* is in the foreground
Padek market display, Vientiane

one with vinegar. Alternatively, stew tinned or bottled anchovy fillets in fish stock until disintegrated. If desired, this mixture can then be sieved for a finer sauce.

Preserved or fermented fish from various Asian countries also makes a good substitute, for example Filipino fermented or preserved gourami fish.

Here is a recipe for authentic *padek* from Boutsady Khounnouvong who learned it from her grandmother when she was young.

3 kg of fish/3 portions of fish
1 kg of salt/1 portion of salt
1/2 kg of rice bran (eg, half the amount of salt)

Scale, gut, wash and drain the fish. Put the drained fish in a large bowl and add the salt. Mix together, and then leave to sit, covered, for 12 hours.

After 12 hours, add the rice bran and mix again. Shift the mixture into a pottery or glass jar. Use your hand to press down the contents. A boiled rock may be used to maintain pressure on the fish. Do not fill the jar completely; leave 7 to 8 cm (3 in) at the top as there will be expansion with fermentation.

Cover the jar, and then leave it for at least six months. A year is preferable. During the fermentation, check the mixture. Use a large spoon to turn it and press it down again. It will keep two years in the jar. Store carefully as flies love *padek*!

Here is another recipe for *padek* from Madame Ny Luangkhot who devised it using sea fish when she was a graduate student in the Soviet Union.

If you have small fish, the proportion of fish and salt is one to five – 1 kg (2 lb) of salt to 5 kg (10 lb) of fish. Mix the salt and fish together, and then leave for a few days. Next add 1 kg (1 lb) rice husks or rice bran. Squeeze the mixture a bit as the ingredients are being incorporated. Transfer the mix to a jar or pot. Put a clean boiled stone on top. Its pressure will create the juice over the next months. Keep the pot well closed for at least a year. If you are making *padek* with large fish – 7 to 8 kg (16 lb) per fish – the proportion of salt to fish is one to three. Before salting, hit the fish firmly several times on both sides so that the flesh can absorb the salt.

Here is how the Kalom (Tai Yuan) people make *padek* in Luang Namtha.

Big fish are preferred, but small fish are also used. Use 3 kg (7 lb) fish, including heads. Slice fish and bones into 4 cm (1½ in) pieces. Put in a bowl, and then leave three or four days until the fish smells—the smellier the better. Pound a thumb-size piece of galangal and 6 – 10 chillies together and add ½ cup rice bran, ½ kg salt and ½ cup alcohol, such as *lao Lao* or whiskey. More salt may be used if a very strong sauce is desired. Add the fish, mix and put in a ceramic pot to ferment. Cover with a plastic bag and weigh down. Leave untouched for a year, although it may be eaten after two months. Two-year-old *padek* is very nice.



Fiddlehead fern ຜັກກູດ *pak goot*

Choose dark green, fresh, tender fronds. Break them from the base like asparagus. They are eaten steamed or boiled in a soup with salt and some pork. Blanch them, and then stir fry like morning glory. They are also an excellent addition to a vegetable *soop*.

Field crab paste See Crab paste.

Fish sauce ນ້ຳປາ *nam bpa* (Lao), *nam pla* (Thai)

This is a clear, thin brown sauce made from small fish and salt left to ferment for many months. The pungent and complexly flavoured liquid is then decanted and bottled. The quality of fish sauces varies tremendously. It is widely available in supermarkets and Asian stores. Buy the best quality possible, preferably naturally fermented and without additives. Lao use locally bottled Thai, Chinese and Vietnamese fish sauces.

Fish, sun dried ປາແຈ້ງ *bpa haeng*

Fish, smoke dried ປາແຂງ *bpa kaang* ປາຍ້ອນໄຟ *bpa yaang kwan fai*

In Laos fish is frequently dried in the sun or smoke dried high above an open fire. Small strips of smoked fish strung on a circle of bamboo strip are sold in markets everywhere. The fish are eaten with sticky rice or

Clockwise from top left:

Fiddlehead fern ຜັກກູດ *pak goot*

Fish sauce ນ້ຳປາ *nam bpa*

Fish, smoked ປາແຈ້ງ *bpa haeng*

Galangal, galingale ຂ້າ *ka*

Galangal shoots ອອດຂ້າ *nyot ka*

Garlic ຫົວຜັກທຽມ *pak tiam*

used as flavouring in a stew or soup. They are delicious in a *jeow* (page 107). Substitute with any dry smoked fish.

Gadawm gourd ຫມາກກະດອມ *mak gadawm* See Gourds.

Galangal, galingale, greater galangal ຂ້າ *ka*

Young rhizomes have the best flavour and are more tender. Peel, and then steam or boil small ones. Eat with *jeow*. The root is used in daily cooking – in noodle soup, *soop* and *lahp*. The steamed flower is eaten. Leaves are used to wrap fish before grilling or steaming. The seed is harvested in January and February; it is traded with the Chinese who use it as a traditional medicine. The root is also mixed with neem leaves and lemongrass, and then pounded, soaked and strained. The resultant liquid is sprayed as a pesticide. It is a natural food given to improve a mother's health in the first month after birth.

Galangal shoots ອອດຂ້າ *nyot ka*

These long, creamy shoots are steamed and eaten with *poon bpa* (page 119) and other fish dishes.

Garlic ຫົວຜັກທຽມ *pak tiam*

This is a kitchen staple. Both the green tops and bulbs are eaten as salad. Fry cloves in oil at the beginning of a stir fry or soup. Use cloves in *lahp* when young. Heads of garlic are roasted over a fire, and then the cooked cloves are pounded as one of the ingredients for *jeow* and other dishes. Lao garlic, which has very small cloves, is used raw in *jeow* and other recipes. The larger Chinese garlic is more commonly available now than the smaller Lao variety.



Clockwise from top left:

Giant water beetles ຄຳງຸດາ *maengda*

Small ginger ຂີ່ງໜ້ອຍ *king noi*

Ginger ຂີ່ງ *king*

Angled gourds ຫາກໜອຍ *mak noi*

Gadawm gourds ຫາກກະດຳມ *mak kadawm*

Sponge gourds ຫາກບວບ *mak buab*

Sponge gourd leaves ຍອດຫາກບວບ *nyot mak buab*

Centre: Water gourds ຫາກນ້ຳ *mak nam*



Giant water beetles ຄຳງຸດາ *maengda*

These large beetles are grilled until crunchy and then pounded into a tasty *jeow* (page 84). The male beetles have a fragrant, nutty, apple-y flavour. Collected from upland fields in the rainy season, they are sold in Lao and Thai markets. Asian suppliers sell artificial *maengda* essence.

Ginger ຂີ່ງ *king*

Small ginger, traditional ginger ຂີ່ງໜ້ອຍ *king noi*

Peel and use in curries and stir fries. Young ginger is best for grating and pounding. The leaves are added by the Kmhmu' to their stews and soups. Ginger is used medicinally to cure chills and colds, to improve digestion, to stimulate circulation and to ease rheumatism.

GOURDS

A wide variety is grown in Laos. The gourd, leaves, flowers and tendrils are all eaten.

Angled gourd, silk melon ຫາກໜອຍ *mak noi*

Use in soups and fry with pork. Sometimes it is used in

bamboo soup. It is steamed in northern provinces and eaten during the rice harvest ceremony.

Gadawm gourd ຫາກກະດຳມ *mak gadawm*

A small, rainy season gourd, it is used for soup or eaten steamed with *jeow*.

Sponge gourd ຫາກບວບ *mak buab*

This gourd is very similar in appearance to zucchini (courgette). Its skin is dull, not shiny. Steam and eat with *jeow*. Zucchini is a suitable substitute. The leaves, ຍອດຫາກບວບ *nyot mak buab*, can be stir fried in the same manner as morning glory. Steam the leaves and eat with tomato *jeow*. Add to soup.

Water gourd, bottle gourd ຫາກນ້ຳ *mak nam*

Fully grown water gourds are dried and used as water-carrying vessels. Small, 10 cm (4 in) long, immature gourds are eaten steamed with their skin on with a *jeow* or added as a vegetable to a soup or stew. They are quite bland. Substitute scallopini (patty pan squash).



Clockwise from top left:
 Green beans ຫມາກຖົ່ວເບືອ *mak tua beua*
 Guava leaves ໄປຫມາກສິດາ *bai mak sida*
 Hog plums ຫມາກກອກ *mak gawk*
 Ivy gourd leaves ຜັກແອບ, ຫຼື ຜັກຕ່າງິນ *pak kep, pak tam tam nin*
 Jicama ມັນເຜົາ *man phao*
 Kaf r lime leaves ໄປຂີ້ຫຼຸດ *bai ke hoot*
 Lead tree pods ຕົ້ນກະຖິນ *ton ka tin*
 Centre: Grilled hog plum

Green beans ຫມາກຖົ່ວເບືອ *mak tua beua*

Steam and serve with *jeow* or use in stir fries. They are used in Akha bean salad (page 142) and can be substituted for long or yard-long beans.

Guava leaves ໄປຫມາກສິດາ *bai mak sida*

The Kmhmu' and Lao use the youngest, most tender leaves as a sour and faintly clovelike flavouring agent in soups and stews. They are added to Akha pork balls (page 109). The leaves are also used as a treatment for diarrhea as they suppress bowel movements.

Hog plum ຫມາກກອກ *mak gawk, mak kok*

This sour forest fruit is most abundant in the rainy season. It is roasted and used in *jeow* (page 83) and can be added to papaya salad (*tam mak hoong*). Substitutes are rhu-barb, crab apple or sour plum. It is also eaten as a fruit.

Ivy gourd leaves ຜັກແອບ, ຫຼື ຜັກຕ່າງິນ *pak kep, pak tam tam nin*

High in vitamin A, K and iron, these are considered by

some as the most nutritious Lao vegetable. They are an ingredient in soup and stir fries.

Jicama, yam bean, Mexican turnip ມັນເຜົາ *man phao*

Locally grown jicama is eaten raw like fruit, added to soups, used as a salad vegetable and served chopped with chilli or lime. In a pinch, use it as a substitute for water chestnuts. Jicama is a snack of village children.

Kaf r lime leaves, also referred to as leech lime, caffre lime, wild lime ໄປຂີ້ຫຼຸດ *bai ke hoot*

'Kaffir' is now considered racist. It was used by European settlers in southern Africa as an insulting term for native Africans. There is no consensus on a replacement term. Use fresh in soup, *aw lahm*, Thai curries and rice noodles. Finely sliced leaves are sometimes used in *lahp*. Dried leaves are exported.

Lead tree pods, jumbay ຕົ້ນກະຖິນ *ton ka tin*

The pods of this highly invasive tree resemble large, elongated snow peas. They are about 15 – 20 cm (6 – 8 in) long. Young pods are eaten raw as a salad vegetable



Clockwise from top left:

Lemongrass ຫົວສີໄຄ *houa sikai*

Lettuce ຜັກສະລັດ *pak salat*

Limes ຫມາກນາວ *mak naow*

Long beans ຫມາກຖົ່ວຂາວ *mak tua nyaow*

Luang Prabang chilli paste ຄຳຈົ່ວບອງ *jeow bong*



with papaya salad, *aw lahm* (spicy chicken stew, page 116) and with *jeow*. The pods can be boiled or steamed and eaten with *padek*. The leaves are also steamed. The stems and leaves are used for animal fodder.

Lemongrass ຫົວສີໄຄ *houa sikai*

Lemongrass is used in many Lao dishes including *moke*, soup, chicken *sa* and *op* (braised) dishes. Use the freshest stems available and discard any dried parts. Bruise the stems with a blunt object to release the flavoursome oils before adding to soups and stews. When finely slicing lemongrass to be used raw, as in a *lahp* or *sa*, discard any stem where the knife meets resistance. Lemongrass is also a traditional medicine for colds and sore throats.

Lettuce ຜັກສະລັດ *pak salat*

A common salad vegetable, this variety of lettuce wilts easily when mixed with Western-style dressings. It frequently accompanies *lahp* and *yam sin ngua* (spicy beef salad), *fer*, *miang* and *pan bpa*. Lao also eat baby iceberg lettuce in season.

Limes ຫມາກນາວ *mak naow*

Often erroneously called 'lemons', the lime is a small, green-skinned citrus fruit used as a souring agent in many dishes. Lemons, confusingly, share the same Lao name, *mak naow*. Lime juice compliments chicken, pork, duck or fish *sa* and beef *lahp*. In Luang Namtha it is not used in other *lahp* or beef *sa*. It is also added to fish or fowl soup. Wedges of lime are often used as a garnish allowing the diner to flavour food to taste. Lemon juice or tamarind juice is a substitute. Limes are also used to make a deliciously refreshing drink sweetened with sugar cane syrup.

Long beans ຫມາກຖົ່ວຂາວ *mak tua nyaow*

Steam for *soop* (vegetable salad) and other vegetable preparations. Eat raw with *lahp*. Add as a green vegetable to stews (*or*) and stir fries. They are sometimes substituted for green papaya in salad. For the northern Lao lightly-pounded salad *tam mak tua*, beans are finely cut and a local pickled vegetable, rather than lime, is often used as a souring agent.

Luang Prabang chilli paste ຄຳຈົ່ວບອງ *jeow bong*

There are two types of this mild and thick, deep red-brown chilli paste that are used in stir fried dishes, as an accompaniment to river algae chips or steamed vegetables. One type is made with buffalo skin which adds a rich, chewy texture. The other is made without skin. Substitute with any mild, dark-coloured Thai chilli paste, such as the Thai Mae Pranom brand.

Or make your own:

3 large heads of garlic (about 1 cup)

½ cup shallots

1 thumb-size piece of galangal chopped into small pieces

½ – 1 teaspoon salt

1 – 2 tablespoons dark red, roasted chilli flakes or dark-roasted chilli paste

2 teaspoons sugar

Water or fish sauce to thin, if needed

Roast or grill the garlic and shallots until cooked through. Meanwhile, in a mortar pound the galangal. Peel the garlic cloves and shallots, add to the mortar along with the salt and pound to a paste. Stir in the chilli flakes. Add the sugar and pound to mix. Taste and add water, fish sauce or soy sauce or more chilli flakes.



Clockwise from top left:
Melons, immature ຫາກເຂດງາຂາຍອ່ອນ
mak taeng orn
Mizuna ຜັກສະລັດ ອີປຸ່ນ *pak salat nyipun*
Mint ຜັກຫອມລາບມົນ *pakhomlahpmon*
Sugar (left) and **monosodium glutamate,**
MSG ແບັງນົວ *baeng noo-a, bang nuah*
 showing difference in crystals
Morning glory, water spinach, water
convolvulus ຜັກບັງ *pak bong*

Transfer the mixture to a small frying pan and dry fry on a very low heat for 10 minutes until rich, dark and aromatic. The flavour develops over time.

Melon, sold immature, green and small ຫາກເຂດງາຂາຍອ່ອນ *mak taeng kaai orn*

Stir fry with pork or put in soup.

Mizuna, Japanese lettuce ຜັກສະລັດ ອີປຸ່ນ *pak salat nyipun*

Used in the north of Laos as an accompaniment to pork, chicken or fish *lahp*, mizuna is also added to Lao salad.

Mint ຜັກຫອມ *pak hom, pak hawm*

Three types of mint are grown in Laos. They look and taste fairly similar, unlike the Lao basil which taste completely different from each other. All are eaten in *lahp*, as a salad vegetable served with *lahp* and with Lao noodles. Mint is also sometimes added at the last minute to stews and soups.

- ຜັກຫອມຫໍ່ *pak hom hor* is a small, mild variety, with long stems
- ຜັກຫອມລາບມົນ *pak hom lahp mon* is also a small, mild variety, but is short-stemmed
- ຜັກຫອມລາບ *pak hom lahp*, ຜັກກ້ານກຳ *pak kancam* is a large, mild variety with long, dark purple stems

Monosodium glutamate, MSG ແບັງນົວ *baeng noo-a, bang nuah*

This flavour-enhancing agent is widely used throughout Asia. It targets specific umami receptor cells within the

taste buds, giving food a more savoury and hearty taste. This 'deliciousness' is considered by many experts to be the fifth taste; salty, sour, bitter and sweet are the other four. It is triggered when glutamates common in soy sauce, fish sauce, anchovies, meats, cheese, stock and other protein-rich foods are detected. A naturally occurring flavouring, MSG is extracted from sugar beets, corn, tapioca, rice or wheat. MSG has received bad press for triggering 'Chinese restaurant syndrome', which is a mixed bag of symptoms including flushing, jaw tension, headache, raging thirst, asthma attacks and/or palpitations. The Boat Landing kitchen does not use MSG. However, MSG use is widespread throughout Laos, and it is often used in large quantities to boost flavour. Should you opt to use MSG, you will be in the good company of many Lao cooks. If you want to avoid MSG in Laos, just say "*Baw sai bang nuah*" (Don't put in MSG) when ordering food in restaurants and food stalls. Use caution with the condiments placed on restaurant or stall tables. That sugar you are about to add to your noodles may in fact be MSG!

Morning glory, water spinach, water convolvulus ຜັກບັງ *pak bong*

A very commonly used vegetable, high in iron and vitamins A and K. It may be eaten raw.

To make *pak bong fie daeng*, the stems are stir fried with 1 tablespoon chopped garlic and several bird's eye chillies over a high heat, with the leaves being added only 2 minutes before serving. Fish sauce, 1 tablespoon drained beans from yellow bean sauce, a splash of stock or water and a dash of sugar can also be added.



Clockwise from top left:

Variety of morning glory ຜັກ ບົງ *pak bong*
Red morning glory ຜັກບົງແດງ *pak bong daeng*

Honeycomb mushrooms ຕັດນ້ຳເຜິ້ງ *het nam poeng*

Mouse ear mushrooms, wood ear mushrooms ຕັດຫູໜູ *het huu nuu*

Oyster mushrooms ຕັດດນາງລົມ *het nang lom*

Straw mushrooms ຕັດເຜືອງ *het feuang*



Morning glory, red; water spinach ຜັກບົງແດງ *pak bong daeng*

Stir fry as above, eat raw or simmer lightly, drain and serve with *jeow*.

MUSHROOMS

Honeycomb mushrooms ຕັດນ້ຳເຜິ້ງ *het nam poeng*

Small pieces are added to salads including a sour salad containing carrot, lime, pickled garlic, white mushroom, sliced chillies and slices of Vietnamese pork sausage. They are also included in *sin dat*, a Lao hot pot similar to Mongolian hot pot, stir fried dishes and soup.

Mouse ear mushrooms, wood ear mushrooms ຕັດຫູໜູ *het huu nuu*

Fry in oil before adding to bamboo soup or chicken curry. Sliced, they may be used in fresh Vietnamese spring rolls. With pork or chicken, they make a stir fry.

Oyster mushrooms ຕັດດນາງລົມ *het nang lom*

A *moke* of these, red onion, garlic, lemongrass, fish

sauce, lemon basil and salt, which is then wrapped in banana leaves and grilled, is delicious. Use in vegetable *soop* (page 132). Barbecue them for a *jeow* (page 87). Add to stir fries and fish soup.

Straw mushrooms ຕັດເຜືອງ *het feuang*

Make a *moke* with these. Barbecue and use in a *jeow*. Use in stir fries and in any Lao sour fish soup or the Thai fish soup, *tom yum bpa*.

Tsi mushrooms ຕັດສະມອນ *het samawd*

Ahum tsi (Akha) or *het samawd* (Lao) are very small beige mushrooms that grow in profusion during the rainy season. The Akha gather them to eat for themselves or to sell locally. The mushrooms can be eaten fresh or dried. To reconstitute dried mushrooms, soak them in cold water for 10 minutes, drain and squeeze dry. They are then ready to stir fry (page 123). They may also be combined with aromatic ingredients and steamed in banana leaves (page 135).



Clockwise from top left:
 Cutting local rice noodles ເຂົ້າຊອຍ *kao soi*
 Fermented rice noodles ເຂົ້າປູນ *kao poon*
 Glass noodles ເສັ້ນໄມ້ *sen lon*
 Fresh noodles: rice noodles for *kao piak*, egg noodles ຫີ່ມ *mee luang*
 and rice noodles ເພີ່ *fer*
Tsi mushrooms ຫິດສະມອດ *het samawd*



NOODLES

Egg noodles ຫີ່ມ *mee, mee luang*

These extruded noodles are made of wheat flour, egg and water. Usually bought dried, they are boiled in salted water until softened. Instant varieties only need boiling water poured over them and a few minutes to steep. They are used by Lao mainly in stir fried dishes and noodle soup.

Fermented rice noodles, Chinese spaghetti ເຂົ້າປູນ *kao poon*

The rice and water mixture for these noodles is fermented for two days before being forced through a nozzle to form thin, round noodles which then fall directly into boiling water. The noodles are drained and formed into skeins which are layered on a tray for sale or dried. They are the centrepiece of *kao poon*, an opaque, soupy stew usually made with pork and fish, to which diners add shredded cabbage, the noodles, banana flower and other trimmings to personal taste (page 145). Rice vermicelli can be used instead of *kao poon*. They are also used in *phan* dishes, preparations where the diner chooses

morsels of different bite-size food then wrapped in a leaf before eating. They are added to soups and stir fries. These noodles are also made in Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Glass or cellophane noodles, bead threads ເສັ້ນໄມ້ *senlon*

Made from mung bean flour, these very fine, flavourless and wiry dried noodles are used in soups and sour salads. They are usually soaked in boiling water until soft, after which they can be cut into mouth-size pieces.

Luang Namtha/Muang Sing rice noodles ເຂົ້າຊອຍ *kao soi*

These hand-made, round sheets of rice noodle are a product of Luang Namtha province. Usually only made of rice and water, tapioca flour sometimes is added to the batter. They are cut into strips which are served alone or in a soup. *Soi* means 'cut'. The noodle topping is a pork, fermented chilli and soybean sauce.

Rice vermicelli, rice noodles ເພີ່ *fer*

Widely used in Asia, including Laos, these are fine vermicelli-type noodles. The noodles are bought dried or



Clockwise from top left:

Onions, brown ຫົວຜັກບົວໃຫ່ຍ *houa pak bua nyai*

Pak goot hai leaf ຜັກກູດໄຮ່ *pak koot hai*

Papayas, green ຫມາກຮຸ່ງ *mak hoong*

Peanuts, ground nuts ຫມາກຖົ່ວດີນ *mak tua din*

Pepper leaves, betel leaves ຜັກນາງເລີດ *pak nang leut*



fresh and blanched or soaked in very hot water briefly (1 – 2 minutes or room temperature water for 10 minutes). They are a key ingredient for *fer* (Vietnamese noodle soup cooked Lao-style, page 78). Wider, flat rice noodles are used in stir fried dishes.

Onions ຫົວຜັກບົວໃຫ່ຍ *houa pak bua nyai*

Large brown, white or purple onions are not widely used in Laos except in Chinese-based dishes, stir fries, salads and *yams*. Traditional dishes normally call for either red or brown shallots. *Note:* Lao cut onions in half, and then finely slice each half vertically. They do not slice onions horizontally into half rings.

Pak bong See Morning glory.

Pak goot, pak koot ຜັກກູດ See Fiddlehead fern.

***Pak goot hai* leaves** ຜັກກູດໄຮ່ *pak goot hai, pak koot hai*

This wild forest plant has seven leaves to a stem. The raw leaf is tongue-numbing. It is used as a flavouring in stews in upland villages. Elsewhere it is eaten raw as an accompanying salad vegetable with pork *lahp*.

Papaya ຫມາກຮຸ່ງ *mak hoong*

Young, green papaya ຫມາກຮຸ່ງອ່ອນ *mak hoong orn*

This is the essential ingredient in the Lao landmark dish, *tam mak hoong* (papaya salad, page 141). For this salad, the fruit's skin should be green or just turning yellow. The meat must still be hard and very light green in colour. Shred for chicken soup and *aw lahm*. Use in sour salads (*yam*). When ripe, the fruit is served for dessert, sometimes with a squeeze of lime. Wrapping meat in the leaves acts as a

tenderizer. The seeds are edible, but may be bitter.

Peanut sauce ຄຳຈ່ວຖົ່ວດີນ *jeow tua din*

This is the accompaniment for the rice noodle soup that originated in Vietnam (*phở*) and is available widely in Laos (*fer*). Peanut sauce is also used as a condiment for satay. Homemade, fresh sauce is available at many wet markets in Laos from noodle vendors. A substitute is any sour, mildly chilli and garlic-flavoured peanut sauce made without coconut milk.

Peanuts, ground nuts ຫມາກຖົ່ວດີນ *mak tua din*

Use fried and finely chopped over Vietnamese salad or in a Vietnamese sauce for fresh spring rolls, both of which are popular in Laos. Use in Chinese soup with pork leg. Peanuts are boiled in the shell and eaten as a snack. Also they are boiled, shelled and then fried for a garnish. A popular sweet is ground nut/sugar cane toffee. Cooking oil is extracted from the nut. It is an export crop, planted twice a year. Peanut chilli sauce is served with *fer*, a noodle soup. Peanuts are also used in various *miang*; see Pepper leaves entry below.

Pepper leaves, betel leaves, wild pepper leaves ຜັກນາງເລີດ *pak nang leut*

This is a salad vegetable used to make *miang*, a snack of peanuts and morsels of ginger, dried shrimp, shallots and lime wrapped together in a pepper leaf. Before using the leaves for wrapping, soak them in water with a little added sugar for two hours. Pepper leaves are sold as food in markets during the wet season to augment a depleted vegetable supply. They are also used in beef soup and *phan miang bpa* (grilled fish *miang*, page 160).



Clockwise from top left:
 Pepper, green and black ໂພກໄທ *phik thai*
 Pickled, fermented bamboo shoots
 ຫົ່ມໄມ້ສົ້ມ *naw mai som*
 Prickly ash berries, wild pepper
 ຫາກແຂ້ວ *mak ken*
 Pumpkin leaves, young ຍອດໜາກອີ *nyot mak eu*
 Pumpkin (grey-skinned) ໜາກອີ *mak eu*
 Bottom: Pumpkin (buttercup) ໜາກອີ *mak eu*

Pepper, green and black ໂພກໄທ *phik tai*

Unripe, green pepper berries are one of the key ingredients in jungle curry, the famous Isaan and Lao dish which does not use coconut milk, and in stir fries, especially with wild boar. When the berries are dried, they become black peppercorns which are used in *fer* or *gaeng jeut* (vegetable soup, page 100). Before chillies were introduced to the East from Latin America, pepper is thought to have been used extensively in dishes where chilli was subsequently substituted. White pepper is derived from the same pepper berries as black. The berries are left to ripen on the bush and are then soaked and rubbed to remove the outer skin. Green peppercorns can be found fresh or preserved in salt or vinegar in tins and jars at Asian suppliers. Drain and soak preserved green peppercorns in fresh water before using.

Pickled, fermented bamboo shoots ຫົ່ມໄມ້ສົ້ມ *naw mai som*

In the rainy season, fresh large bamboo shoots are harvested and then finely shredded and left for one night in water. The next day they are drained and salt is added (1 kg for 15 kg of shredded bamboo). After mixing, the shreds are put in a closed pottery crock to ferment and mature. In three months, the mixture is ready to eat in a soup or cooked as a side dish.

The preserve will last for two years. Jars and plastic bags of pickled bamboo are available at Asian suppliers. To prepare, rinse off the salt and soak if still very salty. Dried pickled bamboo is a substitute.

Prickly ash berries, wild pepper *Zanthoxylum rhetsa* ຫາກແຂ້ວ *mak ken*

Mak ken is used widely in northern Laos. The berries are smaller than Sichuan pepper, but they taste virtually the same. They may be a wild variety. Only the outer casing is eaten. The black seeds are removed before cooking as they are very bitter. *Mak ken* makes the tongue tingle and go numb. The berries are used in *jeow* (page 88), stews and *sa low* (page 153).

Pumpkin tendrils, young ຍອດໜາກອີ *nyot mak eu*

Add to bamboo soup just before serving. Boil or steam young leaves and tendrils and eat with *jeow*. Use cut young leaves to fry with eggs or pork. Steam and use in *soop pak* along with other vegetables (page 132). The flowers can be stuffed with a minced pork mixture, dipped in either beaten egg or tempura batter and deep-fried.

Pumpkin ໜາກອີ *mak eu*

Chunks are used in soup, especially when the whole is small and immature, or pieces may be fried or steamed. Custard is steamed in small, whole buttercup pumpkins, and cooled slices are served as a sweet. This is a classic sold by street vendors specializing in sweets. The dessert is also popular throughout Thailand.





Clockwise from top left:

Rattan ຍ້ອດໜາຍ *yawt wai*, the vine before stripping and cooking; Thai bottled rattan

Lanten youth ploughing rice paddy, Ban Nam Lue

Rice paddy herb ຜັກຂະແລງ *pak ka yaeng*

Lanten-grown plain rice ຄຳຈ້າວ *kao jao*



Rattan *Daemonorops jenkinsiana* ຍ້ອດໜາຍ *yawt wai*

Strip and use the steamed inner core for *awm wai* (rattan purée, page 117) or add pieces of uncooked core to stews such as *aw lahm* (page 116) and *gaeng bawt* (page 111). Rattan from Luang Namtha province is large and succulent; it is only mildly bitter. It is called *naw boun* (shoot of rattan) in Vientiane and *yawt wai* in Luang Namtha. Rattan from the South and Isaan, the Thai province with a large ethnic Lao population, is thin and often extremely bitter. To ready for use, char the rattan sticks in a low fire, strip the outer skin from the inner core and use the cooked, inner flesh with chilli paste, ginger and/or barbecued fish. In Phongsaly province, also in Laos' north, it is made into an *aw lahm* with dried beef. In Luang Namtha, rattan is used in a dish with dried squirrel (page 106). It is exported dried to the US from Boung Pao village in Toulakom district.

A substitute for fresh rattan is Thai bottled rattan which has been soaked for half an hour in cold water to which a squeeze of lime juice has been added. Remove from water and steam until soft. For a substitute, try parsnip or turnip; they mash similarly to rattan and hold their shape in stews. Use an apple corer with these substitutes to create rattan's cylindrical shape.

Rice paddy herb ຜັກຂະແລງ *pak ka yaeng*

This has a curry/lemon and nutmeg taste. It is eaten fresh or added at the last minute as a flavouring in soup,

fish or chicken *gaeng*, bamboo soup, *aw lahm* and fish soup. It is served pounded with fresh tamarind, garlic and chilli in Savannakhet, a southern provincial city.

RICE *Oryza sativa* ຄຳ ກາວ

Laos is one of the world's foremost centres of rice biodiversity. The Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) and the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) have jointly collected more than 13,000 samples of rice seed, to which farmers have applied 3,169 distinct variety names based on the farmer's ethnic group and related factors. Well over 500 traditional varieties of sticky rice are currently being grown in the uplands of Laos, mostly of the *japonica* group. The grains of upland varieties of both sticky and plain rice are harder than lowland varieties. All rice is at its most fragrant and soft just after harvest.

Plain rice ຄຳຈ້າວ *kao jao*

Plain rice accounts for 10 to 20 percent of rice consumption in Laos. Some ethnic groups, such as the Akha, Hmong and Lanten, traditionally eat non-glutinous (plain) rice rather than sticky rice. Plain rice is usually polished when it is milled. Lao prefer cooked rice which is soft and naturally clumped together rather than having every grain separate as do some other cultures. Rice cookers are very popular where there is electricity. See page 165 for cooking instructions.



Clockwise from top left:
Glutinous rice drying in an upland
swidden field close to Ban Goop
Sticky rice ຄຳນ້ຳ ກາວ ນ້ຳ ກາວ *kao niao*, hand milled
Kmhmu' foot driven rice polder for
husking rice, Ban Sopsinh

Sticky rice, glutinous rice ຄຳນ້ຳ ກາວ ນ້ຳ ກາວ *kao niao*

Sticky rice accounts for 80 to 90 percent of the rice consumed in Laos¹. It is opaque rather than semi-transparent like plain rice. High in gluten, it is the staple diet of many Tai and Kmhmu' people. In the uplands, much work goes into polishing the rice which is unfortunate as many essential vitamins and minerals lacking in local diets could be provided if the bran were left on the grains. There are many varieties, both old, traditional seeds and new, higher-yielding ones. The latter have improved food security in subsistence economy villages and added income when yields are large enough for a portion to be sold. However, they may need more chemicals and be less resistant to drought, disease and pests.

Sticky rice is the most important crop for subsistence economies in the hills of northern Laos even when it is

not traded. It is grown dry on steep, upland slash and burn fields, interplanted with crops such as maize, cucumber, chilli, taro and sesame. Other sticky rice varieties are grown in wet paddy fields.

The rice must be soaked before steaming. It is usually cooked in a traditional bamboo or wooden steamer above a special aluminium pot. Once steamed, the rice is allowed to breathe by being stirred and turned over with a wooden paddle. Turning, allowing the steam to escape, prevents an overly sticky rice. A special woven bamboo basket is used for storing and serving sticky rice. The rice is eaten with the fingers. The diner presses the rice in the right palm to form a small ball to scoop up accompanying food. Dip the ball into chilli paste or use it, along with the thumb, to grab a piece of food. See page 164 for full cooking instructions.

Sticky rice is available in supermarkets and Asian sup-

1 N. Bestari, et al, 2004.



Clockwise from top left:
 Ban Nam Maang girls winnowing rice
 Dry-frying rice for ground, roasted sticky
 rice ຄ້າຂົ້ວ *kao koua*; f nal product
 Pounded, soaked sticky rice ຄ້າເບືອ *kao
 beua*
 Puffed rice ຄ້າເຕນ *kao ten*; puffed rice



pliers. Buy young rice which requires less time to cook. Overseas Lao prefer Japanese sticky rice to the long grain Thai sticky rice because the Japanese variety has smaller grains like that at home.

Ground, roasted sticky rice ຄ້າຂົ້ວ *kao koua*

This is used as a texture and flavour enhancer in *lahp* and *sa* preparations and as a thickener in stews and *moke*. To make it, dry fry 2 tablespoons uncooked sticky (or plain) rice in a pan on medium heat until lightly brown. Remove and pound until fine (or use a coffee grinder). Some Lao roast the rice until it is dark grey which creates a charred flavour. This is best done outside using an old pan.

The Boat Landing roasts its rice until the grains are golden brown. Use sufficient powder in mixing *lahp* to create a roasted, nutty taste and to produce a slightly gritty texture.

Pounded, soaked sticky rice ຄ້າເບືອ *kao beua*

This rice preparation is used in fish, chicken or duck *moke* or as a thickener for stew, especially Tai Dam stew (page 101). To make *kao beua*, soak sticky rice for 20 – 30 minutes, drain and then pound to a fine paste.

Puffed rice ຄ້າເຕນ *kao taen*

Dried, cooked sticky rice grains are lightly shallow fried until they puff. These are used as a garnish for *naw hian* (green bamboo soup, page 118). A popular national snack is made from cooked sticky rice dried into round patties. These are then deep-fried. The best have hardened melted cane or palm sugar drizzled on top. In Luang Prabang a puffed rice cake is often eaten with rice noodle dishes such as *kao soi* or *fer*.

The Boat Landing mixes sugar with cooked rice which is then dried and puffed to serve as a muesli substitute.



Clockwise from top left:
 Rock algae bundled for sale ໄຄ່ເຮັ່ນ *kai paen*
 Sawtooth herb ຜັກຫອມໜາມ, ຜັກຫອມແປປ *pak hom nham, pak hom pay*
 Lao brown sesame seeds ຫມາກງ່າ *mak ngaa*
 Shallots, small red ຫົວຜັກບົວແດງ *pak boua daeng*
 Shrimp paste ກະປິ *kapi, gapi*

Rock algae, river weed *Chlorophyta spirogyra* ໄຄ່ເຮັ່ນ *kai hin* (raw); ໄຄ່ເຮັ່ນ *kai paen, kai phaen, kai pen* (dried sheets)

Long strands of river weed grow in flowing Lao rivers. They are collected by the locals and served up either as a thick, simmered, spicy sauce or dried in thin sheets which have been sprinkled with tamarind and ginger juice and other aromatics such as sesame seeds, tomato and garlic. The dry sheets are cut into small squares and flash shallow fried for a tasty drinks snack.

Salt ກົອ *geua*

Some dishes in this book may seem to have too much salt and/or salty flavouring. This is partially explained by remembering that many dishes in Laos are eaten with a great deal of rice, the main filler. Salty foods help add interest to that bland staple. The recipes here have been reproduced true to their origins. Western palates may well wish to adjust the saltiness when preparing the dishes. Laos mines its own salt.

Sawtooth herb, culantro, eryngo, long-leaf coriander, stinkweed, ngo ngai ຜັກຫອມໜາມ *pak hawm bpaen*, ຜັກຫອມໜາມ *pak hom nham*, ຜັກຫອມແປປ *pak hom pay*

Sawtooth herb is used in *jeow*, eaten fresh and added to stews. It goes well with fish. It can be eaten raw as an accompaniment to papaya salad and with *lahp*. Use as a substitute for coriander leaves and some basil.

Sesame seeds ຫມາກງ່າ *mak ngaa*

Local Lao sesame seeds are small and brown rather than cream-coloured, but the cream-coloured seed is an acceptable substitute. Black sesame is smaller, more fragrant and expensive. They are an important ingredient

in *soop pak* (page 132). In northern Laos, roasted black sesame seeds are mashed with a clump of sticky rice and eaten for breakfast or snacked on by children. Seeds and processed oil are exported. The oil is used to treat sprains.

Shallots, brown; échalote ຫົວຜັກບົວ *houa pak boua*
Shallots, red ຫົວຜັກບົວແດງ *pak boua daeng*

Shallots are much more commonly used in Laos than are onions. They are used sliced in stir fries and raw in salads. They are also pickled whole. Small ones are finely sliced vertically into *lahp* and are roasted and pounded in *jeow*. They are pounded with garlic and added to *moke* and grilled taro leaf parcels (page 130). Shallots are also finely sliced, shallow or deep-fried until golden and crisp and then used as a topping for soupy dishes such as boiled rice soup (*kao tom*) and green bamboo stew. The garnish can be purchased, or make your own.

Peel and finely slice 1 cup shallots. Heat 2 cups oil. Add the shallots and fry on a low heat until golden brown. Remove with a wire strainer and drain on paper towels until completely cooled. Use immediately or store in an airtight container. The oil can be reused for fried rice and noodle dishes.

Shrimp paste ກະປິ *kapi, gapi, krapi* (Thai)

This pinkish or dark purple-brown paste is made from tiny shrimp which have been salted and fermented for over a year. Widely used in Thailand, *kapi* is used in Laos mainly as a condiment for *fer*. Sometimes it will be added to stir fried dishes and dry curries. It is also used in *jeow* and in papaya and cucumber salads. *Padek* and fish sauce are preferred for local dishes.



Snake beans See Yard-long beans.

Snake gourd ໜາກກອຍຂາວ *mak noi nyaow*

Serve steamed as an accompaniment with *jeow*. Steam, cut and stir fry with pork. Add to soup.

Snow peas ໜາກຖົ່ວຍັດ *mak tua nyap*

These are used in stir fries, steamed or eaten raw as a salad vegetable. Put in soup. Pea shoots can be stir fried, added to stews or soup or simply eaten raw with *kao soi*.

Sour wind leaf vegetable, Pierre exspire, *Aganonerion polymorphum* ໃບສົມລົມ *bai som lom*

In the kitchen, it is used as a souring agent instead of tamarind or lime juice and added to fish soup. The Black Tai boil it with pork in a soup. The meat is then removed and used in a *sa*-type dish. The boiled stem is used as a medicine for kidney and lung problems and back pain.

Soy sauce ນ້ຳສະອິ້ວ *nam sa iu*

Mashed soybeans and a grain (usually rice or wheat) are mixed with natural bacterial and fungal cultures to create this flavouring sauce. Traditionally, it is brewed to yield a thin, dark brown sauce, high in free glutamates which trigger the umami taste. It tastes very salty. Cheaper varieties may be made with hydrolyzed soy protein and have additives, such as caramel colouring, to give the liquid a dark colour. In Laos soy sauce is sometimes used in stir fried dishes. However, fish sauce is commonly used in preference. The Boat Landing substitutes Chinese light soy sauce for fish sauce in pure vegetarian dishes. Dark soy sauce has molasses added to

it and is used for Chinese red cooked dishes.

Sponge gourd ໜາກບວບ *mak buab* See Gourds.

Spring onion greens, scallion greens ຜັກບົວໃບ *pak bua bai*
Spring onions, with bulb ຫົວ ຜັກບົວໃບ *houa pak bua bai*

The hollow green leaves (greens) are chopped and added just before serving to soups and stews. Both the leaves and white stems are eaten raw with papaya salad and *lahp*. Small bunching onions are also referred to as *pak bua bai*. They are more common in some parts of Laos than spring onions and are used interchangeably. Many rural homes have small raised gardens in which onion greens and other herbs are grown. Indeed, these waist-high beds, usually about 1 x 2 metres and often on bamboo legs, are a fixture of the Lao countryside (see photograph on page 17).

Spring onions are also deep-fried for a tasty garnish. To make it, finely slice the white part of the spring onion and pat dry with a paper towel or let dry for half an hour, and then deep-fry in 1 cup oil. Drain until cool. Use immediately or store in an airtight jar.

Clockwise from top left:

Snake gourds ໜາກກອຍຂາວ *mak noi nyaow*

Snow peas ໜາກຖົ່ວຍັດ *mak tua nyap*

Sour wind leaf vegetable ໃບສົມລົມ *baisom lom*

Soy sauce ນ້ຳສະອິ້ວ *nam sa iu*

Sponge gourds ໜາກບວບ *mak buab*

Spring onion greens, scallion greens ຜັກບົວໃບ *pak bua bai* and
with bulb ຫົວ ຜັກບົວໃບ *houa pak bua bai*



Clockwise from top left:

Squash plant flowers ດອກໜາກອີ *dork mak eu*

Stock powder and stock cubes ກັອນ ກວັນ, *sougau gawn, soup moo gawn*

Knorr ຄະນີ *kanaw*

Monosodium glutamate ແບັງນົວ *baeng noo-a*

Squash plant flowers ດອກໜາກອີ *dork mak eu*

These are a common market food in season. They can be eaten steamed as an accompaniment for *jeow* or stuffed with a mixture of minced pork and lemongrass, coated with tempura batter and deep-fried.

Stink weed ຜັກໜອມແບັ້ນ *pak hawm pbaen* See Sawtooth herb.

Stock ນ້ຳແກງ *nam gaeng, nam soup* See also Stock powder and stock cubes.

Liquid stocks are rarely used in Laos because of the difficulty of storing them in rural kitchens without refrigeration. Dishes are made from scratch daily with whatever ingredients are at hand. If a soup has been made and some liquid is needed for another dish, the soup may be used in the second dish. But usually, any fleshy bones and organs will be cooked as part of the main meal, not used to make stock. The Boat Landing rarely uses home-made stocks because the staff likes to put the kitchen's meaty bones in soups for its own consumption. Instant stock powders and cubes, such as Knorr instant flavouring products are, however, extensively used in Laos. Puyking instant seasoning, available in Thailand with details on the Internet, may be used as a substitute for MSG-free stock.

Stock powder and stock cubes ກັອນ ກວັນ, *soupu gai gawn, soup moo gawn* Knorr ຄະນີ *kanaw*

The dominant brand of instant stock used in Laos is Knorr. A Unilever company, Knorr makes and sells instant flavouring products for the Asian market including broth cubes and powders, fish sauce and soups. At the

time of writing, all Knorr broth/stock products sold in Laos contain monosodium glutamate. These products are extensively marketed. Many restaurants and wet markets prominently display Knorr posters and banners. Knorr stages road shows and cooking contests to promote its brand. This extensive advertising could be seen as having shaped attitudes of local cooks, thereby influencing the flavouring of food in Laos. As in the rest of the country, in northern Laos Knorr stock cubes and powder are widely used in both restaurants and households. Even if a restaurant customer requests “no MSG”, it is still very likely a dose of Knorr stock powder will be in the food. The products keep well, are cheap and add flavour to meals where ingredients are often few. Purists may advocate the use of a good vegetable or meat-based stock rather than powder or cube, but that is not viable for cooks who seldom have meat because of scarcity and expense and who often have limited vegetable supplies. Knorr is a very attractive addition to rural kitchens.

The use of Knorr has been hotly debated at The Boat Landing and among those interested in Lao cooking. Its use is a relatively new practice, Knorr having been widely introduced only within the last ten years. The use of monosodium glutamate is an older, far more widespread practice.

So what is authentic Lao food? Is it what most people cook at home now or what was done BK (Before Knorr)? The Boat Landing has decided not to use Knorr products or MSG. It has done this, first, because not using them is more traditional and secondly, guests at an ecolodge expect as many aspects of their stay to be as natural as possible. Most importantly, The Boat Landing restaurant can afford not to use Knorr because its kitchen uses very tasty meat (such as black leg chicken and



Clockwise from top left:

Sugar cane ຕົ້ນອ້ອຍ *ton ooi*

Sweet leaf ຜັກຫວານປ່າ *pak waan pah*

ຜັກເຫຼັດ *pak hur*

Sweet potatoes, red-skinned ມັນດ້າງ *man dang*

Taro tubers ຜິ້ອກ *puak*

Taro leaves and stems ຜິ້ອກ *puak*



locally raised, free-range pork) and lots of herbs, which make any stew, soup or stir fry rich and delicious. Thus, The Boat Landing serves what locals would consider banquet-standard cooking for its restaurant customers.

However, for day-to-day cooking in the local villages, Knorr (and/or MSG) is still widely used. If you cook with commercially raised chicken or pork (which has come to have so little flavour), limited herbs and/or no fresh stock, don't be afraid to do what the local Lao do – add a small spoon of powder or a stock cube to a recipe.

Half a large 10 g Knorr stock cube or one small 5 g stick cube equals 1 teaspoon Knorr stock powder and makes one strong 250 ml (8.5 US oz) cup of liquid stock. A substitute for half a cube is ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon sugar or salted, liquid chicken stock. But, it is important to note, these substitutes do not replicate the Knorr flavour as the MSG in Knorr casts a full, 3-D taste around the top of the mouth which can't otherwise be reproduced.

Knorr chicken stock powder without MSG is available outside Laos. An excellent non-MSG substitute is Puyking instant seasoning, a product from Thailand. Details are available from the Internet.

Sugar ນ້ຳຕານ *nam taan*

This is not used in Lao savoury cooking except for a pinch now and then to enhance the flavour in some stir fried dishes influenced by Thai or Chinese cuisine. It is also used in *fer*. Lao prefer a bitter taste or umami, the full flavour resulting from the use of monosodium glutamate. Sugar cane juice, however, is a very popular, refreshing drink and chewing on fresh cane is greatly enjoyed by village children.

Sweet leaf *Sauropus androgynous* ຜັກຫວານປ່າ *pak waan pah* ຜັກເຫຼັດ *pak hur*

Traditionally, this is used in fish, pork or chicken soups.

Sweet potato, red-skinned ມັນດ້າງ *man dang*

Sweet potato, yellow-f eshed ມັນດ້າງໄຂ່ *man dang ka*

These tubers are frequently grilled by sidewalk and market vendors as a tasty snack. They are also peeled and boiled. Roasted, they may be cooked with or without the skin. Young leaves and vine tips can be stir fried. A *soop* is made using steamed or boiled leaves. The boiled, peeled tuber is eaten with sugar as a dessert.

Taro (tubers, leaves and stems) ຜິ້ອກ *kok thoune; bon; puak*

There are three kinds of taro available in Laos: *kok thoune* has white leaves and is best to eat; *bon* is used to feed animals; sweet *bon (puak)* can be eaten by people. Don't soak tubers. Use like potatoes. Dry peel them, and then wipe clean. They taste like dry sweet potatoes. The steamed and pounded tubers can make a cake or a sweet dessert. Use only cooked young leaves and stems. Uncooked and older taro have more calcium oxalate crystals and other chemicals which cause acidity and intense itching and burning in the mouth and throat.

Tamarind ຫມາກຂາມ *mak kahm, maak khaam*

Tamarind seed pulp is soaked in hot water and squeezed to extract the juice which is then used as a souring agent in soups, salads and curries. Podded sweet tamarind is eaten as a snack and made into sour and spicy sweets and a refreshing drink. Young tamarind leaves are added to chicken and fish soup. Jam is made from old fruit.



Tilapia, St. Peter's fish ປານິນ *bpaanin*

This is an introduced fish that is now widely farmed throughout Laos. *Bpaanin* literally translates as Nile fish. It is most commonly coated with salt before grilling on a vendor's barbecue. It is a succulent, sweet-tasting fish that is used in most dishes where the fish flesh does not have to hold its shape when simmered. Use in soup, *phan miang bpaanin* (page 69 and page 160), fish *moke*, fried fish dishes and for making fermented fish sauce.

Tobacco ໃບຢາສູບ *bai yah soep*

The dried leaves of tobacco are used as an herb in Kmhmu' stews.

Tofu ຕົກຮູ້ *towhu*

Tofu is made of soaked, ground and then cooked soybeans. The resultant strained milk is solidified with one of a variety of coagulants to make either firm or silken tofu. Both are made in Laos, but firm tofu is the more popular. Tofu may replace meat in many recipes in this book. It can be cut in pieces and shallow fried first or used raw. If firmer tofu is desired, wrap it in muslin or another permeable fabric, place on a perforated, smooth surface with a receptacle underneath to catch the drips (a steamer and its pot works well), cover with a lid smaller than the pot, press with a 1 kg weight and leave overnight. Silken tofu is mainly used for Lao desserts, but it also turns up in restaurant soups.

Tomato ໝາກເລັ່ນ *mak len*

Widely used in *jeow* (chilli pastes), it is also included in sour fish soup (page 95), *tam mak hoong* (papaya salad, page 141) and omelettes. It is used by restaurants as a garnish. The Lao language does not distinguish between cherry tomatoes, prevalent in the country, and larger fruit. Generally, cherry tomatoes are favoured for *jeow* and papaya salad.

Vietnamese balm ຜັກເຫຼືອດ *pak huit, pak ki ohn* (Luang Namtha)

This is a lemon-mint flavoured salad vegetable which is added to spring rolls, fried rice and noodles. Lemon balm is a good substitute.

Vietnamese mint, laksa herb, ຜັກແລວ *pak phao* (Luang Namtha) ຜັກໄລ *pak fei, pak fai*

Popular with the Akha, it is one of the salad vegetables for *lahp*. It is also used in noodle dishes and eaten with embryo eggs, a popular snack. The herb is sometimes added to eggplant *jeow* (page 84) or chicken *soop* (page 104).

Water gourd ສ່ວງ See Gourds.

Clockwise from top left:

Tilapia ປານິນ *bpaanin*

Tobacco ໃບຢາສູບ *bai yah soep*

Tofu ຕົກຮູ້ *towhu*

Cherry tomatoes ໝາກເລັ່ນ *mak len*

Vietnamese balm ຜັກເຫຼືອດ *pak huit, pak ki ohn*

Vietnamese mint ຜັກແລວ *pak phao, ຜັກໄລ pak fei*



Clockwise from top left:

Watercress ຍອດຜັກນ້ຳ *nyot pak nam*

Yanang leaves ໃບຍານາງ *bai yanang*

Tin of yanang leaves extract

Yard-long beans, snake beans ຫມາກຖົ່ວຊັງ
mak tua sang

Yerm leaves ໃບເຮືມ *bai yerm*



Watercress ຍອດຜັກນ້ຳ *nyot pak nam*

Centre-piece of the famed Luang Prabang salad, it is also used as a vegetable in other Lao salads. Eat with *fer* (page 78) or *kao soi* (page 76). Trimmed watercress may also be made into a soup with pork or chicken.

Yanang leaves ໃບຍານາງ *bai yanang*

The juice extracted from the leaves is used in all sorts of bamboo dishes, especially bamboo soup (page 115). A *moke* may be made with fresh rock algae and *yanang* juice. Tinned *yanang* juice is available from Asian food suppliers.

To extract the juice from *yanang* leaves, bruise the *yanang* leaves with either a mortar and pestle or on a chopping board with a pestle or the back of a cleaver. Place the leaves in a bowl with 2 cups of cold water. Rub the leaves together to extract the aromatic juice. Alternatively, place the leaves and the water in a blender or food processor and mix until the liquid foams. Strain the resultant juice off and throw away the leaf remnants.

Yard-long bean, snake bean ຫມາກຖົ່ວຊັງ *mak tua sang*

These beans are used in *gaeng* and pork stir fries and as a salad vegetable (*pak gap*). They are chopped and added to fried rice and noodles and cut in slivers for *kao poon* (page 145). Steam and eat with a *jeow*. They are not as thin or as juicy as long beans.

Yerm leaves ໃບເຮືມ *bai yerm*

In Muang Sing cooking, these fragrant and nutty-tasting leaves are used as a flavouring agent, added to chicken soup and eaten raw with *jeow*. The leaves can be barbecued and eaten with *jeow*.

Opposite: Mrs Kham cooking in Ban Soptout
Bottom: Lanten eating in Ban Nam Lue





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Traditional kitchens

Many kitchens in Luang Namtha still use traditional equipment which is extremely practical and versatile. Wondrous food is produced with very little. Cooking over a wood or charcoal fire is the norm in rural areas and still common within the towns. Gas rings are becoming popular, but large-scale cooking for ceremonies is still usually done over a wood fire.

Aluminium lower portion of a sticky rice steamer
 ຫໍ່ໜຶ່ງ *maw neung* (pot steam)

Bamboo strainer ຈອງຕະໜາງ *jong ta nang*
 Many kitchens now use a plastic or metal one.

Bowl ຖ້ວຍ *tuay*

Charcoal stove ດົງໄລ *tao lo*

Chinese soup bowl ຖ້ວຍແກງ *tuay gaeng*

Cutting board ຂຽງ *kiang*
 These usually have legs and are used on the floor.

Iron trivet placed over an open fire ຄຽງ *kiang*

Knife ມິດ *meet*

Cleaver ມິດໃຫ້ຍ ຫຼື ຜ້າ *meet nyai or pa*

Ladle ຈອງ *jong*

Mortar ຄົກ *kok*

Open wood fire with three stones as support
 ກ້ອນຫີນ *kon hiin*

Pestle ສາກ ຄົກ *saak kok*

Plate ຈານ *jarn*

Soup pot ຫໍ່ແກງ *maw gaeng* (pot soup)
 Traditionally, these were double-handled earthenware pots. Now, pots are metal, usually aluminium.

Wok/ Western-style frying pan ຫໍ່ຂາງ *maw kan*

Upper piece of a sticky rice steamer ຫວັດ *houd*
 A conical or barrel-shaped woven bamboo basket that sits on top of the aluminium pot. *Houds* may also be fashioned from wood, sometimes a coconut trunk.



Top: Steaming sticky rice using a *houd* and *maw neung*

Bottom: Lanten steaming plain rice, Ban Nam Lue

Opposite: Traditional kitchen equipment

Preparation techniques

Slicing handheld vegetables and herbs ສອຍ *soi*



Lao frequently slice vegetables and herbs directly into the cooking pot rather than first cutting them on a board and then shifting ingredients into the pot. This is particularly the case in upland villages. There, Lao hand-slice away from themselves. Indeed, once I unthinkingly hand-sliced in the Western fashion, toward myself, only to have my hand slapped by a younger Lao cook and have the knife taken away – because I was cutting just like an unskilled child!

To employ the *soi* technique with a cucumber, use either a sharp, medium-size Chinese cleaver or a knife with a straight blade. Pick up the cucumber in the left hand, palm down with fingers grasped around it, so the first bit to be cut sticks out between thumb and forefinger. Turn the hand over, so the palm now faces upward.

Hold the knife handle in the palm of the right hand with all fingers on the outside of the blade and the thumb on the knife top or slightly to the outside. Lop off the end of the cucumber with a downward stroke. Start slicing diagonally over the pot or bowl. The skin edge of each slice should be 3 mm (1/8 in) wide. Use pressure from the right forefinger on the flat of the knife blade and the angle and pressure of the left hand on the vegetable to control the

depth and direction of the cut. Each slice should taper off about two-thirds of the way through the cucumber. Turn the cucumber as necessary to slice down to the far end. Discard the heel.

Slicing technique for preparing large quantities of greens

Take a large handful of washed and drained vegetable, such as morning glory or Chinese flowering cabbage, and align all the stems, pointing in the same direction. Place them on a chopping board, stem ends on the right side for a right-handed person. Use a large, flat knife. Holding the vegetables together with the left hand, slice diagonally through the stems at finger-length intervals. The leafy part may be chopped into pieces; a diagonal cut is not necessary.

Preparing limes for juicing or garnish ບາດ *baht*

Lao do not bother with lemon juicers. To prepare wedges for garnish or to juice, they slice the lime vertically to one side of the core to avoid the seeds. The knife is then angled, so it cuts off another third, also avoiding the core. The final third is cut in the same manner. The core is discarded, and any seeds are flicked out from the slices. The slices can then be squeezed over or into the dish being prepared or put on a small serving plate for diners to use as they wish.

Other handy hints from the Lao include:

- To extract more juice, use the edge of a small spoon as a lever against which the slice of lime is held
- To economize on limes, cut the fruit in quarters, so there is less waste
- To hand-squeeze a soft lime for juice, cut it in quarters or thirds, but only partially through, retaining the whole



Chopping the head and feet of a duck for soup ພັກ *fuk*

Wash the duck head well. Slit the beak and continue cutting back into the head; clean the interior. Remove the skin from the neck and discard or set it aside for another dish. Chop the feet at the joints and cut the claws off. Chop the carcass into 5 cm (2 in) pieces. The carcass skin is used in some recipes such as pickled bamboo soup (page 99).



Chan chopping up a duck carcass at The Boat Landing

right angles. Continue chopping. Repeat until the meat becomes airy and light. As it gets to this stage, it will be possible both to feel and to hear the airiness. As with using a mortar, if there is a lot to be minced, process it in small (up to 2 cups) batches. It goes faster. Alternatively, use a food processor. Be sure to pulse so the meat does not become a pulpy mush.



Kmhmu' man in Nale district making f sh *lahp*

Mincing meat or f sh for *lahp*, stuffing, meatballs ວາບ *lahp*

Hand-mincing produces a much airier product than using a meat grinder or buying store-ground mince. It takes about five minutes to mince chicken finely with a sharp cleaver, and it is well worth the effort.

Roughly cube the meat into bits smaller than 1 cubic cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in). Finely chop with a sharp meat cleaver or Chinese cleaver on a wooden block. The most comfortable position for mincing is to work at floor level while sitting on a low stool or on a bottom doorstep as the Lao do. Work from one side of the meat to the other. Use the cleaver to fold the chopped meat in on itself, turning the board at

Tasting ຊີມ *seem*

To taste a raw mixture by sampling a little bit on the finger or to take a small sip or piece of a cooked dish on a spoon to test for balance or doneness is an essential step of Lao cooking. Always taste and adjust the flavours while cooking and before serving.



Assembling banana leaf packets ຫໍ່ *haw*

All Lao markets offer banana leaf-wrapped foods. *Haw* (ຫໍ່) is the technique of wrapping the packet as well as the word for the assembled food. *Haw* come in a variety of shapes: pyramidal, cylindrical and flat. Their fillings may be savory or sweet; they may be steamed or grilled. *Haw* are often central to Lao religious festivals. In Luang Namtha, *aeb* (ແອບ) is the name for grilled flat stuffed packets; they are called *kanab* (ຄຳນາບ) in Luang Prabang and *ka-naeb* (ຄຳນາບ) in Vientiane.

One variety of pyramidal *haw*, usually eaten with sticky rice, is *moke*. Here is how to assemble one:

1. Cut the banana leaves into rectangles approximately 25 x 30 cm (10 in x 12 in), allowing two for each *haw*. Soak them in hot water until pliable.
2. For each *haw*, arrange two pieces to form an X. The bottom of the X should face you. Spoon a cup of filling into the middle of the X (a).
3. With one hand, raise the top ends of the X up off the work surface, so they are just behind the filling. Use the other hand to raise the bottom ends of the X (b). The four ends should now meet above the filling (c).



4. Hold the ends together with the left hand (c). With the right hand, manipulate inward the right side, easing the middle portion toward the filling (d). The middle of the side will now be up against the filling (e).
5. Still holding the centre with the left hand, bring the right-hand, closer 'wing' around to the front of the pouch with the other hand. Do the same with the rear, right-hand 'wing,' wrapping it backward to the centre of the pouch (f). Ease the corners where they have been folded.
6. Repeat with the left-hand 'wings' (g - j).
7. Secure the top ends with half a bamboo toothpick (k) and trim the top with scissors (l).

In a very traditional *haw moke*, the leaves are cut in elongated ovals rather than rectangles. A small strip of banana leaf circles the middle of the *haw* vertically, so the package looks neat.

(Note: If the *haw moke* are to be unwrapped before serving, the easier way to enclose the filling is to gather the four ends of the two banana leaf pieces together above the mixture and simply tie with a string.)

Preparing ingredients for *jeow* ການກະກຽມສ່ວນປະສົມຂອງແຈ່ວ *gan gagiam suan bpa som kawng jeow*

Unpeeled heads of garlic and apple eggplants are usually roasted in embers (*jee*) or grilled (*ping*) before they are pounded to make *jeow*, Lao dipping sauce. They must be turned occasionally until the outer skins are thoroughly blackened. After cooling, the burnt skins are peeled or broken off. Not much care is taken to remove all the skin as its smoky flavour is valued.

Chillies are threaded on a toothpick and grilled on a wire rack over a charcoal stove or gas flame. Small chillies are grilled until charred, but not completely blackened. After cooling, the burnt pieces of skin are removed before the chilli pulp is pounded.

Oven roasting eggplants, garlic and chillies or broiling them wrapped in tinfoil are alternative methods of preparing ingredients for Lao dishes.



Using a pestle and mortar ການໃຊ້ຄີກ *gan sai kok*



Pestle and mortars come in three types. The most commonly used in Laos is the pottery or metal mortar with wooden pestle. These are used to pound grilled ingredients for dipping sauces (*jeow*), to prepare ingredients for stews (such as pounded apple eggplants for *or*), to pound soaked sticky rice for *moke* and to crush dry-fried rice for *lahp*. A large pottery mortar is used for preparing *tam mak hoong* (papaya salad).

The second type of mortar is wooden. Small ones are used for crushing salt or spices and for blending the ingredients of a betel nut chew. Big ones are only used for preparing papaya salad and its variations.

The third kind, not often found in Laos, is made of granite and is used for crushing dry-fried spices or rice and making *jeow* and curry pastes. I have not seen one in northern Lao villages as they are expensive and heavy. (Years ago I carried a weighty stone pestle and mortar through a Thai airport check-in as hand luggage, feigning lightness. A kind man offered to help me with my bags, so I gaily gave him the small backpack with the mortar and watched his face as he took the heft. With a big smile, I imitated the pounding motion, *tum*, used with a pestle and mortar. He broke out laughing – all was explained! Good for him, he got the pack on as carry-on luggage!)

The traditional manner for using a pestle and mortar is to place the mortar on the floor with the poulder sitting on a small stool or squatting, legs open. This creates angles which give good leverage and control. The chore of pounding often gets handed to whomever is hanging around (no one seems to cook alone in Laos). The mortar may be placed on the kitchen bench (assuming there is one), and then one stands to pound. In this case, put a tea towel under the mortar for stability and to reduce reverberations.

Different cooks put ingredients into a mortar in different orders. In Laos the harder foods go in first, followed by the softer and wetter ingredients. If pounding raw chillies, garlic, shallots and/or lemongrass, adding a small amount of salt extracts the juices and helps break down the fibres. The paste forms very quickly.

How to pound follows common sense. With a pottery mortar, grasp the rim with the left hand and pound in a *kok kok kok* rhythm up and down, holding the pestle in the right hand. For this book's recipes, it is not necessary to pound very hard as most of the ingredients will have been grilled. To pound ingredients evenly, occasionally angle the pestle to move the ingredients from the side down into the mixture. The mortar can be rotated occasionally with the left hand as well. If using a big mortar with a lot of ingredients, hold a spoon or fork in the left hand, using it occasionally to turn the mixture from the sides in a scooping motion. The weight of the big mortar will hold it in place. When using a stone mortar, slightly angle the pestle toward you and pound hard ingredients in clumps within the mortar. This makes the disintegration go faster than trying to pound everything at the same time.

The resultant paste produced by pounding ingredients is called the *keuang hom* ຄື່ອງຫອມ (fragrant things).

Alternatives to using a pestle and mortar

A small food processor works well, but it chops the ingredients together rather than integrating the ingredients' fibres through pounding. If your kitchen lacks a dishwasher, using a pestle and mortar creates less wash up. I use a coffee grinder for making roasted rice powder and to grind dry-fried spices.

Wrapping (in a leaf) ພັນ *phan*

This is a style of eating where a variety of ingredients is served on platters. Diners assemble small helpings from the offerings, wrapping them in a leaf according to individual taste. An example is *phan* (or *pun*) *bpa*, a whole grilled fish served with the following accompaniments: lettuce or cabbage wedges, mint, coriander, basil and other herbs, chopped ginger, chopped raw garlic, finely

sliced lemongrass, little pieces of lime, sliced apple eggplants, peanuts, pork rinds and cooked rice vermicelli noodles. The diner takes a piece of lettuce or cabbage and assembles ingredients to taste, adds a little bit of *padek* sauce or sweet-sour sauce, wraps the morsel in the leaf and eats it. A simpler version may have only the noodles, herbs, apple eggplants and *padek* sauce.



Preserving (pickling, drying, fermentation)

ການດອງ *gan dawng*, ການຢາງ *gan yang*, ການໝັກ *gan mak*

Rural people, especially those dependent on a subsistence agricultural economy as so many in Luang Namtha are, always hedge against leaner times. One way to stock a larder is to preserve seasonal surplus. Pickling, sun drying, smoke drying and fermentation are all common methods to enhance food storage. These techniques also are used to create new flavours in a food which may then be incorporated with more standard fare for a special-tasting dish. Luang Namtha preserved foods include the fermented fish sauce *padek* (or *bpa-daek*), pickled bamboo shoots, dried fermented bamboo shoots, Muang Sing fermented bean paste, crab paste, pickled fish, sour sausage and sour vegetables. The Ingredients section contains descriptions of how these foods are preserved. Foods which are commonly sun dried are rice, chillies, seasonal herbs, mushrooms, fish and strips of meat. Another way Lao prepare food for storage is by smoke drying over a hearth, a technique often used for preserving small animals such as fish, frogs, lizards, squirrels and snakes.

Cooking techniques

Boiling ຕົ້ມ *tom, dtom*

This is cooking in boiling liquid, usually vegetables.

Roasting in embers, grilling ຈີ້ *jee (moke)*

A charcoal or wood fire's embers and hot ashes are used to pre-cook or sear an ingredient. Chillies, small eggplants and garlic heads are prepared this way in villages before they are peeled and pounded into *jeow* (chilli paste). The Boat Landing usually grills *jeow* ingredients on a wire rack at a medium temperature over a charcoal stove or gas flame but also does it the traditional way.



Steaming ຫິ້ວ *neung*

This is steaming over boiling water. In Luang Namtha, a sticky rice bamboo steamer and pot are used. *Kao neung* means 'steamed rice'. *Moke/mauk/mok* ຫິ້ວ is the word for a dish steamed (or cooked in embers) in a banana leaf wrapping. A number of *moke* recipes have been included in this book. Food can also be steamed unwrapped. Rattan is commonly cooked this way. A recipe for stuffed green chilli peppers also uses this technique.

Braising ອົບ *op*

Braising is used to slow cook less tender meats. In Laos flavourings, meat and sometimes vegetables, along with a small amount of liquid, are added to a pot. The pot is initially covered, and the meat is simmered over very low heat until tender and only a small amount of liquid remains. *Op* is also translated as 'to bake' and 'to pot roast'. *Op bpet*, for example, refers either to marinated whole duck oven-roasted with a little water to keep the meat moist or pot-braised duck pieces, described on page 103.

Grilling ປັງ ping

Grilling is done by placing the food either over a low heat fire or on a wire rack over a gas flame. When grilling small food such as chillies for *jeow*, place them directly on a wire rack or wrap them in tinfoil. See page 160 for a description of grilling the traditional way using *mai heep neep* (split bamboo) for holding fish or a banana leaf-wrapped packet over an open fire. Grilled ingredients for *jeow* are illustrated on page 68.

Frying (stir frying and dry frying) ຂົ້ວ koua

This is to fry with oil or fat as in stir fried dishes. It is a Chinese technique. Many of the province's ethnic groups originally came from China, and now there is a contemporary wave of Chinese immigration, heavy with labourers who are building and manning provincial Chinese agricultural and business schemes. To stir fry, a wok is heated to a high temperature before a small amount of oil is added. Ingredients are then serially put in the pan by type. All the while the food is quickly moved and tossed with a wok spoon, so everything is evenly and lightly cooked. The heat of the pan and hot oil impart a smoky taste to the food. *Koua* is also sautéing. A pan is heated, a small amount of oil is added and the food is moved around the pan as in stir frying. A lower temperature is used for sautéing, so the cooking time is longer than for stir frying.

Further, *koua* is frying without fat or oil over medium heat, tossing or stirring often until the ingredients are golden and aromatic. Sesame seeds and rice intended for ground, roasted rice are toasted in a dry frying pan. Minced meat for *lahp* is often prepared this way, although sometimes a bit of water is added, and the meat is simmered until just cooked.

Below: Stir frying cucumbers

Top right: Dry frying rice for ground, roasted rice



Frying until the oil returns ຈ້າວ jao

The early stages of cooking curries and pounded pastes use this frying technique. This classic Asian method calls for adding a flavouring paste to hot oil and frying for 10 – 15 minutes until the oil returns. There are several stages. The paste first sits in the oil, and then it absorbs the oil. Next the paste tries to stick and burn in the pot. The paste's texture starts to change, and gradually the paste becomes darker and more aromatic. Finally the magic begins – the oil returns from being held in the paste and sits back in the pan. The golden brown paste rests on top of the oil again; the oil is clearly separate. It is a secret of good Burmese, Malaysian and Indian curries. The technique is used in making *kao soi* meat sauce.

Frying in oil or fat ຈິນ jeun

This frying is done in either deep or shallow oil or fat, but it is not stir frying. For shallow frying, heat a wok or frying pan, and then add oil or rendered fat until the base of the pan is generously covered. Wait until the oil has gone past the bubbling stage, essential for releasing excess moisture. It will become still with a clear shimmer. Test readiness by dropping in a piece of bread or other ingredient. It should sizzle and not soak up the oil, but slowly turn golden. (If deep-frying, oil is ready when the bread pops up to the surface within a few seconds. Experienced cooks learn to judge the correct oil temperature by passing a hand over the pan.) Add the food, but don't crowd the pan. The flame can be turned down to medium so long as the oil does not lose heat. Turn food over to finish cooking. Remove food with chopsticks or a wire scoop and let it drain over the wok for a minute. Set the food aside to finish draining on a plate lined with banana leaf or a paper towel.

Lao like pork and chicken fried drier and crispier than is often to Western taste. Cooks achieve this by frying at a medium temperature for a long time. The ensuing chewy texture is appreciated with sticky rice and a *jeow*.

Parboiling, blanching, soft boiling ລວກ *luak*

Pieces of vegetable for a *soop* or for eating with *jeow* are simmered in a small amount of water until just cooked. The vegetable water is often used as a light soup.

Simmering ອັ່ມ *qm, awm*, ຫຸ່ມ *hum*; boiling very gently ຕົ້ມອອນໆ *tom orn orn*; simmering slowly ຄຳວ່າ *or* ຂົ່ວ *kio*

With these techniques, cooking in a pot is done very slowly over a low heat. Use when meat or vegetables would toughen if cooked more rapidly.

Cooking in a bamboo tube ຫຼາມ *lahm*

This brilliant technique uses a bamboo tube to hold uncooked food. The filled bamboo is then sealed and placed in fire embers. When done, the bamboo can be stripped away from the food. This very traditional method may be called *lahm*, *lam* or *larm*. The dish most commonly still cooked in this way is coconut-flavoured rice, *kao lahm*. *Aw lahm* is any stew cooked in this manner. Dishes have the benefit of being easily transportable in their unopened tubes, thus *aw lahm* was a popular travel snack and *kao lahm* still is.



Common northern Lao dishes

Aw lahm ອາະຫຼາມ northern spicy stew

This particular stew is thought of as a Luang Prabang dish by Westerners who know it. In fact, it is prepared throughout northern Laos. Although the term *aw lahm* literally means 'a stew cooked in a bamboo tube over embers', nowadays the dish is usually a meat stew cooked in a pot. An essential, spicy element is flavouring from the trunk of a vine, *mai sakahn*, called 'chilli wood' or 'pepper wood' in English. Other usual ingredients are pulped apple eggplants and buffalo skin, simmered until soft and chewy. *Aw lahm* may also be spelt *or larm* or *o lam*.

Kmhmu', Tai Yuan (Kalom) and Lao versions of *aw lahm* are included in this book.

Jeow ຄຳວ່າ Lao dipping sauce

Jeow is a must for any Lao meal, most commonly served as a condiment to simmered vegetables and sticky rice. In Lao it is called the 'Lord of the table'. It is a thick, spicy paste of selected ingredients with little if any water or stock added. The main ingredients are chilli and salt. The variety of these Lao dipping sauces is amazing. Some are spicy, some sweet and others mild. The secret to a good *jeow* is roasting key ingredients before mixing them.

Lahp ລາບ spicy meat or fish salad

Lahp, also spelt *larb* or *laap*, is one of Laos' most famous dishes. As *lahp* means 'good fortune', it is a staple at celebration feasts, but it is also enjoyed at regular meals. It is usually made with minced meat or fish. Traditionally, it was served raw like steak tartare or Japanese raw fish dishes. Nowadays, *lahp* is more often cooked, but not always. Ingredients for *lahp* are extremely variable. The flexibility of ingredients, as demonstrated in so much of Lao cooking, reflects a cuisine which is made with whatever is readily available from the forest, stream or garden.

The constants of this fragrant salad are finely chopped meat or fish (anything from monitor lizard to beef, with or without selected entrails such as tripe), finely sliced onion or shallots, chilli, ground, roasted rice powder and herbs, usually mint and/or coriander. Traditionally, *padek* is used, but fish sauce is now equally acceptable. Luang Namtha *lahp* does not use lime juice; lime juice is usually only added to the region's *sa*. Elsewhere in Laos, however, cooks frequently use lime juice to impart tanginess to *lahp*.

Other ingredients that may be added to a *lahp* include

finely shredded kaffir lime leaves, lemongrass, galangal, small bitter eggplants, pork or beef skin and slivers of kidney, lung and liver. Chilli may be used either as dried flakes or as fresh, finely sliced pieces. Various *lahp* recipes are in this collection.

Sa ສ້າ northern spicy salad

This is a northern Lao dish similar to *lahp*. Often the meat or fish is cut in bigger pieces than the mince in *lahp*, but not necessarily. Northern *sa* generally include finely sliced banana flower or bitter eggplant. *Sa* differ from northern-style *lahp* as lime juice is an ingredient in *sa*. The exception is *sa low*, which has neither lime juice nor banana flower and traditionally is made with a bit of blood. Sometimes pounded, roasted rice is included; other times it is not. If sorting out the differences in dishes and their regional particulars sounds confusing, that's because it is!

Soop ຊຸບ parboiled salad

Soop is assembled from pieces or shreds of various vegetables that have been pre-cooked (either by steaming or simmering) and are then mixed with seasonings which have been pounded together. These are roasted sesame seeds, sawtooth herb, grilled chillies, garlic and ginger or galangal. A meat *soop* has more liquid than one with only vegetables but has less liquid than a *gaeng*. It features cooked meat which is shredded and then incorporated with pounded grilled garlic, chillies, lemongrass and a variety of herbs such as sawtooth herb.

Gaeng ຄາງ simmered soup

The liquid in a *gaeng* (or *keng*) is usually clearer and more plentiful than in an *aw*. It is sipped with a spoon in between mouthfuls of other dishes. *Gaeng* is not thickened with mashed or pounded vegetable, although a small amount of thickening agent, such as pounded sticky rice powder, may be used. This preparation may be as simple as a lightly flavoured broth, or it may be more substantial with lots of vegetables and pieces of meat or fish cut to fit on the soup spoon.

Yum or yam ຍາ and tum som ຕາໂສ້ມ sour spicy salad

These are cold salads featuring a single fish, meat or vegetable along with other vegetables in supporting roles. The entirety is mixed with a spicy, sour sauce usually containing lime juice, fish sauce (or *padek*) and a small amount of sugar and chillies.

A *tum som* ຕາໂສ້ມ (or *dtum som*) is a pounded sour salad where the ingredients are lightly bruised and mixed to-

gether by pestle and mortar to soften and integrate the flavours. Examples are bean, *kao poon* or cucumber sour salads. *Tum mak hoong*, Lao for the northeastern Thai green papaya salad, *som tam*, also belongs to the collective group of *tum/dtum som* dishes.

Moke/mauk/mok ຫມົກ banana leaf-wrapped dishes



Moke describes a dish that has been wrapped in banana leaves and then steamed or cooked in the embers of a fire (*moke fai*). The embers impart a smoky fragrance to the dish. There are various ways of forming the packets. Refer to page 66 for details on assembling *haw moke*, the pyramid-shaped banana leaf wrapping most commonly used for *moke*. Other *moke* are wrapped like a flat package with the folded ends placed face down during cooking.



Noodle dishes
ອາຫານປະເພດເພີ
aharn bhaphet fer





Making *kao soi* noodles, Ban Khone,
Namtha district

- 76 *Kao soi* with parboiled vegetables ເຂົ້າຊອຍ ກັບ ຜັກລວກ *kao soi gap pak luak*
78 Vietnamese *phô*, cooked home-style ເພີ *fer*
80 Luang Namtha fried noodles ເພີຂົ້ວຫຼວງນ້ຳທາໃສ່ນ້ຳບູ
fer koua Louang Namtha sai nam bpoo

Variations

- Luang Prabang fried noodles ເພີຂົ້ວຫຼວງພະບາງໃສ່ແລ່ວບ່ອງ
fer koua Louang Phabang sai jeow bong
 - Muang Sing fried noodles ເພີຂົ້ວ ເມືອງສິງ ໃສ່ໝາກຖົ່ວເຫົາ
fer koua Muang Sing sai mak toua naow
 - Sesame fried noodles ເພີຂົ້ວ ໝາກງ່າ *fer koua mak nga*
- 81 Ivy gourd *phô* with tofu ເພີ ຜັກແຄບ ເຕົາຮູ້ *fer pak kep tow hu*

Kao soi with parboiled vegetables ເຂົ້າຊອຍ ກັບ ຜັກລວກ *kao soi gap pak luak*

This delicious rice noodle soup, available in Luang Namtha markets and food stalls, is distinctive to the province, as essential to its soul as bouillabaisse is to Marseilles. To know kao soi is to know Luang Namtha. Both the sauce and noodles are made fresh daily. Kao soi uses a local pungent, salty fermented soybean paste with chilli. The sauce should taste very strong as it will be diluted with chicken stock. Ten chillies make a spicy, but not knock-your-socks-off, sauce.

Ingredients

Pork sauce

10 large	dried red chillies
3 medium cloves	garlic (or 5 small cloves), peeled
10 small	brown shallots, thumb joint-size, peeled
Generous pinch	salt
1 C (225 g/8 oz)	pork mince (hand-chopped is best)
4 T	vegetable oil
3 T	fermented bean paste with chilli; substitute miso or drained yellow bean sauce with 1 teaspoon of chilli flakes added, mashed to a smooth paste
1 – 1½ C	water
½ t	salt
1 t	chicken stock powder

For serving bowls of noodles

375 g (12 oz)	fresh or dried flat rice noodles (if dry, at least 6mm [¼ in] wide)
2 l (9 C)	water (for cooking dried noodles)
1 – 2 C	raw chicken bones with bits of meat attached
6 C	water or stock
½ t	salt (or to taste)
3 C	seasonal green vegetables (eg, 3 long beans or 8 small French green beans, cut into 5 cm [2 in] lengths, and a small bunch of watercress or spinach, washed and trimmed of longer stems and old leaves)
5 small	spring onions, trimmed to include 10 cm (3 in) of the greens, finely chopped
5 small sprigs	coriander including stems, finely chopped

Serves five.

Method

1. Remove seeds and stems from the dried chillies, place in pot with 2 cups of water, bring to boil and simmer for 5 minutes or until the chillies are soft and swollen.
2. Cool, remove and drain. Align the chillies on a chopping board. Starting at their tips and moving to their tops, work the chillies with a short chopping motion creating a fine paste. This will take about 5 minutes, or use a blender or food processor. Set the paste aside.
3. Place the garlic and shallots in a mortar, add salt and pound until the mixture is a slightly opaque paste, about 2 minutes.
4. Heat a wok; add oil. When the oil is hot, add the shallot and garlic mixture and stir fry on high heat for 2 minutes. Lower the heat, stir frying continually until the shallots are translucent and beginning to brown and the oil starts returning. Add the chilli paste, continue to stir fry and then add fermented bean paste, squashing the ingredients down and scraping the sides and bottom of the wok to prevent sticking. This takes about 2 minutes.
5. Add the pork and stir fry 2 – 3 minutes. Add 1 – 1½ cups of water. Continue to cook on low heat until the mixture reduces and thickens. Add the stock powder and ½ teaspoon of salt. If using only water and not stock powder, the salt may need to be increased.
6. Dried noodles: check packet directions. Some noodles need only to be soaked in boiled water. If there are no directions, bring 2 litres of water to boil in a pot. Add the noodles and cook until al dente, soft but still firm to the bite. Drain and set aside.
7. Fresh noodles: if not to size, cut the folded sheets into thin strips at least 6 mm (¼ in) wide, place them in a sieve over a pot and pour boiling water over them. This should be enough to revive them. If not, steam for a few minutes.
8. In a separate pot or frying pan, bring 6 cups of water to boil; add chicken bones and salt. Simmer, covered, for 10 minutes. Add the vegetables except for the garnish. Simmer 2 more minutes.
9. Divide noodles into five bowls. The noodles should fill no more than half the bowl. Divide the pork sauce between the bowls, placing it on half of the noodles only. Garnish with a generous sprinkling of chopped spring onion and coriander. Place one-fifth of the vegetables on the other half of the noodles. Discard the chicken

bones and carefully pour the chicken stock over the noodles in each bowl.

10. Serve with small dishes of soy sauce, chilli flakes, sugar and lime wedges for individual seasoning.

Variations

- Use beef, chicken or tofu instead of pork.
- For vegetarians, use water or vegetable stock only, no chicken bones. Add 2 tablespoons of soy sauce to the water.
- Brothless modification: place refreshed rice noodles on a piece of banana leaf or a plate. Top with several tablespoons of the chilli paste. Voila! Luang Namtha-style spaghetti a-go-go.
- In Muang Sing, rice noodle sheets are spread with the paste, rolled up and cut into 10 cm (4 in) pieces like Vietnamese *bánh cuốn*.



Vietnamese *phô*, cooked home-style *fer*

Phô is a bowl of noodles, commercial meat balls and slices of meat served in a clear soup stock and accompanied with a variety of garnishes and condiments. A platter of fresh salad vegetables, from which each person may select what they wish, is served to the side. Although the list of ingredients and the method may seem long, this is a very easy dish to make for large numbers of people by multiplying the recipe.

Ingredients

1 kg (2 lb)	fleshy pork or beef bones, chopped into 5 cm (2 in) pieces
3 l (5 – 6 pt)	water
1 medium	onion, sliced vertically in half; slice halves into ½ cm vertical slices
1 small piece	star anise, half the size of a pinkie fingernail (optional)
1 small bunch	coriander plants including roots
1 small bunch	sawtooth herb, washed and trimmed
1 head	lettuce, washed; leaves separated
4	snake beans, cut into 5 cm (2 in) pieces
2 large handfuls	mint
6	long reddish chillies
2	limes, cut for squeezing
1 medium	tomato, firm, sliced into rounds
1 bunch	spring onions, 3 fingers-width
2 C	mung bean sprouts
2 T	stock powder
½ packet (250 g)	beef balls (about 20)
½ kg	<i>fer</i> noodles, fresh (or 1 packet of dried rice vermicelli noodles)
1 small pot	water for heating noodles
3 T	peanut chilli sauce
Condiments	fish sauce, sugar, wedges of lime, deep-fried spring onions or shallots, chilli paste and chilli flakes

Serves four.

Cook's note

The peanut chilli sauce for this dish may be purchased in Asian wet markets or from *phô* restaurants.

Method

- Put a large pot filled two-thirds with water on to boil. Add a quarter of the sliced onion and the star anise (optional). Put the rest of the onion on a large plate to be used for the garnishes.
- Wash and pick over the coriander. Cut the roots off and toss these into the heating water. Add the pork bones to the pot, cover and bring to the boil.
- Take the remaining coriander and finely chop half. Put on the garnish plate. Put the rest, uncut, on a large platter for the table accompaniments. Place the sawtooth herb, lettuce, snake beans, mint and chillies on the same platter.
- Prepare wedges of lime and tomato and add to the garnish plate.
- Wash the spring onions; trim off roots. Take six and finely chop them for garnish. Put on the garnish plate.
- Trim the remaining spring onions, so that the white bulb end has just a bit of green still attached. Place on the platter. Trim the remaining onion greens and place alongside the white ends.
- Wash the bean sprouts, pick off anything that is not fresh, place in clean water to soak and set aside until serving time.
- After the stock has been boiling for about 15 minutes, add the 2 tablespoons of stock powder. Stir to dissolve, simmer for 10 minutes and then add the beef balls. Remove the pork bones and set aside to cool enough to handle. Continue simmering the stock.
- Slice the meat off the bones and put in a bowl to use as another garnish for the *fer*. Return the bones to the stock, simmer for another 10 minutes and then remove the pot from the heat. At this stage preparation can be halted until it is time to serve the meal.

To serve

- When ready to eat, reheat the stock and bring a smaller pot of water to the boil. Place the platter of vegetables on the table.
- Drain the bean sprouts and put in side bowls for each diner (or in a communal bowl). Divide the peanut chilli sauce into small saucers, one for each diner.



12. To serve, take a handful of *fer* noodles per person and dunk them into the pot of boiling water for a minute until softened. Remove with a handled, mesh sieve.
13. Place each serving of noodles into an individual bowl. Add some sliced pork, onion and tomato to each bowl. Spoon over the stock, making sure to place some beef balls in each bowl. Top with chopped spring onion and coriander and bring to the table.
14. Provide each diner chopsticks and a Chinese soup spoon. Put the plate of garnishes on the table.
15. Diners should adjust the soup to taste by adding their choice of condiments and garnishes such as lime juice, sprouts and torn up herbs from the platter. The lot is mixed together with the chopsticks and spoon. Pieces of meat, beef balls and vegetables from the broth can be dunked into the peanut sauce. Huge quantities of greens are eaten with *fer*. Lao also dunk raw chillies in shrimp paste, eating them whole for a sinus blast.



Luang Namtha fried noodles ຝີຂົ້ວຫຼວງນ້ຳທາໃສ່ນ້ຳປຸງ *fer koua Louang Namtha sai nam bpoo*

These popular Boat Landing stir fried noodle dishes are the brainchild of Bill Tuffin. Bill loves the special taste of Laos' fermented pastes and thought they would add zest to one-plate meals. His innovations were not added to the menu, however, until he playfully headed into the kitchen to devise the recipes.

Ingredients

100 g	pork, sliced across the grain
1	snake bean, cut into 4 cm (1½ in) lengths
1 large or 2 small	oyster mushrooms, torn into shreds 1-2 cm (1 in) at the widest part
¼	white or purple onion, finely sliced vertically
2 medium cloves	garlic, peeled and chopped
2 T	oil
½ – 1 t	crab paste
2 C	dry egg or rice noodles, refreshed (or fresh rice noodles [<i>kao soi</i>])
½ t	sugar
2 T	soy sauce
3 T	water, if needed
To finish	
¼	lime
	dried chilli flakes

Serves one.

Method

1. Prepare the first five ingredients and set aside.
2. In a wok, heat the oil until hot and toss in the garlic, stirring constantly until golden. Add the meat and stir fry, moving ingredients constantly. When the meat becomes opaque and is starting to brown, toss in the snake bean, mushroom and onion slices. Mix, and then add the crab paste. Stir fry until the onions are translucent.
3. Drain the noodles. Add them to the wok along with the sugar and soy sauce. Very gently mix the ingredients together without breaking the noodles. Add some water, if necessary, to avoid sticking. When the noodles are coated with sauce and are thoroughly heated, transfer them to a serving dish. Serve sprinkled with dried chilli flakes to taste and the lime wedge on the side.

Variations

- **Luang Prabang fried noodles ຝີຂົ້ວຫຼວງພະບາງໃສ່ແຈ່ວບ່ອງ *fer koua Louang Phabang sai jeow bong***
Replace the crab paste with 1 teaspoon of Luang Prabang chilli paste for Luang Prabang noodles. Any Thai dark-coloured chilli paste can be substituted.
- **Muang Sing fried noodles ຝີຂົ້ວ ເມືອງສິງ ໃສ່ໝາກຖົ່ວເຫຼົ້າ *fer koua Muang Sing sai mak toua naow***
Replace the crab paste with 1 teaspoon of fermented soybean paste for noodles as cooked in Muang Sing. Dry chilli flakes added to brown miso make a good substitute for the *kao soi* paste.
- **Sesame fried noodles ຝີຂົ້ວ ໝາກງ່າ *fer koua mak nga***
Instead of a seasoning paste, add 1 teaspoon of sesame oil to the frying oil before cooking the garlic. Just before serving, sprinkle the noodles with 1 tablespoon of dry roasted sesame seeds and mix them in.
- Toss in a tablespoon of Vietnamese balm leaves or another herb of your choice before serving for a fragrant variation on any of the noodle dishes.
- Chop a fresh chilli and add it to the wok at the same time as the onion for a spicy version of any of the above.
- Vary the vegetables. Use French beans, snow peas, shredded mustard greens, bamboo shoots or Chinese kale.
- Sliced chicken, duck, beef or prawns may be substituted for pork in all fried noodle recipes.



Ivy gourd *phò* with tofu 滷 莴苣 卷 腐 竹 *fer pak kep tow hu*

This vegetarian *phò* (pronounced *fer*) is usually served at breakfast and lunch at The Boat Landing. It can be made quite tasty by adjusting soy sauce, pepper and lime juice. Any mild-tasting leaves such as spinach can replace the ivy gourd leaves, or try snow pea shoots or coarsely chopped Chinese cabbage.

Ingredients

2 C	water
1 small hand- ful	ivy gourd leaves, stripped off vine, torn in small pieces
2 slices	galangal
Pinch	salt
2 – 3 T	light soy sauce
½ C	tofu, cubed
1 C	<i>kao soi</i> noodles (fresh sheet rice noodles), cut 6 mm (¼ in) wide (or substitute dried rice noodles, refreshed)
½	tomato, sliced
Extra	light Chinese soy sauce to taste
1 t	black pepper, cracked
To finish	
½	lime, juiced
1	spring onion, finely chopped

Serves four to six.

Method

1. In a small pot, bring the water to boil.
2. Lower the heat and add the tofu, ivy gourd leaves, galangal, salt and soy sauce. Simmer until the leaves are tender.
3. Remove from heat and add the noodles and tomato, more soy sauce to taste and the cracked pepper.
4. Transfer to a bowl, adding the lime juice and sprinkling with the spring onion.

Variations

- *Yerm* leaves (*bai yerm*), a local herb, can be added at the beginning of cooking.
- Tofu may be replaced by chicken.



Lao dipping sauces ແລ່ວ *jeow*



Chan preparing *jeow* in The Boat Landing kitchen

- 83 Fish *jeow* with hog plum ແລ່ວປາ ໃສ່ໝາກກອກ *jeow bpaai sai mak gawk*
- 84 Giant water beetle *jeow* ແລ່ວແມງດາ *jeow maengda*
- 85 Chilli paste *awng* with pork ນ້ຳຝິກອ່ອງ ຊິ້ນໜູ ຫຼື ເຕົາຮູ້
nam phik awng sin moo
- 86 Tomato and Vietnamese balm *jeow* ແລ່ວ ໝາກເລັ່ນ ໃສ່ຜັກຂີ້ອັນ
jeow mak len sai pak ki orn
- 86 Sawtooth herb *jeow* ແລ່ວຜັກຫອມແບ້ນ *jeow pak hawm pan*
- 87 Roasted oyster mushroom *jeow* ແລ່ວເຫັດນາງລົມ
jeow het pouk ket nang lom
- 88 Prickly ash berry *jeow* ແລ່ວ ໝາກແຂ່ນ *jeow mak ken*
- 89 Young green chilli *jeow* ແລ່ວຫມາກເຜັດໜຸ່ມ *jeow mak pet*
- 90 Crab paste *jeow* ແລ່ວນ້ຳບູ *jegw nam bpoo*; field crab *jeow*
ແລ່ວນ້ຳບູກັບໜໍ່ໄມ້ຕົ້ມ *jeow nam bpoo gap naw mai tom*
- 91 Roasted chilli, garlic and tomato *jeow* ແລ່ວໝາກເລັ່ນ *jeow mak len*

Fish *jeow* with optional hog plum ຄຳລ່ວປາ ໃສ່ໝາກກອກ *jeow bpaai sai mak gawk*

This is a very versatile dipping sauce. The base is fish, garlic and chillies along with a souring agent. The overall taste is a balance of salty and sour along with sweet from the garlic and hot from the chilli. Intensity can be controlled by the type of chillies used. The full roundness of flavour comes from grilling the key ingredients. Tamarind water or lime juice may be substituted for the hog plum. Alternatively, use a 6 cm (2½ in) piece of rhubarb, a crab apple or a sour plum, grilling the substitute as one would the hog plum.

Ingredients

8	red chillies, medium-hot (about 4 cm [1½ in] long when mature)
3	green/yellow chillies (about 4 cm [1½ in] long when mature)
1 small	white-fleshed fish (20 cm [8 in])
1 small head	garlic (or 3 large cloves)
1	hog plum (optional; see substitutes, above)
1 t	salt (or to taste)
1 t	stock powder (optional). Only use if liquid stock is not used to finish the recipe. If omitting stock powder, add 1 tablespoon of fish sauce, soy sauce or more salt.
2 T	liquid stock or water
2 stems	coriander, including the leaves, chopped finely (optional)

Method

1. Thread the chillies on toothpicks or a bamboo skewer.
2. Place the fish, garlic cloves, plum and the threaded chillies on a wire rack or mesh screen and grill over a low flame using a charcoal or gas burner. Alternately, place the ingredients on a sheet of tinfoil and grill over an electric element or under an oven grill for the same duration.
3. Turn the fish infrequently, the garlic and chillies more frequently. When the chillies are slightly charred and the hog plum is soft, about 7 minutes, remove them. The garlic and fish will take longer, about 12 and 15 – 20 minutes respectively. When each is ready, remove.
4. Deskewer the chillies, peel the garlic cloves and the hog plum, or its substitute, and debone the fish as each is cool enough to handle.
5. Place the salt and stock powder, or its substitute, in a mortar or food processor.
6. Add the chillies and peeled garlic to the mortar and pound several minutes. Add the fish flesh and some grilled skin and pound; add the hog plum and process until smooth.
7. To finish, add up to 2 tablespoons of water or liquid stock and the finely chopped coriander, if using, to make a thick paste. Taste and adjust the flavour with extra salt, lime juice or tamarind water.

Variations

- Leave out the souring agent.
- For a milder *jeow*, use a less hot chilli.
- Leftover fish from a soup may be used instead of grilled fish.
- Add ½ – 1 cup mashed, grilled or cooked eggplant. Remove the skin if grilled or tough.



Giant water beetle *jeow* လေခဲလေမာဂါ *jeow maengda*

When the rains fill the paddies, along come the frogs, field crabs and giant water beetles (*lethocerus indicus*). It is difficult to dream that an insect could taste so heavenly, but it does! The perfume from the beetle's gland permeates this condiment made with roasted chilli and garlic. Serve with steamed water gourd or other steamed vegetables.

Ingredients

2	water gourds, tea cup-size
1 small head	garlic
4	giant water beetles
10 small	green chillies for a hot <i>jeow</i> , threaded on toothpicks (or 3 big green chillies for a milder <i>jeow</i>)
1½ t	salt
1 t	soy sauce (or to taste)
¼ t	sugar
3 T	coriander leaves, chopped
1	cucumber, as an accompaniment

Method

1. Cut the water gourds into quarters and steam about 15 minutes until tender.
2. On a fine wire grill, arrange the garlic, water beetles and chillies. Grill until the beetles are crispy and the other ingredients are well-roasted, but only lightly blackened.
3. Finely mince the beetles. Mince the big chillies separately if using them. Peel the garlic.
4. In a mortar, add the salt, roasted garlic and chillies. Pound roughly, and then add the minced beetles. Pound for 3 minutes. Add the sugar, soy sauce and the chopped coriander leaves. Stir to mix.
5. Transfer to a small bowl. Add water if the mixture is too dry and mix in.
6. Remove the water gourd from the steamer and arrange on a plate together with cucumber which has been peeled and thickly sliced into half rounds.
7. Serve the *jeow* and the accompaniments together.

Variations

- Add ½ – 1 cup roasted shallots and eggplant.
- Vietnamese mint can be substituted for coriander.
- Three drops of artificial *maengda* essence may be substituted for the giant water beetles.



Chilli paste *awng* with pork ນ້ຳພິກອ່ອງ ຊີ້ນໝູ ຫຼື ເຕົາຮູ້ *nam phik awng sin moo*

This jeow, which is eaten as a condiment for steamed or simmered vegetables, is claimed as both a Lao and a northern Thai dish. It is also prepared in northeastern Thailand as a local recipe. The Luang Namtha version uses the local kao soi fermented bean sauce, whereas the southern versions utilize shrimp paste and lemongrass. Its popularity is no doubt due to easy preparation from readily available ingredients. The jeow compliments greens superbly and tastes great!

Ingredients

1 small head	garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
4 T	vegetable oil
1 T	fermented chilli soybean paste (see Ingredients section for substitutes)
1 C (225g/8 oz)	pork, minced (optional)
½ t	sugar
1 T	thin soy sauce
	chilli powder to taste (optional)
2 large	tomatoes, chopped
	water or stock to adjust mixture to a thick salsa consistency
1 small bunch	spring onions, greens only, chopped finely
1 T	coriander, chopped finely (optional)
1 bunch	Chinese flowering cabbage (and slices of pumpkin and gourd [optional])
Water	to cook vegetable accompaniments

Method

1. Heat the oil in a hot wok. Toss in the chopped garlic and stir fry briefly. Remove the garlic if it is browning too fast. Add the fermented soybean paste to the oil and fry, squishing the paste down so it cooks, but does not burn or stick. Add the minced pork or tofu as well as the garlic if it has been set aside. Add the sugar, soy sauce and tomato. Flavour with chilli powder if desired.
2. Simmer, stirring occasionally, until the meat and tomatoes are cooked and integrated with the other ingredients into a rich, chunky sauce. Add water or stock to thin if necessary. Taste and adjust seasoning.
3. When finished, stir in the onion greens and coriander. Transfer to a serving dish such as a Chinese rice bowl.
4. Steam or simmer the greens for 5 minutes until they turn vivid green, but remain crisp.
5. To eat, take a long stalk of green and bend it over repeatedly until it is the length of a little finger,

wrapping any floppy bits around the middle to form a bundle. Use this to scoop some of the sauce to the side of the serving bowl and eat in one mouthful.

Variations

- The finished *jeow* is superb tossed through pasta. It's worth making for that alone.
- Use a thick version of this *jeow* to make Sloppy Joes. Lightly grill a baguette, slit it and add the *jeow*. Add lettuce, cucumber and tomato.
- For a delicious pasta sauce, stop cooking while the tomatoes are still chunky, before they cook down. This variation is a bit of serendipity discovered when making the sauce in bulk. The bottled gas ran out before the tomatoes could cook as long as intended. A new sauce was born.
- Substitute tofu for the pork.



Tomato and Vietnamese balm *jeow*
 ແລ່ວ ຫາກເລັ້ນ ໃສ່ຜັກຂີ້ອັນ *jeow mak*
len sai pak ki orn

Ingredients

1 head	garlic
1 handful	red or brown shallots
5 – 7 small	red chillies (or 2 – 3 larger ones)
2 large	tomatoes
1 t	salt
2 T	fish sauce
	sugar and lime juice to taste (optional)
½ C	Vietnamese balm leaves (dried leaves or lemon balm may be substituted)
2 T	stock or water to adjust <i>jeow</i> consistency

Method

1. Thread the chillies on toothpicks or a bamboo satay skewer.
2. Place the head of garlic, shallots, threaded chillies and tomatoes on a wire rack or mesh screen and grill over a low flame using a charcoal or gas burner. Alternatively, place the ingredients on a sheet of tinfoil and grill over an electric element or under an oven grill for the same durations.
3. Turn the ingredients frequently while grilling. The chillies should be grilled until black and soft inside (about 12 minutes). When each is ready, remove from the grill and place on a plate. Deskewer the chillies and peel the garlic cloves, shallots and the tomato.
4. Place the salt, fish sauce and a small amount of sugar in a mortar or food processor.
5. Add the chillies, garlic and shallots to the mortar and pound several minutes. Add the tomatoes and pound until smooth.
6. To finish, add the finely chopped Vietnamese balm and up to 2 tablespoons of water or liquid stock until a thick paste is formed. Taste and adjust flavour with extra salt, sugar and/or souring agent.

Sawtooth herb *jeow*
 ແລ່ວຜັກຫອມແປ້ນ *jeow pak hawm pan*

This pungent, herby jeow imparts a heady Lao flavour to sticky rice and its accompaniments.

Ingredients

4 – 10	green chillies
3 cloves	garlic
½ t	chicken stock powder (optional)
1 t	salt
2 T	Vietnamese mint (or 3 tablespoons of coriander leaves), chopped
1 small plant	sawtooth herb (or 2 big leaves), trimmed and chopped

Method

1. Grill or roast the chillies and garlic over a gas flame or charcoal fire, picking off the really blackened bits of skin. Put the stock powder, salt, grilled chillies and garlic cloves in a mortar and pound together. Add the herbs and pound further until juicily integrated, but not totally puréed (or use a hand blender).
2. Taste and adjust to suit. Spoon the mixture into a small serving bowl such as a Chinese rice bowl.
3. Serve with sticky rice, grilled meat or other meat dish, steamed or lightly boiled vegetables and a soup.

Variation

- Add a tablespoon or more water or liquid stock for a more liquid *jeow*.



Roasted oyster mushroom *jeow* ແຈ່ວເຫັດນາງລົມ *jeow het pouk ket nang lom*

This jeow is redolent with grilled mushrooms and is similar in flavour and texture to a rough mushroom pâté.

Ingredients

6 large	oyster mushrooms (about 1½ cups when grilled and torn)
2	shallots, unpeeled
3 cloves	garlic, unpeeled
2 – 5	chillies
½ t	salt
1 T	fish sauce
2 T	coriander, chopped
2 T	spring onion, chopped

Method

1. Grill the mushrooms, shallots, garlic and chillies over an open fire, turning until the mushrooms are toasted and the other ingredients are cooked through with their skins charred. Remove as cooked and peel off blackened skins.
2. Put the peeled shallots, garlic and chillies in a mortar, add salt and pound with a pestle. Tear the mushrooms in shreds and add them and the fish sauce to the mixture. Pound to blend into a rough paste. Taste and season to suit. Stir in the chopped coriander and spring onion. Lightly pound to mix thoroughly.
3. Transfer to a small serving bowl and serve with sticky rice, cucumbers and tiny eggplants, *mak keua phoung*.

Variation

- Serve with rice crackers as a snack.



Prickly ash berry *jeow* ຄຳວິ ຫວງກວຸ້ນ *jeow mak ken*

Mak ken, prickly ash, is used widely in northern Laos. These wild berries are smaller and darker than Sichuan pepper, but they taste virtually the same. This jeow is a local favourite of the Akha ethnic group. If mak ken is unavailable, use Sichuan pepper. When made with small chillies, this jeow is fiercely hot and flavoursome. For a milder jeow, roast big, mild green chillies instead. Both versions are delicious with grilled meat, particularly pork.

Ingredients

½ – 1 t	dried <i>mak ken</i> berries, dry roasted in a frying pan to release their aroma
6 cloves	garlic, roasted
15 small or 4 large	green and reddening chillies threaded on toothpicks and roasted over a grill
½ – 1 t	salt
1 T	soy sauce

Serves two to six as a condiment with grilled pork or chicken.

Method

1. Peel off the blackened skin of the garlic cloves and peppers.
2. In a small mortar, add ½ teaspoon of salt and *mak ken* to taste, using more with smaller chillies. Pound until the berries are crushed. Add the garlic and chillies; pound again.
3. If using large mild chillies, after roasting discard the stems, cut the chillies in small pieces and put in the mortar. Pound with the other ingredients, as above.
4. Add soy sauce, pound to mix, taste and make any adjustments needed (salt, *mak ken*, soy sauce). Turn into a small serving bowl.



Young green chilli *jeow* ແຈ້ວຫມາກເຜັດໜຸ່ມ *jeow mak pet*

This dish's intensity is modified by pre-cooking the chillies and garlic. Grilling imparts a mellow, sweeter flavour than if the ingredients were used raw. This jeow may be made with small, hot green and reddening (immature) chillies, or if a milder flavour is preferred, use immature, longer green chillies or the large, sweeter pale green chillies of a size suitable for stuffing. The younger the chillies, the less hot they are.

Ingredients

1 handful	immature chillies (about 22 small chillies for a hot <i>jeow</i> or 2 – 3 large pale green chillies for a mild <i>jeow</i>)
6 medium cloves	garlic (or a small garlic head)
½ t	chicken stock powder (or 1 teaspoon of fish sauce and a little sugar), (optional)
½ t	salt
2 sprigs	coriander
2 T (approx)	water or stock

Method

1. Choose a mix of small immature chillies from green to nearly red, with the balance more towards the green. Thread them through their middles, so they lie side by side on toothpicks. Each toothpick will take about 7 – 8 of the small ones. Large chillies can be grilled separately.
2. Grill the chillies and unpeeled garlic cloves, turning occasionally until the chilli skin crinkles slightly and has occasional blisters and the insides soften (about 7 minutes). Grilling may be done on a wire rack over a gas flame, on tinfoil on a heating element, under a grill or over a low fire, the usual village way.
3. Remove the grilled chillies and garlic as they become ready. Deskewer the chillies when cool.
4. If using big chillies, remove any blistered skin and chop into 1 cm (¼ in) pieces. Placing the chillies in a plastic bag to cool for a couple of minutes before removing the skin makes this easy.
5. If using stock powder, place it and salt in a mortar or food processor.
6. Peel the cloves of garlic and add to the mortar. Add the chillies to the mortar. Pound with a pestle for several minutes (or process until the ingredients form a coarse paste). The individual ingredients should be recognizable, but blended together.
7. Remove any thick stems from the coriander and finely chop the leaves and finer stems. Add to the *jeow*. Add the water or stock. Mix, thinning the *jeow* to the consistency of a thick spread or salsa.



Crab paste *jeow* ແລ້ວນ້ຳບູ *jeow nam bpoo*

In Luang Namtha, crab paste is as common an accompaniment to bamboo shoots as ketchup is to French fries or mint sauce is to lamb roast in the West. Prepare this *jeow* as part of any meal containing pickled bamboo shoots or other bamboo shoot dish. It can be made with either roasted or raw garlic. Raw garlic adds a sharp note.

Ingredients

2 t	stock powder
1 head	garlic, outer skin removed, top sliced off and the entire head sliced through into rough pieces
3 small	green chillies
4 large	pale green sweet chillies about 10 – 12 cm (4 – 5 in) long
1½ t	crab paste
	water or stock to adjust consistency

Serves four.

Method

- String the small chillies together parallel to each other on a toothpick. Place it and the large chillies in the embers of a charcoal stove until blackened. Alternatively, grill on a wire rack over a gas flame or on a piece of tinfoil on an electric element. Turn occasionally. Remove when blackened and softened inside; set aside to cool for a minute.
- Put the stock powder and the chopped garlic in the mortar and pound together.
- Pick any loose black bits off the small chillies, remove stems and then add to the mortar. Pound.
- Peel the larger peppers, removing the stems and the hard top along with the seeds. Slice roughly into the mortar. Pound until the ingredients are juicily integrated. Add the crab paste and pound until a smooth, thick paste is formed. Thin with a couple of tablespoons of stock or water if necessary. Transfer to a bowl to serve.



Field crab *jeow* ແລ້ວນ້ຳບູກັບໜົມໄມ້ຕົ້ມ

jeow nam bpoo gap naw mai tom

This is the signature *jeow* or chilli paste of the Kalom, the ethnic group native to The Boat Landing's village. Field crabs are collected from the rice paddies and boiled down to a paste. This is mixed with raw garlic and chilli and eaten with boiled bamboo shoots.

Ingredients

1 t	salt
4 cloves	garlic, peeled
20	green chillies, lightly grilled over a charcoal fire or grill (use less for a milder <i>jeow</i>)
1 T (scant)	field crab paste
	fish sauce to taste

Method

- Put the salt, garlic and chillies in a mortar. Pound with a pestle for 2 minutes, and then add the crab paste and pound some more. When well mixed, taste. Add fish sauce as desired and pound to integrate.
- Turn into a small bowl and serve with boiled young bamboo shoots.

Accompanying vegetables

Buy pre-cooked bamboo shoots, or buy them fresh and cook them. If the cooked bamboo shoots are cold, reheat the shoots through in a cup or two of water in a wok or by steaming.



Roasted chilli, garlic and tomato *jeow* ຄຳວ໊ອ໊ອກເລັ້ນ *jeow mak len*

This simple, easy jeow is good with grilled fish and sticky rice. It also works well as a salsa substitute or a hamburger topping.

Ingredients

5	red chillies, strung side by side on a toothpick or bamboo skewer
1 head	garlic, unpeeled
2 medium	tomatoes, unpeeled
½ t	salt
2 T	coriander leaves, finely chopped

Method

1. Grill the chillies, garlic head and tomatoes over embers. The chillies can be propped up and turned occasionally until their skins are slightly blackened and they have softened inside. The garlic can be placed directly in the embers until the outside skin is blackened and the cloves are softened. The tomatoes can nestle close to the fire and be turned occasionally, so that they blacken, but do not disintegrate. Alternatively, grill all on a wire rack or piece of tinfoil over a gas flame or electric element.
2. When each has cooled, peel the worst of the blackened skins off, put each ingredient in a mortar with the salt and pound to a medium paste. Taste and add more salt if needed and some water or stock if the mixture needs thinning. Stir in the chopped coriander leaves and serve in a small bowl as part of a Lao meal.

Opposite page, bottom left: Crab paste *jeow* served with bamboo shoots

Opposite page, bottom right: Crab paste and other ingredients for Field crab *jeow*

Bottom left: Sticky rice, a traditional accompaniment for *jeow*

Bottom right: Tomato *jeow*





Stews and soups
ຊຸບ ຫຼື ເອາະ ແລະ ແກງ
soop, or/aw and gaeng

- 94 Bamboo shoot stew with pork ແກງ ຫົ່ມໄມ້ ໃສ່ຊີ້ນໝູ *gaeng naw mai sai sin moo*
- 95 Sour fish soup ແກງປາສົ້ມ *gaeng bpaasom*
- 96 Sour pumpkin soup with mushrooms ແກງ ຫາກອີໃສ່ສົ້ມແລະ ເຫັດເພືອງ *gaeng mak eu leh het feuang sai som*
- 97 Dried, fermented bamboo shoot soup ແກງຫົ່ມໄມ້ແຫ້ວ *gaeng naw heo*
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- 100 Mild soup with tofu, chicken or pork ແກງ ຈີດ *gaeng jeut*
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- 102 Sweet bamboo shoots with *yanang* ຫົ່ມໄມ້ໃຫຍ່ ໃສ່ຍາວາງ *naw mai nyai sai yanang*
- 103 Lao-style braised chicken ອົບ ໄກ່ ແບບລາວໆ *op sin gai bap lao lao*
- 104 Chicken soop ຊຸບ ໄກ່ *soop gai*
- 105 *Aw lahm* Kmhmu' with forest mushrooms ເອາະຫຼາມກົມມຸໃສ່ ເຫັດປ່າ *aw lahm Kmhmu sai het bpaasom*



- 106 Kmhmu' rattan stew ເອາະຫຼາມຫວາຍກິມມຸ *aw lahm wai Khmu*
- 107 Smoked f sh boiled jeow ຕົ້ມແລ່ວປາແຫ້ງ *tom jeow bpa haeng*
- 108 Lao stew with dried buffalo skin ເອາະຫຼາມໃສ່ໜັງຄວາຍແຫ້ງ *aw lahm sai nang kwaai haeng*
- 109 Akha pork balls ລູນຊີ້ນອາຄາ *luk sin moo Akha*
- 110 Water gourd soup ແກງໝາກນ້ຳ *gaeng mak nam*
- 111 Stuffed cucumber soup ແກງອົວໝາກແຕງ *gaeng oua mak dtaeng*
- 112 *Gaeng bawt* with chicken or duck ແກງບອ່ດໃສ່ໄກ່ຫຼືເປັດ *gaeng bawt sai gai leur bpet*
- 113 Ginger chicken soup ແກງໄກ່ໃສ່ຂີງ *gaeng gai sai king*
- 114 *Gadawm* gourd soup ແກງໝາກກະດ່ອມ *gaeng gadawm*
- 115 Bamboo soup with fermented f sh ແກງໜໍ່ໄມ້ໃສ່ປາແດກ *gaeng naw mai sai padek*
- 116 Spicy chicken stew ເອາະຫຼາມໄກ່ *aw lahm gai*
- 117 Rattan purée ອ່ອມຍອດຫວາຍ *awm nyot wai*
- 118 Green bamboo stew ໜໍ່ຫ່ຽນ *naw hian*
- 119 Puréed f sh ບິນປາ *poon bpa nin*

Bamboo shoot stew with pork ກາງ ຫົ່ມໄມ້ ໃສ່ຊີ້ນໜູ *gaeng naw mai sai sin moo*

This soup was made for Kees and myself during red ant egg season, so the cook added these tasty morsels to the dish at the last moment of cooking. Substitute any bitter, leafy green for acacia fronds.

Ingredients

500 g – 1 kg (1 – 2 lb)	fleshy pork bones chopped into small pieces (3 cm [1 in])
1 – 2 large handfuls	<i>yanang</i> leaves to taste (or half a tin or more of <i>yanang</i> extract)
	water for soaking <i>yanang</i> leaves
3 T	oil
5 cloves	garlic
1 small	white onion, chopped into thumb-size pieces or several shallots
5 T	<i>padek</i> , boiled for 5 minutes to sterilize (or less to taste)
10 – 12	long reddish chillies
1 thick	bamboo shoot, pre-cooked, finely sliced lengthwise and blanched (or about 2 cups tinned bamboo shoots)
2 C	oyster mushrooms
⅓ C	cloud ear mushrooms
1 bunch	acacia fronds (<i>pak la</i>)
1 C	red ant eggs (optional)

Serves four to six.

Method

1. Put *yanang* leaves into water and soak. Squeeze and collect the liquid (or use tinned *yanang* extract).
2. In a large frying pan or wok, add the oil. When hot, add the garlic, stir briefly and then add the onion. When the onion is transparent, add the pork pieces, frying until sealed and succulent looking (about 5 minutes).
3. Put the *yanang* juice in a large pot along with the *padek* and chillies. If using *yanang* extract, add sufficient water to create a soupy stew. Bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the pork and simmer for 5 more minutes. Stir in the bamboo shoots and simmer a further 5 minutes. Lower heat if needed and add the oyster mushrooms. Stir to mix gently.
4. Line up the fronds, so they face the same direction. Curl them on top of the stew; do not mix in. Leave to simmer for a few minutes, and then slip in the red ant eggs and cloud ear mushrooms trying not to disturb the fronds. Simmer for a few minutes more. Take off the heat and serve with steamed rice.



Sour fish soup ຄກງປາສົ້ມ *gaeng bpaasom*

A sour soup is a great accompaniment to fried pork ribs and similar dishes. This one uses sour wind leaf as the souring agent, but it can also be made using lime juice, young tamarind leaves or the juice from soaking tamarind pulp.

Ingredients

2 C	water
1 C loosely packed	sour wind leaf vegetable (<i>bai som lom</i>) leaves torn from the vine (or substitute tamarind leaves or 4 tablespoons of tamarind juice or 4 kaffir lime leaves and 1 tablespoon of white vinegar)
1 stalk	lemongrass, cut to 10 cm (4 in) length and bruised roughly to release flavour
1 t	salt
1	chilli
1 C	fish, chopped in 4 cm (1½ in) pieces; big river fish is best
1 small	tomato (or half a large one), deseeded and cut into eighths
To finish	
1 stem	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>)
1	spring onion, greens only
1 T	fish sauce

Method

1. In a small pot, bring the water and vine leaves to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Add the salt, chilli and bruised lemongrass. Simmer.
2. Add the fish pieces and bring back to the boil. Lower the heat and simmer the fish for 10 minutes or until tender. Add the sliced tomato.
3. Slice the spring onion greens and basil leaves about 2 cm (¾ in) long.
4. Add the sliced spring onion and basil plus 1 tablespoon of fish sauce to the soup; stir and simmer for 1 more minute. Taste and adjust seasonings to your own preference.
5. Transfer the soup to a bowl and serve.



Sour pumpkin soup with mushrooms ແກງ ຫາກອີໄສ່ສົ້ມແລະ ເຫັດເຜືອງ *gaeng mak eu leh het feuang sai som*

This refreshing soup goes well when a deep-fried dish is part of the menu.

Ingredients

½	chicken, chopped into soup pieces
1 l (5 C/ 2 pt)	water
2 C	pumpkin, cut into bite-size chunks (substitute any firm squash)
1 C	straw mushrooms (or torn oyster mushrooms)
4	chillies
3 cloves	garlic
1 t	salt
2 stalks	lemongrass, cut into 10 cm (4 in) lengths and roughly bruised to release flavour
2 – 3 slices	galangal
5 small	kaffir lime leaves
3	limes, juiced
2 – 3 T	fish sauce (or to taste)
To finish	
3 small	spring onions, washed and trimmed of old leaves
3 small	coriander plants, washed and trimmed of old leaves

Serves two to four as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. In a medium pot, bring the water to the boil. Add the chicken pieces and return to the boil. Skim scum. Lower the heat and simmer the chicken for 5 minutes. Add the pumpkin, lemongrass, galangal and the kaffir lime leaves. Continue to simmer gently.
2. In a mortar, pound together the chillies and the garlic. Stir into the soup. Simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Add the mushrooms. Continue to simmer until the chicken is tender and the pumpkin is cooked. Add the lime juice and fish sauce. Taste and adjust flavourings, adding possibly more salt or lime juice. The predominant taste should be sour with a contrast of sweetness from the pumpkin and nuttiness from the mushrooms.
4. Remove the pot from the heat. Chop the spring onions and coriander together and stir them into the soup. Transfer the soup to a bowl and serve.



Dried, fermented bamboo shoot soup ຄາງຫົ່ມໄມ້ແຫ້ວ *gaeng naw heo*

This is an exquisitely flavoured soup well worth making. Chinese stores often stock dried, fermented bamboo shoots which resemble dried, cut tobacco. They are also easily made at home; the method is described on page 40.

Ingredients

½ – 1 C	dried, fermented bamboo shoot slivers, soaked in water for 15 minutes
2 C	water
1	chilli, sliced lengthwise
1 stalk	lemongrass, white part only, bruised and cut lengthwise
½ C	duck pieces with bone, soup-size
3 small	spring onions, finger-width bunch, greens only
½ C leaves (when combined with spring onions)	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>); pinch the leaves from stem just before using
2 T	thin soy sauce (or to taste)

Serves two to four as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. Bring the water to boil in a small pot. For a more liquid *gaeng*, use more water.
2. Squeeze the bamboo slivers dry.
3. Add the chilli, lemongrass and duck to the boiling water. Simmer for 15 minutes. Add the bamboo slivers, and then simmer for a further 15 minutes.
4. Prepare the herbs by cutting the spring onion greens into 2 cm (1 in) lengths and plucking the leaves off the basil.
5. At the end of the cooking period, add 2 tablespoons of soy sauce and the mixed herbs. Stir. Remove the pot from the heat. Taste. Adjust the seasoning, and then spoon into a serving bowl.

Variations

- Use chicken or turkey instead of duck.



Green pumpkin/squash soup ຄາງ ທາງອີ *gaeng mak eu*

This is another mild yet tasty soup, good for serving with more strongly flavoured dishes. A variety of pumpkins and squashes are grown in Lao villages. Most plant parts are eaten. The shoots and tendrils are added to soup or stir fry dishes; seeds are dried, toasted and eaten as a snack; flowers are stuffed, then either steamed or deep-fried and the fruit is simmered in stews and soups. Any meat may be used in this recipe. In rural villages, it would most likely be a small forest animal, chicken or pork. Adjust the amount of ingredients to suit your needs and taste.

Ingredients

3 – 4 C	water
½ – 1 t	salt
1	chilli, sliced
1 stalk	lemongrass, trimmed and bruised
1 small hand-ful	pork, cut in 2 cm (1 in) pieces
1 – 2 C	green pumpkin, cut in 2 cm (1 in) chunks, rind removed if thick
1 – 2 T	soy sauce or fish sauce
¼ t	sugar
To finish	
2 stems	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>); ¼ cup, chopped
2	spring onions, greens only; ¼ cup, chopped

Serves two to four as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. In a small pot, bring the water and salt to the boil. Add the sliced chilli, bruised lemongrass and the meat. Simmer 5 minutes.
2. Add the pumpkin pieces; cover and bring back to the boil. Lower the heat and let the soup simmer until the pumpkin is tender.
3. Taste and add 1 tablespoon of soy sauce (or fish sauce) and ¼ teaspoon of sugar. Simmer for 1 minute, taste again and adjust flavourings. Turn off heat.
4. Put the chopped spring onions and basil in the bottom of a serving bowl, and then spoon the soup over them.
5. Serve with sticky rice and other Lao dishes such as chicken or fish *lahp*.

Variations

- Use turkey, chicken or duck instead of pork.



Pickled bamboo shoot soup ຄາງ ຫໍ່ໄມ້ສົ້ມ ໃສ່ ຄັບດ *gaeng naw mai som sai bpet*

The Boat Landing Restaurant makes its own pickled bamboo shoots in the rainy season when new shoots are plentiful. The finely shredded, pickled bamboo shoots are a salted preserve. Like German sauerkraut, the preserve keeps over a long period of time. Pickled bamboo shoots are also available bottled or tinned from Asian food stores. This recipe serves up to twelve as part of a Lao meal which typically would also include sticky rice, jeow and a stir fried vegetable dish. This soup is not suitable served Western-style before the main dish; it needs additional side dishes to complement it.

Ingredients

1.5 kg wet weight (2½ lb)	pickled bamboo shoots
12 C	stock or water
2 stalks	lemongrass
8	green and yellow-turning chillies
1 kg (2 lb)	meaty duck pieces (or half a duck carcass including the head)
½ C	oil
1 head	garlic, cloves peeled and roughly smashed
1 t	stock powder
1 t	salt or less. Add salt with care as the bamboo shoots already contain a great deal as a preservative.
Additional 2 t	chicken stock powder (optional); use only if not using liquid stock or omit altogether and flavour with salt to taste
1 bunch	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), leaves removed from stems just before using
1 C	spring onions greens, chopped just before using

Halve the recipe to serve four generously.

Method

1. Firmly squeeze the juice out of the pickled bamboo shoots and place the drained bamboo shoots in a large pot. Add the stock or water. Bring to the boil.
2. Remove the outer hard leaves of the lemongrass. String the chillies parallel to each other on a toothpick. Roast the lemongrass and the chillies in the flames of a charcoal fire or over a gas flame until blackened. Remove from the heat and cool. Remove the blackened skin of the lemongrass. Bruise the lemongrass with the back of a knife. Dust off any black flakes from the chillies. Add the lemongrass and the chillies to the boiling stock.
3. Clean the duck and chop into 5 cm (2 in) pieces. See note on preparing duck for soup, page 65.
4. Heat the oil in a hot wok. Toss in the garlic, frying for 15 seconds. Add the duck, the first 1 teaspoon of stock powder and 1 teaspoon of salt. Fry until golden brown, about 10 minutes.
5. After the bamboo shoots have boiled 20 minutes, add the additional stock powder, if using, and the browned duck pieces. Continue simmering until the flavours have developed and the duck is tender. Time will vary. A duck carcass takes about 1 hour; duck breast and other meaty bits would take less time, roughly 35 – 45 minutes.
6. Taste the soup and add salt if necessary. The final flavour should be slightly fermented, hot, sour and salty, but rounded by the clear meat stock. Stir in the basil leaves and chopped spring onions. Allow to sit for a few minutes before transferring to serving bowls.

Variations

- Use chicken or pork instead of duck.



Mild soup with tofu, chicken or pork ကကၵ်ႉ ခိၵ်ႉ *gaeng jeut*

Here is a mild soup to serve as an accompaniment to spicy or deep-fried dishes.

Ingredients

6 C	water, chicken or vegetable stock
6 pieces	white peppercorns, pounded (or use ground pepper to taste)
1 T	garlic, roughly pounded
2 T	soy or fish sauce
1 C	Chinese cabbage (or other <i>brassica</i>), chopped into 3 cm (1¼ in) pieces
1 C	Chinese flowering cabbage, chopped into pieces approx 3 cm (1¼ in)
2 blocks	firm tofu, cut into 2 cm (1 in) cubes (or the same amount of pork or chicken pieces, such as 4 wings, cut into soup-size pieces)

Serves four people.

Method

1. In a medium pot, place the water or stock, pepper, garlic and the soy or fish sauce. Bring to the boil, reduce heat and simmer on low heat.
2. If using meat, add it to the liquid and simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Add the Chinese greens, followed by the tofu if using. Simmer for 3 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning.
4. To serve, transfer the soup into a large serving bowl or individual Chinese bowls.



Tai Dam pork stew ຫອກໄຕດຳໃສ່ ຊີ້ນໝູ *aw Tai Dam sai sin moo*

This is a favourite in Luang Namtha Black Tai villages.

Ingredients

4 C	water
1 t	salt
2 T	oil
1 stalk	lemongrass, trimmed to 10 cm (4 in)
2	chillies (or more to taste)
½ t	chicken stock powder
Pinch	salt
200 g (6 oz)	pork, sliced thinly
Additional	water (if needed)
⅓ C	ground, roasted rice
1 bunch	Chinese greens with yellow flowers (<i>pak kaat kuang tung</i>), cut into 5 cm (2 in) pieces
1 bunch	dill, 2 fingers-width, washed

Serves two to four depending on the number of accompanying dishes.

Method

1. Put the water and salt in a medium pot and bring to the boil.
2. Meanwhile, heat a wok or frying pan. Add the oil and when it is hot, stir fry the lemongrass, chillies and sliced pork for a minute. Season with salt and chicken stock. Fry 1 minute more until the meat changes colour and is lightly cooked.
3. Add the meat mixture to the boiling water. Reduce heat, and then simmer for 5 minutes or longer for really tough meat.
4. As the meat becomes tender, stir in the ground, roasted rice. Stir constantly, very gently simmering the stew as the rice thickens it (at least 7 minutes).
5. Add the Chinese greens. Simmer. Remove the stew from the heat when the vegetable stems are cooked, but still crisp (about 3 minutes). Taste and adjust salt.
6. Cut the dill into 5 cm (2 in) lengths and stir in.
7. Ladle into a serving bowl and serve with sticky rice, a *jeow* and a stir fried dish or grilled meat.

Variations

- Use chicken, turkey, duck or tofu.



Sweet bamboo shoots with *yanang* ຫົ່ມໄມ້ໃຫຍ່ ໃສ່ຮາບາງ *naw mai nyai sai yanang*

Sweet bamboo is the fat, large bamboo shoot called naw wai nyai (big) or naw wai waan (sweet). This dish was cooked for us by Pawn's mother. It is similar to green bamboo stew (naw hian), except it is flavoured with coriander and basil instead of lemongrass. Mae did not use puffed rice as a garnish.

Ingredients

380 ml tin	<i>yanang</i> extract, diluted with water to make up 2 cups (or 2 cups <i>yanang</i> juice. See <i>yanang</i> preparation, Ingredients, page 60.)
¼ C	uncooked rice
½ small head	garlic, cloves peeled and smashed
500 g (1 lb)	sweet bamboo shoots
1 C	pork, minced
2 t	chicken stock powder
1 t	salt
2 T	coriander, finely chopped
2 T	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), finely chopped
	soy, fish or seasoning sauce to adjust flavours
To f nish	
2 T	spring onion, deep-fried (use market-bought if available)
2 T	coriander leaves, coarsely chopped

Serves four to six when accompanied with sticky or plain rice and another dish.

Method

1. Soak the rice in water to soften (about 1 – 2 hours). When the grains 'give' by being squished between two fingers, drain. Put the rice in a mortar and pound to a grainy powder. Set the powder aside.
2. Dry fry the minced pork a few minutes until it changes colour and texture.
3. With a pestle and mortar, pound the garlic roughly. Add the rice flour. Pound to mix.
4. Take each bamboo shoot and cut it vertically into wedges. Traditionally, Lao cooks use a needle or toothpick to tease the wedges into fine shreds the width of a matchstick. A lemon zester, grater or food processor blade will do the same job faster.
5. Put the shredded shoots into a large 30 cm (12 in) pot. Add the cooked pork, stock powder, salt and *yanang* juice. Mix.
6. Bring to the boil, stirring to prevent lumping. Simmer for 15 minutes. Continue stirring until any coarse bits of rice have softened and the bamboo is tender. Taste for flavour. Add fish sauce (or soy or seasoning sauce) for a more robust, salty taste. The texture should be wet, but not soupy (eg, like spaghetti in a liquid sauce).
7. Add the chopped coriander and basil. Stir to mix. Remove from heat.
8. To serve, transfer into two or more soup bowls. Sprinkle the deep-fried onion and chopped coriander garnishes over each.

Suggested accompanying dishes

For a feast, try serving with grilled or deep-fried fish, young green chilli *jeow*, a stir fried green vegetable, soup and sticky rice.

Variations

- To enliven the dish, in step 5 add chopped fresh chillies or 1 teaspoon of dried chilli flakes.



Lao-style braised chicken ອົບ ໄກ່ ແບບລາວໆ *op sin gai bap lao lao*

This flavoursome dish, redolent of lemongrass and galangal, appears at Luang Namtha wedding feasts where it is often stretched by adding potatoes. The recipe can also be made with pork, turkey or duck. For a Western variation, fry the pounded flavourings and meat together until golden before adding water. This will add more colour to the dish.

Ingredients

600 g (1½ lb)	meaty chicken on the bone, chopped into 3 cm (1¼ in) pieces
4 stalks	lemongrass, white stalk only
1 piece	galangal, the size of two thumbs, sliced
1 small head	garlic, peeled
2	green chillies, stemmed
2 t	stock powder (optional; use only if no liquid stock is at hand)
½ – 1 t	salt
2 T	fish sauce
4	kaffir lime leaves, torn into pieces
3 C approx	water or a mix of stock and water

Serves four as part of a Lao meal.



Method

1. Remove any fibrous outer leaves of the lemongrass and slice the white stalk and juicy green part into ½ cm (¼ in) pieces. Discard any dry, hard stalk.
2. Place the lemongrass, galangal, garlic, shallots, chillies and stock powder in a mortar and pound until juicily integrated (or use a blender or food processor). Transfer to a medium pot along with the chicken.
3. Add 2 tablespoons of fish sauce and the kaffir lime leaves. Mix. Cover with water or a mixture of stock and water until 1 cm (½ in) above the ingredients.
4. Simmer slowly, initially covered, on low heat for 30 minutes or until the meat is succulent. Add more liquid if necessary. In the final dish, most of the liquid is absorbed and the meat is coated with the sauce (like a dry curry). Taste and adjust seasoning with fish sauce if necessary.

Variation

- **Braised meat and potato ອົບ ຊີ້ນໝູ່, ໄກ່, ເປັດ *op sin moo, gai, bpet gap man falang***

The idea of adding potatoes to this dish to extend the recipe was Bill Tuffin's. Now, it has become a frequent dish on a celebration menu for large numbers of people. It is easy to prepare and cook in bulk over a charcoal fire. To determine quantities, count the number of people expected; divide by four. Use the resultant number as the recipe multiplier.

Ingredients

500 g (1 lb) potatoes

Equal amount meat (pork, chicken or duck)

Double the amount of all other ingredients listed in the main recipe

Method

1. Peel and chop the potatoes and meat into 3 cm (1¼ in) chunks.
2. Proceed with the recipe.
3. After simmering the meat 10 minutes, add the potatoes. Delay adding the potatoes if the meat is tough. Serve when the potatoes are cooked.

Chicken soop ຊຸບ ໄກ່ soop gai

A soop has less water than a gaeng and contains pre-cooked ingredients, in this case the chicken. The dish is enticingly flavoured with roasted garlic, lemongrass, chillies and a wide range of fresh herbs. Recommended accompaniments are fish moke (page 133), awm nyot wai (page 117), a jeow and sticky rice.

Ingredients

2 C	water or stock
1 t	salt
1 t	chicken stock powder (do not use if using stock)
½	chicken breast, cut horizontally to lie flat
1 stalk	lemongrass
1	green chilli (or more to taste)
3 large cloves	garlic
½ C	sawtooth herb, finely chopped
½ C	spring onion greens (or Chinese chives), finely sliced
1 T	coriander leaves, finely chopped
¼ C	mint leaves, finely sliced
1	lime, juiced
1 T	fish sauce

Serves four as part of a Lao meal.



Method

1. In a pot, bring 2 cups of water or stock to the boil. Add the salt and the stock powder (optional). Put the flattened chicken breast in the boiling stock, and then simmer on low for 5 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, grill the white part of the lemongrass, the green chilli and the cloves of garlic over a low flame until brown and charred. Remove each from the fire as they brown. The garlic takes the longest.
3. Peel the burnt layer from the lemongrass stalk, and then bruise it with the back of a knife. Add to the simmering stock.
4. Turn the chicken over, so it simmers evenly.
5. Peel the roasted garlic, leaving a bit of charring. Place it in a mortar along with the grilled chilli. Using a pestle, pound them together to a coarse paste (or use a food processor or blender).
6. After a further 5 minutes or when done, take the chicken out of the stock and set aside. Add the pounded garlic and chilli to the stock. Remove the stock pot from the heat, and then stir in the finely chopped sawtooth herb, spring onion, coriander and mint plus the juice of 1 lime.
7. Shred the chicken into 5 cm (2 in) slivers; add to the stock. Stir to mix.
8. Stir in 1 tablespoon of fish sauce. Taste and adjust lime juice and fish sauce.
9. Serve in a small bowl. Accompany with other dishes and sticky rice.

Variations

- This dish can also be made with pork, duck or tofu.



Aw lahm Kmhmu' with forest mushrooms ຄອາະຫຼາມກົມມຸໃສ່ເຫັດປ່າ *aw lahm Khm sai het bpa*

We enjoyed this dish along with aw lahm wai and freshly killed, grilled pork which had been rubbed with a pounded mixture of salt, fresh green chillies, garlic, lemongrass and large dried red chillies before it was cooked. The mushrooms were prepared in the home village of Khamsouk, the young woman we consider our Kmhmu' granddaughter. We were also served an accompaniment of pig innards flavoured with vertically shredded lemongrass stalk.

Ingredients

1 – 2 C loosely packed	dried mouse ear mushrooms (<i>het hu nuu</i>); <i>het ki tom</i> or fresh mushrooms may be included
3 C	water
4 leaves	ginger plant, preferably the traditional, small variety
½ C	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>) leaves, removed from stems just before using
½ C	Vietnamese balm leaves
1 bunch	chives or spring onion greens, thumb-width
4	green chillies
½ small head	garlic, peeled
2 stalks	lemongrass, trimmed, bruised and knotted
1 T	salt
½ T	MSG (optional)
1½ T	raw rice, pounded to coarse salt consistency

Serves four to eight as part of a Kmhmu' meal.

Method

1. In a medium pot, add the water. Bring to the boil.
2. Wash the leafy herbs; set aside to cut into the stew when needed.
3. Add the salt and MSG to the boiling water, and then add the rinsed and drained mushrooms.
4. Mix in the knotted lemongrass and the pounded rice. Cut the chillies in diagonal slivers into the pot. Cover. Bring back to the boil, lower heat and simmer for 10 minutes.
5. Prepare the herbs by slicing the ginger leaves and chives into finger joint-size pieces. Pluck the basil and Vietnamese balm leaves from their stems.
6. Take the lid off the stew and stir. Sliver the garlic into the pot. Cover. Simmer for 3 minutes. Taste and adjust for salt. Add the herbs. Let simmer for a few minutes. Remove from heat. Total cooking time is between 15 – 20 minutes depending on whether dried or fresh mushrooms are used.
7. Transfer the stew into a big bowl.
8. Serve with sticky rice and grilled pork if available.

Right: Khamsouk (left) and relatives at home in Ban Chalensouk serving local dishes



Kmhmu' rattan stew ເອາະຫຼາມຫວາຍກີມມຸ *aw lahm wai Khmu*

Our introduction to this dish was in Chalansouk village where it was cooked for us by Khamsouk, our self-appointed granddaughter. The meal included *aw lahm het huu nuu* and a dish of pig entrails flavoured with fresh herbs. Our hosts kindly spared us the usual serving of raw blood salad which accompanies meals of freshly slaughtered animals. This recipe records the village way of using the *soi* technique of slicing ingredients directly into the cooking pot, described on page 64. The amount of water and pounded rice in the stew can be varied depending on how many people are being fed.

Ingredients

3 – 4 C	water
1	dried, smoked squirrel (or 1 cup of beef jerky strips)
1 t	prickly ash (<i>mak ken</i>) berries
1 stalk	lemongrass, bruised and knotted
1 stem	dill
6 leaves	ginger plant, preferably the traditional, small variety
½ C	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), leaves removed from stems just before using
5 leaves	sawtooth herb
1 T	salt
1 T	MSG, monosodium glutamate (optional or to taste)
2 – 3 T	raw rice, pounded to coarse salt consistency
½ small head	garlic
3	green chillies
11 sticks	rattan, outer skin stripped
1 piece	ginger, thumb-size

Method

1. In a medium pot, put in 3 – 4 cups of water and bring to the boil.
2. Wash and joint the dried squirrel (*proowk*) or cut the beef jerky into 5 cm (2 in) pieces. Add to the water. Bring back to the boil. Cover. After 10 minutes, add the *mak ken* berries and the lemongrass. Wash the leafy herbs and set aside, ready to cut into the stew as needed.
3. After 5 minutes, add the salt, the optional MSG and 2 tablespoons of pounded rice. Add the garlic and diagonally slice the green chillies straight into the pot. Cover, and then simmer for about 10 minutes. Break the rattan into 5 cm (2 in) pieces, discarding the parts that are not easy to snap. Add to the pot. Simmer for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Smash the ginger root to release its flavours and slice it directly into the pot.
5. While the stew is cooking, prepare the herbs by slicing the ginger leaves and sawtooth herb into finger joint-size pieces. Pick the basil leaves from their stems. Cut the dill roughly the same size as the leaves. There should be 1 heaping cup of fresh herbs.
6. Add the green herbs to the stew. Taste and adjust for salt and/or MSG. Let simmer for a few minutes, and then remove from heat. The total cooking time is about 15 minutes.
7. Transfer the stew into a big bowl to serve. Serve with sticky rice and grilled pork if available.

Left: Kmhmu' women prepare rattan, Ban Chalensouk
Below: Kmhmu' rattan stew



Smoked fish boiled *jeow* ຕົ້ມແຈ່ວປາແຫ້ງ *tom jeow bpa haeng*

This is a delicious use of any kind of smoked fish.

Ingredients

6 small	apple eggplants
2 heads	garlic
1 stalk	lemongrass
4 small	shallots, threaded on toothpicks for roasting
4	chillies, 3 red and 1 green, threaded on a toothpick for roasting
1 T	chicken stock powder, if not using stock
500 g (1 lb)	smoked fish strips, small (or any flaked smoked fish)
8 C	water or stock of any sort
1 t	salt
To finish	
1 bunch	dill, thumb-width
6 small	spring onions
1 bunch	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), thumb-width

Method

1. Cut the tops off the eggplants, and then cut them crosswise to a depth of $\frac{1}{2}$ cm ($\frac{1}{4}$ in).
2. Grill the eggplants, garlic heads, shallots, chillies and lemongrass in a charcoal fire or over a gas flame. Turn frequently until the eggplants and garlic have a solid black exterior and are soft inside and until the shallots, chillies and lemongrass are charred, but not completely blackened. The eggplants take the longest time and the chillies the shortest. Remove each as ready.
3. Peel the garlic and shallots. Place in a mortar with the chillies and stock powder if using. Pound together. Peel the eggplants and add to the mortar, pounding to a creamy paste.
4. Bruise the lemongrass with the back of a knife. In a medium pot, bring the water or stock to the boil. Add salt and the lemongrass, and then add the paste from the mortar. Boil for 3 minutes. Pluck off the basil leaves. Cut the dill and spring onions to basil leaf-length.
5. Taste the *jeow* and adjust with stock powder or salt. Add the herbs and smoked fish. Take off heat. Leave a minimum of 5 minutes for flavours to blend.

Suggested accompanying dishes

Serve with steamed sponge gourd, choko or zucchini and thick slices of raw, peeled cucumber.

For a set meal, combine with sticky rice, grilled chicken, snake beans stir fried with garlic and oyster sauce and a green chilli *jeow*.



Lao stew with dried buffalo skin ເຂົ້າໜົມໃສ່ໜັງຄວາຍແຫ້ງ *aw lahm sai nang kwaai haeng*

This stew was prepared for us by Pawn's mother, Mae, and is enough to feed up to ten people if it is accompanied by other dishes. Understandably, dried buffalo skin may be hard to obtain in some countries; if so, leave it out. The texture of buffalo skin is not replaceable, although some people add clumps of dried, cooked sticky rice instead.

Ingredients

8 – 10 C (2 1/4 pt)	water
1 small handful	dried buffalo skin strips (1 – 2 strips), chopped into 1 cm (½ in) pieces (or dried beef)
3 fingers	chilli wood (<i>mai sakahn</i>) or substitute; see Ingredients, page 36
5 stems	rattan, stripped of thorny outer bark and the creamy inner core cut into 5 cm (2 in) pieces (or use a banana flow- er or a drained 400 g jar of preserved rattan. Taste and, if necessary, rinse and steam the preserved rattan to soften and remove the bitter flavour.)
8 – 10 small	apple eggplants; if large, cut crosswise partially through the top
1 – 2	chillies to taste (Aim for a mellow, spicy flavour where all the ingredients meld together. <i>Mai sakahn</i> has a hot peppery, chilli flavour itself, so increase the number of chil- lies, if not using <i>mai sakahn</i> , to 5 and add 1 teaspoon of black peppercorns to keep the flavour balanced.)
750 g (1½ lb)	duck pieces, including the head and feet (optional; flavour will not be af- fected)
2 t	salt
One 25 cm (10 in) bowl	mixed greens, washed and drained and torn or cut into pieces no bigger than 10 cm (4 in). Use pumpkin leaves (or squash or courgette [zucchini] tendrils or other leafy green), dill, holy basil, sawtooth herb and yard-long beans (or French beans), cut into 5 cm (2 in) pieces.

Method

1. Boil the dried buffalo skin hide in the water for 1 – 2 hours until softened. (The consistency will be like a very firm Turkish delight.)
2. Add the chopped *mai sakahn* and rattan pieces to the simmering liquid, and then add the eggplants and chillies.
3. Remove the duck fat from the carcass. Cut the fat into small pieces for use in the dish or discard. Chop the duck into approximately 4 cm (1½ in) pieces, including the bone. If using the full carcass, page 65 describes how to prepare it for soup.
4. Add the duck pieces and salt to the stew. Simmer for a total of 30 – 40 minutes, depending on the meat's tenderness. In the meantime, when the eggplants are very soft, remove them from the stew and pound to a pulp in a pestle and mortar (or use a food processor or potato masher). Return the pulp to the stew and stir in. Taste and add more salt if needed. Ten minutes from the end of cooking, add the prepared mixed greens and stir in to allow the flavours to mingle.
5. Transfer to two serving bowls, each enough for four people, and serve as part of a Lao meal. The dish is also suitable as a one-dish meal served with sticky or plain rice.



Akha pork balls ລູກຊີ້ນໝູອາຄາ *luk sin moo Akha*

The Akha typically leave this herby minced meat free-form. The Boat Landing cooks decided the dish would be more appealing, however, if the mixture were shaped into balls. The Akha include pig or duck blood in the recipe. The blood imparts a rich flavour and helps bind the other ingredients. Replace fresh blood with egg yolk if preferred.

Ingredients

1 – 1½ C	minced pork
3 cloves	garlic, peeled
½ t	salt
1 small	green chilli (not bird's eye chilli)
¾ – 1 t	stock powder
1 sprig	young guava leaves (optional)
3 T	mint
3 T	sawtooth herb, finger-width cluster, chopped
3 small	spring onion plants, whites and greens, chopped
3 T	Vietnamese mint, finger-width bunch, chopped
or	
3 small	coriander plants, stalk and green, chopped (use if no Vietnamese mint)
1 T	pig or duck blood (or substitute 1 table-spoon egg yolk)
1 C	hot water

Serves four as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. Pound the garlic, chilli, salt and instant stock together with a pestle and mortar for a minute. Add the herbs, and then pound the mixture together until thoroughly blended. Add the minced pork and pound again for at least 5 minutes. Pounding breaks down the meat fibres and makes for light meat balls which stick together. Taste and add more salt if needed. Add the duck blood or egg yolk and mix together.
2. Put the hot water in a small pot. Roll pieces of mixture into 2 cm (¾ in) balls. Place them in the water as the balls are rolled. This stops the balls from breaking up. Set the pot on the fire, cover and simmer for up to 15 minutes until the meat balls are cooked through. Top up with water if the water level gets too low and the meat balls start to stick to the pot.
3. Remove the pot from the heat. Transfer the meat balls to a bowl and serve.
4. Accompany with sawtooth herb *jeow*, steamed vegetables, sticky rice and Akha chicken soup.



Water gourd soup ຄຳນາງນ້ຳ ແກ່ງມັກນາມ *gaeng mak nam*

The water (or bottle) gourd, among the oldest of cultivated plants and cousin to the cucumber, is used both as a food and dried as a container. Choose small gourds for the recipe. This soup also works well with any small squash. Its subtle taste is flavoured with basil, garlic and chilli, and it can be made with tofu, pork or chicken.

Ingredients

2	water gourds, mug-size, cut in eighths
1 C	chicken with bone, chopped into 2 cm (1 in) pieces
4 C	water
½ t	salt
2	chillies, turning red
1 stalk	lemongrass, cut to 10 cm (4 in), bruised to release flavour
¼ C	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>) leaves
¼ C	spring onion greens, cut to 2 cm (1 in) lengths
1 T	fish sauce (or to taste)

Serves two to six depending on the number of accompanying dishes.

Method

1. Put the water in a small pot, add the chicken, salt, chillies and bruised lemongrass and bring to the boil. Simmer for 7 minutes.
2. Add the water gourd, and then simmer for a further 8 – 10 minutes until the chicken is cooked and the gourd is cooked through, but not overly soft.
3. Turn off the heat and add the herbs.
4. Add 1 tablespoon of fish sauce (or more to taste) and stir. Let the soup sit, covered, several minutes to impart the flavours.
5. Spoon into a serving bowl and serve.

Variation

1 T	oil
1 – 2 cloves	garlic, chopped

1. Put the oil in a small pot, and then fry the chopped garlic. When slightly brown, add the meat, salt, lemongrass and chilli. Mix together. Fry for 2 – 3 minutes. Add water and simmer for 5 minutes.
2. Follow from step 2 of the recipe to finish.



Stuffed cucumber soup ກາງອົວໝາກແຕ່ງ *gaeng oua mak dtaeng*

This soup is found in markets selling take away dishes, as well as being prepared at home. It is also cooked in Thailand and China. This version was made by Tik, our Vientiane housekeeper.

Ingredients

4 – 5 small cucumbers (or 1 telegraph cucumber or bitter melon; see Variations)

For the pork stuffing

2 C (450 g/1 lb) pork, minced
 3 – 4 large garlic, smashed with back of knife, minced
 ½ medium onion, minced
 4 spring onions, topped and tailed, then finely cut
 1 t ground white pepper (or to taste)
 ½ t salt
 2 t soy sauce

For the soup

6 C water or stock
 2 T thin soy sauce (or fish sauce or salt)
 3 chillies (optional)
 1 plant coriander, stems and leaves
 2 spring onions

Serves four as part of a Lao meal.

Suggested accompanying dishes

This dish does well with sticky or plain rice, steamed vegetables and a jeow.



Method

1. Combine the minced pork, minced garlic, onion and cut spring onions in a bowl. Add the pepper, salt and soy sauce. Work together until well mixed.
2. Cut cucumbers in half at their middle. Remove the seeds. If using longer cucumbers or bitter melon, cut in 5 cm (2 in) rings. Only peel the cucumber if the skin is very thick.
3. Stuff each piece of cucumber or gourd with some of the mixture. Roll the remainder into small meat balls and place in cold water. This will help them to retain their shape until added to the soup.
4. Bring the water or stock to the boil in a medium pot, and then reduce to a simmer. Add the chillies, soy (or fish sauce or salt), and then add the stuffed cucumbers and pork balls. Simmer until the meat is cooked and the cucumbers are softened, but not overcooked.
5. Taste the soup and balance it for flavour by adding more soy or fish sauce, salt and/or sugar (if using bitter melon). Stir and remove the pot from the heat. Cut the coriander and spring onions into 3 cm (1¼ in) lengths. Add to the soup.
6. To serve, place some of the soup in a bowl for diners to help themselves; replenish the serving bowl as needed.

Variations

- Seeded bitter melon can be stuffed with the mixture. (Peel the melon if they are old, as the skin will be very bitter.) Add a little sugar to the soup, depending on the bitterness of the gourd.
- Add 1 cup sliced, peeled green pumpkin to the soup.
- Mix equal proportions of minced pork and minced prawns for the stuffing.
- Try minced chicken in place of pork.
- Experiment, incorporating different chopped herbs in the stuffing. Add finely chopped chilli to the pork mixture for zing. Vietnamese mint is a pleasant addition to the pork stuffing.
- The stuffed cucumbers also can be steamed and served as a side dish.

Gaeng bawt with chicken or duck ກາງບອ່ດໃສ່ ໄກ່ ຫຼື ລຸ້ນ *gaeng bawt sai gai leur bpet*

This is a typical Kalom (Tai Yuan) stew from Ban Khone, The Boat Landing's village. It is prepared with whatever vegetables are in season. Ingredients for the dish in the inset photo include banana flower, gourd vine leaves and rattan, whereas the stew in the main photo uses baby corn and snake gourd.

Ingredients

2½ C	water (or more for a thinner dish)
1 t	salt
3 pieces	chilli wood (<i>mai sakahn</i>), half a thumb-length (or substitute 1 green chilli and ½ teaspoon of black peppercorns)
2 T	oil
2 T	garlic, chopped
½ C	chicken or duck on the bone, cut soup-size, 2 cm (1 in)
2 stalks	lemongrass, white only and bruised to release flavour
1	chilli (or more to taste)
3 small	green apple eggplants, cut in eighths
½ C	rattan pieces (or use pumpkin, squash, gourd, baby sweet corn or tinned rattan, soaked and drained)
¼ C	<i>gadawm</i> gourd (optional; or any other gourd or squash)
4 leaves	sawtooth herb
3 stems	dill, cut into 4 cm (1½ in) pieces
2 stems	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), cut into 4 cm (1½ in) pieces
2 small	long beans, cut into 4 cm (1½ in) pieces
3 T	roasted rice powder
2 T	thin soy sauce

Serves two to four as part of a Lao meal.



Method

1. Put the water in a small pot, add ½ teaspoon of salt and bring to the boil
2. In a wok, put 2 tablespoons of oil. Heat and add 2 tablespoons of chopped garlic. Stir fry briefly. Add the chicken pieces, lemongrass, the chilli and ½ teaspoon of salt. Stir fry until the colour of the meat has changed. Transfer this mixture to the boiling water. Simmer.
3. After 5 minutes, add the eggplant. Simmer for 10 – 15 minutes, and then add the rattan (or substitute). Simmer 5 minutes more until cooked.
4. Sprinkle 3 tablespoons of roasted rice powder over the *gaeng*. Mix in smoothly. Add the long beans and herbs; simmer for a further 5 minutes. Finish with 2 tablespoons of thin soy sauce. Stir, taste and add more soy sauce or salt if needed.
5. Transfer to a serving bowl.

Variations

- Try using tofu or pork instead of chicken.



Ginger chicken soup ຄກງໄກ່ໃສ່ຂີງ *gaeng gai sai king*

This refreshing soup goes well with other Akha dishes. Refer to the book's recipes for simmered Akha pork balls (page 109), steamed green beans with sesame seeds (page 142) and sawtooth herb chilli paste (page 86).

Ingredients

½	chicken breast
4 C	water or stock
1 stalk	lemongrass, cut to 10 cm (4 in) length and roughly bruised to release flavour
½ – 1 t	salt
1 piece	ginger, pinkie finger-size, sliced in slivers
1 medium	green chilli, sliced
2 cloves	garlic
2 T	spring onion, finely sliced
2 T	Vietnamese mint, finely sliced (or a small handful of small coriander plants and mint, chopped)

Method

1. In a medium pot, bring the water, salt and lemongrass to the boil. Add the slivered ginger, sliced chilli and sliced garlic. Let them simmer together while skinning and cubing the chicken breast.
2. Add the chicken pieces to the pot, and then bring the liquid back to the boil. Lower the heat. Let the chicken simmer for 15 minutes or until tender. Taste and adjust salt if needed.
3. Remove the pot from the heat. Add the chopped spring onions and Vietnamese mint (or coriander and mint) and stir them into the soup. Transfer the soup to a bowl and serve.



Gadawm gourd soup ຄາງໝາກກະດ້ອມ *gaeng gadawm*

The gadawm gourd is grown in mountain fields along side upland rice. When the rice is tall this small, slightly sweet, bitter-tinged gourd is harvested and has a brief appearance in the Luang Namtha market. The soup also can be made with chicken, turkey or tofu. Young bitter melon may replace the gadawm.

Ingredients

2 C	<i>gadawm</i> gourds, small, peeled and soaked
2 C	boiling water
½ t	salt
1 stalk	lemongrass, white part only, bruised with the flat of a knife and split in two
2	chillies, split top to bottom
1 small handful	pork, cut into 2 cm (1 in) cubes
2 – 3 stems	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), rinsed and chopped into 2 cm (1 in) lengths
1 bunch	spring onion greens, pinkie finger-width, rinsed and chopped into 2 cm (1 in) lengths

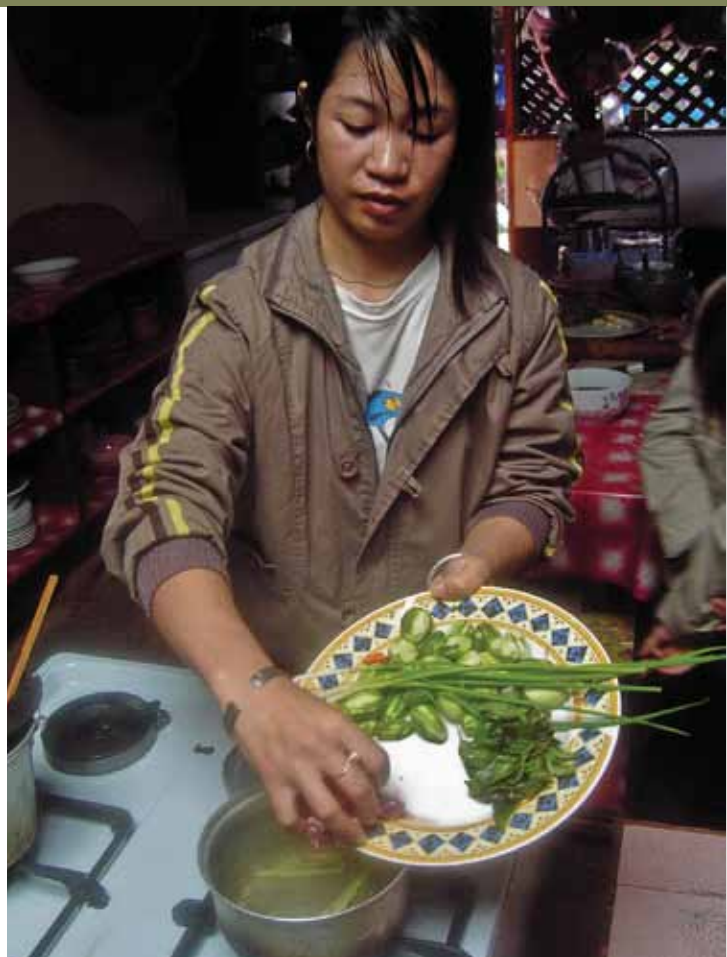
Serves two to four depending on the number of accompanying dishes.

Method

1. In a small pot, add 2 cups boiling water, salt, lemongrass and chillies. Cover and bring to the boil. Add the pork, and then simmer for 15 – 20 minutes.
2. Add the drained gourd. Simmer for a further 5 minutes.
3. Add the basil and spring onion greens to the pot.
4. Take the soup off the heat. Taste and adjust for salt if needed.
5. Transfer to a bowl for serving.

Variation

- If using tofu, add it at the same time as the *gadawm* gourd.



Bamboo soup with fermented fish ກາງຫົ່ມໄມ້ໃສ່ປາແດກ *gaeng naw mai sai padek*

This padek-flavoured dish is a local Luang Namtha soup made in the rainy season when new bamboo shoots and squash tendrils are available. Fresh yanang leaves are another key ingredient. The soup is thickened with sticky rice powder.

Ingredients

1 large handful	fresh <i>yanang</i> leaves (or use tinned <i>yanang</i> juice)
2 C	cold water
500 g (1 lb) small	long, fresh bamboo shoots (or tinned or shrink-packed, pre-cooked ones)
4	red chillies
	water to simmer bamboo shoots
1 t	salt (or more to taste)
2 t	stock powder (optional)
2 – 3 T	pounded, unsoaked, raw sticky rice (or use a coffee grinder to convert the rice into flour)
½ C	<i>padek</i> with a piece of fish included (or substitute ¼ cup fish sauce and either fermented shrimp paste [<i>kapi</i>] or crab paste)

A mixture of washed, green vegetables and herbs to fill a 30 cm (12 in) bowl, comprising:

2 – 4	chilli leaves (optional)
2 small or one large bunch	sawtooth herb; ½ cup, chopped
2 handfuls	squash (or pumpkin) flowers, new leaves and tendrils
2 – 3	small squash (<i>mak buab</i> or courgettes), cut to 5 cm (2 in)
1 C	yard-long beans, cut to 5 cm (2 in)
2 sprigs	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>)

Serves two to six depending on the number of dishes served.

Method

1. In a mortar or on a chopping board, bruise the *yanang* leaves with a pestle or the back of a cleaver. Place leaves in a bowl along with 2 cups cold water. Rub the leaves together to release the aromatic juices. Alternatively, place the leaves and the water in a blender or food processor and work until the mixture foams. Strain the juice; discard the leaf remnants.
2. If using pre-cooked bamboo shoots, cut into 5 cm (2 in) pieces and rinse.
3. For fresh bamboo shoots only: cut shoots into 5 cm (2 in) pieces and smash lightly with a pestle or back of a knife. Cover with water, and then boil for 15 minutes. When ready, drain and set aside. Discard the bitter water.
4. Thread the chillies on a toothpick. Roast over a grill or flame until softened, crinkled and slightly charred. Put the salt, stock powder, if using, and roasted chillies in a mortar and pound for 1 minute.
5. Place these ingredients in a large pot along with the bamboo shoots, *yanang* juice and enough fresh water (about 4 cups) to cover by 2.5 cm (1 in). Bring to the boil. Stir in the pounded rice flour. Simmer for about 15 minutes.
6. Add *padek*, or its substitute, into the simmering soup, stir and then add the vegetables and herbs. Cover and simmer for a few minutes. Taste and adjust with stock and/or salt if necessary. The flavour of the soup should be bitter and herby, with a spicy, mild chilli and sawtooth herbal note.



Spicy chicken stew ຕອາະຫຼາມ ໄກ່ *aw lahm gai*

Brimming with the distinct flavours of northern Laos, this spicy stew is a must to try. Serve it with sticky rice, jeow and steamed or simmered fresh vegetables.

Ingredients

4 T	cooked sticky rice, flattened like cookie dough
½	chicken breast (or thigh and drumstick), boned and flattened

Vegetables and herbs (after preparing, soak in a bowl of cold water until needed)

2 yard-long beans, cut into 5 cm (2 in) pieces
1 small handful of new pumpkin leaves
1 stalk lemongrass, bruised
2 – 3 small sprigs dill
4 leaves sawtooth herb

Other ingredients

3 pieces	chilli wood (<i>mai sakahn</i>), each wedge approximately 3 cm long x 1 cm in diameter (1¼ in x ½ in) at its widest point, (see Ingredients, page 36, for substitute).
1 – 2	fresh chillies, 4 cm (1½ in) long
3 – 4 C	water for stock
1 t	salt
1 t	stock powder
7 small	apple eggplants, stems removed; cut vertically from the top into partial quarters, leaving eggplant intact
30 – 40 cm (12 – 16 in)	rattan shoots, cut to 3 cm (1¼ in) lengths
1 large sprig	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>); 2 T leaves removed just before using

Serves two to four as part of a Lao meal.



Method

1. Grill the flattened chicken and sticky rice over a low flame until the rice is dry and partly brown and the chicken is just cooked. Cool.
1. Prepare vegetables and herbs, and then put in a bowl of cold water to soak.
2. Put 3 – 4 cups of water in a pot, add the salt and stock powder and then bring to the boil on a low heat.
3. Break the sticky rice into 1 cm (½ in) pieces; add to the simmering stock. Ingredient by ingredient, add the lemongrass, chilli wood, prepared eggplants and cut-up rattan. Simmer for 4 minutes.
4. Add chillies, and then simmer for 10 more minutes.
5. Remove chillies and eggplants from stew when soft and put in a mortar (or food processor).
6. Cut the grilled chicken into 1½ x 3 cm (½ in x 1 in) pieces. Add to the simmering stew together with the basil. Pulp the eggplants and chillies using a pestle (or food processor).
7. Drain the remaining vegetables and herbs. Add the beans to the stew. Simmer several minutes. Add the eggplant mixture. Salt, if needed, and serve.



Rattan purée ອ້ອມຍອດຫວາຍ *awm nyot wai*

This tasty Vientiane recipe was modified by Bill Tuffin to expand The Boat Landing's vegetarian offerings. Bill added the fermented soybean paste, one of his favourite flavouring agents. For non-vegetarians, this dish is excellent accompanying a fish, pork or chicken moke.

Ingredients

2 large cloves	garlic, peeled
Equal amount	brown or red shallots, peeled
2 C	rattan shoots, cut into thumb-size pieces
¼ – ½ C	oil
3 T	fermented soybean paste
2 t	stock powder
1 C	water
1 T	fish sauce
3 T	coriander leaves, finely chopped
¼ C	spring onion greens or Chinese chives, finely sliced

Serves four as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. Place the garlic and shallots in a mortar. Pound until smashed and juicily integrated (or use a food processor or blender).
2. Steam the rattan until soft. Remove.
3. Heat a wok and add oil. When the oil is hot, add the garlic/shallot mix. Fry for 3 minutes or until golden and translucent, stirring regularly to prevent burning.
4. Place the steamed rattan in the mortar; pound to break up. Cream slightly.
5. When the garlic/shallot mix has become translucent, add the fermented bean paste. Continue to fry, turning frequently to prevent burning.
6. Add the pounded rattan to the wok. Mix. Sprinkle in the stock powder and add 1 cup water. When the mixture starts to simmer, reduce heat. Continue simmering, stirring occasionally. The dish is ready when its consistency reaches a thick stew.
7. Taste. Add 1 tablespoon of fish sauce (or to taste). Mix in coriander and spring onion greens.
8. Transfer to a bowl and serve.



Green bamboo stew 𑖀𑖃𑖄𑖅 *naw hian*

This richly flavoursome rainy season dish is made with sweet bamboo shoots, ladies' medicine (yanang) leaves, soaked sticky or plain rice, garlic, chilli and lemongrass. Spring onion greens can also be added. It is garnished with coriander, crispy fried puffed rice and fried spring onions or fried, finely sliced shallots. Here, it is made with pork but is just as perfectly delicious without meat.

Ingredients

2 C heaped	shredded, raw bamboo shoots
1 generous handful	<i>yanang</i> leaves (or use 1 cup tinned <i>yanang</i> extract)
1 large handful	pork, minced including fat (optional)
4 T	uncooked plain rice, soaked in water for 1 – 2 hours, and then pounded until it resembles soaked and drained desiccated coconut (yields 5 T)
1 t	salt
5 large cloves	garlic
4 – 5 small	chillies, green with a few turning red; use fewer for a less hot dish
2 stalks	lemongrass, white parts only, finely sliced
2 T	soy sauce
1 t	fish sauce
To finish	
2 T	deep-fried spring onions or shallots (purchased or homemade)
2 T	coriander, chopped (optional)
2 T	dried, cooked sticky rice

Method

1. Fill a bowl with 2 cups of water and soak the *yanang* leaves. Rub the leaves together briskly for about 5 minutes to release the juice, and then discard them. Set the deep green liquid aside for later use.
2. In a mortar, put in the salt, garlic, chillies and lemongrass. Pound together until juicily integrated.
3. In a wok, heat 2 tablespoons of oil and spoon in the pounded mixture. Stir fry until the mixture turns brown with the oil returning. Add the minced pork, stir fry 1 minute and then add the shredded bamboo. Continue to stir fry. Add 1 cup of water and 5 tablespoons of soaked, pounded rice. (Mixing the pounded rice and water together before adding will avoid lumps.) Turn down the heat straight away. Add about 2 tablespoons of soy sauce and mix, simmering on a low heat for 5 minutes.
4. Pour in the *yanang* juice (about 1 cup) until the mixture is quite sloppy. Continue to simmer for a further 5 – 10 minutes.
5. Taste and add more soy sauce (if needed) and the 1 teaspoon of fish sauce (or more to taste).
6. Put in a serving bowl. Top with deep-fried spring onion and chopped coriander (optional).
7. To make the final garnish, put 1 cup of oil in a wok, and then heat to deep-frying temperature. Test the heat by dropping a piece of dried, cooked sticky rice in the oil. If it puffs up and fries a golden brown, the oil is ready. Take a small handful of the dried, cooked rice (making sure the grains are separate). Transfer to a serving spoon, and then sprinkle the rice grains into the oil. Stir to separate the grains as they puff. Fry an even, golden brown. Quickly remove from the oil into a sieve to drain any excess oil. Sprinkle the puffed rice on top of the deep-fried spring onion garnish. Serve promptly.
8. Accompany with sticky or steamed rice and other dishes.



Puréed fish ບົ່ນບາ *poon bpaan nin*

This very Lao Loum dish is easy to prepare. A few simple ingredients are turned into a delicious combination of flavours. In this recipe, farmed freshwater fish, tilapia (*bpaan nin*), is used. The roughly puréed paste of cooked fish and grilled shallots, garlic and chillies is served with rice and lightly boiled vegetables. Both rice and al dente vegetables are used for dipping into the purée. The vegetables suggested here may, of course, be replaced by others, such as blanched cabbage wedges, small bottle gourds, Chinese cabbage, green peppers, beans or carrot sticks.

Ingredients

1 small	tilapia (<i>bpaan nin</i>), 25 cm (10 in) long
2 – 3 C	water
3 T	<i>padek</i>
5	shallots, unpeeled
1 head (10 cloves)	garlic, unpeeled
8	chillies
2 T	coriander, chopped
2 T	spring onions, chopped
	salt or fish sauce to enhance flavour

Accompanying vegetables

4 small	chokos (chayote)
2	snake gourds (or 6 – 8 small courgettes)
1 bunch	galangal shoots

Serves two to four with sticky rice.

Method

1. Put the water and *padek* in a medium pot, and then bring to the boil.
2. Wash the fish inside and out; chop off its tail. Cut the fish in half around its waist and place in the boiling liquid. Simmer for 15 minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.
3. Grill the shallots, garlic cloves and chillies over a gas or charcoal fire until blackened.
4. When cool, remove most of the blackened skins. Leaving on a little will enhance the final flavour. Put these ingredients into a mortar and pound to a coarse paste (or pulse in a small food processor).
5. Remove the fish from the broth, reserving the liquid. Debone and skin the fish, and then add it to the paste. Pound together, adding a few tablespoons of the fish broth until the mixture has the consistency of runny porridge. Taste. Add salt or fish sauce if required.
6. Stir in the chopped coriander and spring onions. Put the finished purée in a serving bowl.

For the vegetables

7. Bring 4 cups of water to the boil.
8. Prepare the vegetables. Peel chokos, halve and core them and then cut each half into quarters, lengthwise. Snap the galangal shoots into 10 cm (4 in) lengths. If using snake gourd, cut it into the same lengths as the shoots. Place all in the water. Simmer until cooked, but still firm.
9. Alternatively, the vegetables may be steamed.
10. Turn all onto a serving dish.





Stir fried dishes ປະເພດຂົ້ວ

bpaphet khoua

- 121 Stir fried fiddlehead fern ຂົ້ວຜັກກູດ *koua pak goot*
- 122 Stir fried bamboo shoots with pork ຂົ້ວຫົ່ມໄມ້ *koua naw mai*
- 123 Stir fried *tsi* mushrooms with pork, egg or chicken ຂົ້ວເຫັດສະມອດ *koua het samawd*
- 124 Stir fried Chinese yellow or white flowering cabbage with pork and its variations
ຂົ້ວຜັກກາດກວາງຕຸ້ງໃສ່ຊີ້ນໝູ *koua pak kaat kuang tung sai sin moo*
- 125 Stir fried cucumber with duck in oyster sauce ຂົ້ວໜາກແຕງ ໃສ່ເປັດແລະນ້ຳມັນຫອຍ
koua mak taeng sai pet leh nam man hoi

Stir fried fiddlehead fern ຂົວຜັກກູດ *koua pak goot*

Fiddlehead fern is plentiful in the rainy season and is delicious as part of a Lao vegetable soop or stir fry. Asparagus has a similar taste so makes a good substitute.

Ingredients

3 C	fiddlehead fern pieces, 10 cm (4 in) lengths from the tip end, washed and drained. The younger and smaller the ferns the better. If using larger ferns, check that the stems are tender. If not, peel them before snapping into smaller pieces.
3 T	oil
2 – 4 small	green and red chillies, not the tiny hot ones
2 T	garlic, chopped
2 T	soy sauce
1½ medium	tomatoes, sliced into eighths
2 T	oyster sauce

Serves two to four as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. Heat the wok and add 3 tablespoons of oil. When hot, add the chopped garlic, moving it continually with a wok spoon. After a minute, add the whole chillies. After another minute, toss in the fern pieces and stir fry. Add the soy sauce. Stir fry for 1 – 2 minutes. Toss in the tomatoes followed by 2 tablespoons of oyster sauce (or to taste).
2. Turn onto a serving plate.

Variation

- For a more substantial dish, add a small amount of sliced pork or tofu after the garlic has become aromatic and before adding the fern.



Stir fried bamboo shoots with pork ຂີ້ວຫນໍ້ໄມ້ *koua naw mai*

In Luang Namtha, crab paste goes with bamboo shoots like a horse goes with a cart. If there is no crab paste, shrimp paste may be substituted. For a fast, less calorific version, substitute pre-cooked pork rinds for the pork skin and use oil for frying instead of pork fat.

Ingredients

1 kg (2 lb)	fresh small bamboo shoots, boiled, or 500 g (1 lb) canned shoots
400 g (14 oz) approx	pork shoulder or similar, prepared as follows: pork fat trimmed from skin and meat, sliced thinly pork skin, palm-size piece, finely sliced lean pork, sliced in 1.5 x 4 cm (1 x 2 in) strips across the grain
1 bundle	rice vermicelli, soaked for a few minutes in boiling water and drained
3 large cloves	garlic, minced roughly
3	green chillies, cut into vertical slivers, including seeds (about 6 slivers per chilli)
1 T	field crab paste (or substitute 2 teaspoons of shrimp paste)
5 small or 3 large	kaffir lime leaves, torn in half or thirds
2 T	fish sauce
2 T	soy sauce
2 T	oyster sauce
1 t	sugar
To finish	coriander (small bunch, no roots) and spring onion greens (a small handful)

COOK'S NOTES

Prior to the early '90s, Thai condiments, such as oyster sauce, were not available in Laos. Cooks stir fried with rendered pork fat seasoned with salt and local spices.

Method

1. To prepare each fresh bamboo shoot, cut off the top third, halve the remaining shoot vertically and slice each half into pieces approx 1 x 4 cm x 2 mm (1 x 2 x ¼ in).
2. Heat a wok on high, add pork fat and pork skin and fry until the pork skin is crisp and brown and the pork fat has rendered down. Remove the pork skin to a bowl and set aside (or substitute with market-bought pork rinds).
3. Add minced garlic to the rendered fat in the wok (add 3 tablespoons of oil if not using pork fat). When the garlic turns golden, add the chilli slivers, crab paste and then the sliced pork. Stir fry briefly. Add lime leaves followed by the sliced bamboo shoots, sliced pork skin, 1 tablespoon each of fish sauce, soy sauce, and oyster sauce and 1 teaspoon of sugar.
4. Continue to stir fry for 4 minutes or until the bamboo shoots and pork are cooked.
5. Add drained rice vermicelli and pre-made pork rinds if using. Toss lightly to mix and heat through. Taste and adjust soy sauce.
6. Hold over the wok one small bunch of coriander leaves and a handful of spring onion greens, cut into 3 cm (1 in) lengths into the wok, mix together and serve.



Stir fried *tsi* mushrooms with pork, egg or chicken ຂົວເຫັນສະມອນ *koua het samaw*

This is another rainy season dish which makes the most of field and forest mushrooms. Locals gather these tiny mushrooms and either eat them or dry them to sell in the market. Try this recipe with any small dried or fresh mushrooms.

Ingredients

2 – 3 C	rehydrated dried <i>tsi</i> mushrooms (<i>het samawd</i>), soaked for 10 minutes in water with ½ teaspoon of salt
½ t	salt
4 large cloves	garlic
4 small	red shallots, peeled (equal volume to garlic)
10 small	green chillies
2 stalks	lemongrass, finely sliced stalks only
½ C	oil
1	egg (or 1 small handful of minced pork or chicken)
¾ C	spring onion greens, chopped
¾ C	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), leaves and flower heads plucked from stem and finely chopped just before using
3 T	fish sauce (or to taste)

Serves two to six depending on the number of accompanying dishes.

Method

1. Put the salt in a small mortar, followed by the garlic, shallots and chillies. Pound for a few minutes. Incorporate the lemongrass and continue to pound until everything is broken down and well mixed.
2. Heat the oil in a wok until hot. Add the pounded mixture. Stir fry for about 3 minutes until the garlic and shallots turn translucent.
3. If using minced pork or chicken, add and stir fry until the meat changes colour.
4. Add the drained mushrooms and 2 tablespoons of fish sauce, stirring to mix the ingredients. Stir fry for a further 2 minutes.
5. If using an egg, break it into a small bowl, whisk briefly and toss into the wok, stir frying to mix ingredients.
6. Add the chopped herbs and stir fry, occasionally flattening the mixture with the back of the wok spoon and turning in the mixture from the outside of the wok into its centre. Taste and add more fish sauce if needed. Toss with the wok spoon until quite dry.
7. Transfer to a plate and serve with accompanying dishes.



Stir fried Chinese yellow or white flowering cabbage with pork and its variations

ຂົວ ຜັກກາດກວາງຕຸ້ງໃສ່ຊີ້ນໝູ *koua pak kaat kuang tung sai sin moo*

This is a basic stir fried vegetable dish cooked Luang Namtha-style. Any leafy or vine-grown vegetable, sliced pumpkin or gourd may be cooked with any meat. Traditionally, only one vegetable is cooked with one meat.

Ingredients

½ C	oil
1 small head	garlic, cloves peeled and chopped (or 5 large cloves of garlic)
150 g (5 oz)	pork, sliced across the grain (1 cup loosely filled)
1 T	soy sauce (or more to taste)
1 T	fish sauce (or more to taste)
1 large bunch (300 g/10 oz)	Chinese yellow flowering cabbage (<i>choi sum</i> , Chinese), washed and trimmed then roughly chopped into pieces up to 8 cm (3 in) long
1 T	oyster sauce

Serves up to ten people, three small serving plates, as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. Heat the oil in a hot wok. Toss in the chopped garlic, swirling with a wok spoon for a few seconds. Add the pork, stir frying to mix and to sear the meat evenly.
2. Add 1 tablespoon each of soy sauce and fish sauce and continue to stir fry for a minute.
3. Toss in the prepared cabbage, stir frying for a minute to mix the flavours.
4. Cover the wok and let fry-steam for about 2 minutes. Taste and adjust flavourings. Add the oyster sauce and fry-steam for another minute. Greens should glisten brightly, while the stems should remain crisp. Add stock or water if more sauce is desired.
5. Put on small serving plates as part of a Lao meal.

COOK'S NOTES

Cooking times will vary depending on the chief ingredients. Stock or water is added if the vegetable does not naturally give up sufficient liquid to create a moist dish. The meat is more for flavouring than a main feature. This recipe uses oyster sauce which is commonly used in larger towns in Laos. In villages, salt and/or MSG would be used instead. Because soy and fish sauces vary in saltiness, put in the indicated amount of each sauce. Adjust quantities later to suit your taste.

Variations

- For a spicier dish, add a few whole fresh chillies or some chopped or shredded chilli just before the meat.
- Chicken, duck or turkey may be substituted for the pork. Yes, turkeys are not uncommon in Luang Namtha!
- Suggested vegetables:
 - Chinese cabbage (*bok choy*, Chinese; *pak kat kao*, Lao)
 - snow peas
 - green beans or yard-long beans
 - Chinese broccoli or collard greens
 - cucumber or edible gourd
 - pumpkin
 - Chinese mustard greens
 - morning glory (*pak bong*)
 - mixed vegetables
- Suggested herbs and roots for flavouring:
 - ginger (slice and stir fry in the oil for 10 seconds, and then remove. Alternatively, finely shred and add after the meat.)
 - Vietnamese balm (add 1 small handful of leaves at the end)
 - holy basil *kapow* (add a small handful of leaves at the end)



Stir fried cucumber with duck in oyster sauce ຂົ້ວໝາກແຕງ ໃສ່ເປັດແລະນໍ້າມັນຫອຍ *koua mak taeng sai pet leh nam man hoi*

Half the recipe would be enough for four people if served as one of two main dishes along with rice for a simple, easy meal. Chicken, turkey or pork is a fine substitute for duck.

Ingredients

5 medium	cucumbers or 2 telegraph cucumbers, washed (choose young ones with thin, edible skin and small seed core if possible)
½ breast	duck with skin (or equivalent in thigh meat and skin)
1 T	garlic, chopped
2 T	fish sauce
2 T	thin soy sauce
1 T	chicken stock powder (optional)
3 T	oyster sauce
½ t	sugar
1 t	chilli paste to taste (optional)
¼ C	spring onion greens, finely sliced

Serves six to eight as part of a Lao family meal.



Method

1. Separate the duck skin from the flesh, reserving fat. Slice the fat into 1 cm (½ in) pieces and the skin into 2 cm (1 in) slices. Set aside. Slice the duck meat finely across the grain. Set aside.
2. Toss the chopped fat and skin into a heated wok set over a medium flame. Allow the fat to render down and the skin to fry until golden brown and crisp. At this stage (there will be a change in the frying sound and a fragrance released), push the crisp skin to one side. While the skin and fat are cooking, prepare the cucumbers.
3. Peel the cucumbers if the skin is tough and bitter; cucumber is used in this dish to impart sweetness. Slice them in thin diagonal wedges, creating slices that taper off about two-thirds of the way through the cucumber. See *soi* slicing technique, page 64.
4. Add the chopped garlic to the rendered fat and then the meat. Stir fry several minutes until the colour changes. Add the crisp duck skin and then the cucumber. Mix together and stir fry until all is heated through and starting to cook. Add the fish sauce, soy sauce, stock powder, oyster sauce, optional chilli paste and sugar, briefly stirring between each addition to distribute the flavours evenly and merge them together. Cover and let cook for a few more minutes. The moisture from the cucumbers should be released to form a tasty sauce with the other flavourings, but the vegetable must not be overcooked. It should remain crisp.
5. Taste for flavour and adjust. Stir in the spring onion greens. Transfer to a serving bowl.

Variations

- For a low saturated fat dish, substitute the duck fat and skin with any oil other than olive. However, using the rendered fat and skin adds a silky richness and depth to the dish.
- For a vegetarian alternative, use oil and substitute tofu for the meat or add a second vegetable to replace the meat. Vegetables might include a mix of Savoy cabbage and Chinese yellow flowering cabbage.
- If cooking this dish with pork, consider adding pork fat and skin.



Stuffed, steamed, grilled & fried dishes

ປະເພດ ອົວ ຫົ່ງ ປິ້ງ ຈິ່ນ

bpaphet oua neung ping jeun





- 128 Stuffed sweet chilli peppers with pork ອົວຫມາກເຜັດໃສ່ຊີ້ນໝູ
oua mak pet sai sin moo
- 129 Stuffed bamboo shoots ອົວໜໍ່ຫົກ *oua naw hoke*
- 130 Grilled taro leaf parcels ແອບບອນ *aeb bawn*
- 132 Lao vegetable soup ຊູບຜັກ *soop pak*
- 133 Fish moke ໝົກປາ *moke bpa*
- 134 Fried pork ຈີນຊີ້ນໝູ *jeun sin moo*
- 134 Roasted (grilled) pork ປີ້ງຊີ້ນໝູ *ping sin moo*
- 135 *Tsi* mushrooms steamed in banana leaves ຫໍ່ໜຶ້ງເຫັດສະມອດ *haw neung het samawd*
- 136 Fried, crispy f sh with garlic ຈີນ ປາໃສ່ຜັກທຽມ *jeun bpa sai pak tiam*
- 137 Fried rock algae (river weed) chips ໄຄ່ແຜ່ນຈີນ *kai paen jeun*

Stuffed sweet chilli peppers with pork ອົວຫມາກເຜັດໃສ່ຊີ້ນໜູ *oua mak pet sai sin moo*

Ingredients

10 – 12	pale green sweet chillies (<i>mak pet nyai</i>)
200 g (7 oz/ ¾ C)	minced pork
1 layer	glass noodles (bean threads), soaked in cold water for 10 minutes; this will yield 1 cup of soft noodles
3 T	thin soy sauce
1 t	chicken stock powder
½ – 1 t	ground black pepper (to suit taste)
½ t	salt
2	eggs
¾ C	spring onion, finely chopped

Serves four with one other dish; serves twelve as part of a feast. Halve quantities if serving four to six people with a variety of dishes.

Method

1. Wash the peppers and soak them in water for a few minutes.
2. Slit the peppers along one side and seed. Wear gloves if the peppers are hot.
3. Drain the glass noodles and cut into 5 cm (2 in) lengths.
4. In a bowl, put the minced pork, cut noodles, soy sauce, stock powder, pepper, salt and eggs. Mix together well. Add the chopped spring onions; mix uniformly. The mixture will be quite sloppy. Let the mixture rest for a few minutes to firm.
5. Stuff each pepper with some of the mixture. Wipe the peppers clean. Use scissors to snip off unruly noodle threads for a neatly stuffed look.
6. Place the stuffed peppers in a steamer (lined with banana leaves if possible). Steam, covered, over a pot one-third full of boiling water until ready (about 25 – 30 minutes). Make sure the water does not boil dry and that the steamer does not touch the water.
7. Remove stuffed peppers from the steamer; cut into 2 cm (1 in) slices. Arrange on a serving platter.

Suggestions for accompaniments

This dish goes well with a simple Chinese greens soup, sticky rice and *nam phik ong* or other tomato-based *jeow*.

Variations

- **Stuffed sweet chilli peppers with tofu ອົວຫມາກເຜັດໃສ່ເຕົ້າຮູ້ *oua mak pet sai towhu***
Peppers may be stuffed with tofu instead of pork. When using tofu, treat it as described in the recipe for *lahp* tofu (page 152). Substitute 1 teaspoon of salt for the chicken stock powder used above. Minced beef or chicken can also be used.
- Other vegetables such as bell peppers, bamboo shoots, cucumbers or tomatoes can be stuffed with the mixture. For bamboo shoots, omit the eggs.
- Use soaked, raw sticky rice that is then pounded instead of glass noodles. With this substitution, allow room for expansion of the filling.
- Use rice vermicelli noodles instead of glass noodles.



Stuffed bamboo shoots ອົວຫໍ່ຫົກ *oua naw hoke*

Simmered, fibrous bamboo shoots, such as *naw hoke* (*Dendrocalamus Hamiltonii*), may be split and stuffed with minced pork or tofu and flavoured with garlic, spring onions, chilli, lemongrass and ginger leaves. This is a great picnic dish.

Ingredients

10	bamboo shoots, cooked
1 large handful	pork, minced with fat
1 t	salt
2 – 3 large cloves	garlic, peeled
5 small	red shallots, peeled
8 small	chillies (green with a few turning red); use less for a milder dish
2 stalks	lemongrass, white parts only, finely sliced
2 – 3 stems	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), leaves only
1 bunch	spring onions greens, finger-width
4	ginger leaves (or 2 teaspoons of chopped ginger)
Additional 1 t	salt
½ – 1 t	sugar
1 – 2 T	fish sauce
	oil for frying

Serves six to ten as part of a Lao meal or picnic.

Method

1. Wash the leafy herbs. Set aside to be sliced later.
2. Cut open a bamboo shoot down one side and lay it as flat as possible. Using a toothpick, finely score one side in parallel strokes to flatten and widen the shoot as much as possible without cutting through. Turn the shoot over and score the other side. The goal is to have the shoot be evenly thinned and spread without its falling apart. This will ensure that it can hold the stuffing and will fry through evenly.
3. In a mortar, put 1 teaspoon of salt, garlic, shallots and chillies. Add the lemongrass. Pound the ingredients together for about 5 minutes.
4. Finely slice the basil leaves with the spring onion greens. Remove the stems from the ginger leaves. Slice finely. Add the herbs to the mortar, and then pound for a further few minutes.
5. Add the pork to the mixture, together with an additional 1 teaspoon of salt, sugar and fish sauce. Pound to mix, using a spoon to ensure that the mixture is turned into the centre of the mortar.
6. Take a teased bamboo shoot and lay it flat, inside up. Place 3 tablespoons of the mixture on the lower part of the bamboo shoot. Spread the mix evenly. Fold the top of the shoot over, so the filling is completely covered. Tie the shoot with a piece of fine, split bamboo or string. Set aside on a plate. Repeat for all the shoots.
7. Heat the wok or deep frying pan and add oil to cover the bottom generously. When hot, add 3 – 5 bamboo shoots. Cover and fry for 5 – 6 minutes. Gently turn over. Recover, frying on the other side for 7 – 8 minutes until cooked through and golden brown. Transfer to a serving plate. Do this for all the bamboo shoots.
8. If not using for a picnic meal, serve with sticky or steamed rice, a soup/*gaeng*, steamed vegetables and a *jeow*. Crab paste *jeow* is particularly good with bamboo.



Grilled taro leaf parcels ຄອູູອູ ເອບ ບາວນ

This delicious dish is often looked down upon in Laos. It is tainted with intimations of poverty as it is usually prepared when the yearly rice supplies have run out. However, because it is so good, it is worth cooking on any occasion. It is made from taro leaves, rattan and fresh herbs. These are barbecued in banana leaf packets.

Ingredients

1 bundle	young taro leaves (stems should fit within a hand-grasp; preferably use leaves that are about 12 cm [5 in] wide with 1 cm [$\frac{1}{2}$ in] stems)
2 sticks	fresh rattan (or a 400 g bottle of preserved rattan, drained)
1 t	lime juice, for the bottled rattan
4 – 6 T	vegetable oil
300 g (9 oz)	pork, minced (optional)
1 small head	garlic, top cut off, and cloves peeled
1½ times volume of garlic	brown or red shallots, cloves topped, tailed and peeled
½ t	salt or 1 teaspoon of fish sauce
¼ C	liquid stock (or ½ teaspoon of stock powder)
2	green or yellowing chillies
1 small bunch	spring onion greens, finely chopped
3 large stems	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), finely chopped
4 large stems	dill, finely chopped
For wrapping	4 pieces of banana leaf or tinfoil, 35 x 25 cm (14 in x 10 in)

Serves four to six as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. Wash the taro leaves and stems. Cut into 12 cm (5 in) pieces and place in a steamer.
2. Prepare the rattan. If using fresh rattan, strip the outside cane until the soft, inner core is exposed. Cut into 10 cm (4 in) lengths. If using bottled rattan, drain and soak the rattan for half an hour in cold water to which a squeeze of lime juice has been added.
3. Add the rattan to the steamer and cook over boiling water for 25 minutes.
4. Briefly pound the garlic, shallots and chillies with a pestle and mortar.
5. Heat the oil in a wok, add the pounded ingredients and stir fry until softened. If using pork, add it, along with the salt (or fish sauce) and the stock powder, if

using powder instead of liquid stock. Fry until the meat changes colour and its juice is released. Add the liquid stock if using. Simmer briefly until the liquid is reduced to a coating sauce.

6. When the taro leaves and stems are ready, drain them, squeezing out any moisture. Transfer the taro and rattan to a mortar. Pound to a slushy pulp (or process in a bowl with a potato masher).
7. Add the fried ingredients to the pulp. Mash together for a minute with the pestle or potato masher.
8. Stir in the chopped onion greens, basil and dill.
9. Taste. Adjust seasoning, possibly adding more fish sauce.

To make the packets for grilling

10. Hold each banana leaf piece over a low fire or heat element to soften and make pliable.
11. With the short side facing you, spread 1½ cups of mixture in a small square in the bottom half of a leaf portion, keeping the bottom quarter mixture-free and allowing room for the leaf piece to be turned in 8 cm (3 in) on each side. Fold the bottom quarter of the leaf piece over the top of the mixture; fold the sides in. Complete the packet by folding over the leaf piece twice more and securing with a toothpick.
12. Place the packet over barbecue embers or under a grill for 20 minutes, turning occasionally.
13. To serve, remove each packet to a plate, open and cut away any banana leaf overhanging the plate. The ingredients will have thickened and should retain their packet shape.

Variations

- For a Western taste with more accessible ingredients, use steamed spinach or Swiss chard to replace the taro.
- Try cooked potato or taro root as a replacement for the rattan.

Opposite: Mae making *aeb bawn* for the family



Lao vegetable *soop* ຊຸບຜັກ *soop pak*

A *soop* resembles either a cooked vegetable salad or a thick, herby stew. This dish is more a salad. It can be made with a wide variety of steamed or lightly boiled vegetables. In fact, the sesame seeds are the only essential ingredient. Everything else may be varied. The Boat Landing Restaurant has found that guests greatly prefer a strong sesame flavour.

Ingredients

1 C	Chinese cabbage, cut in small, loose leaf pieces 7 cm (2 – 3in)
1 C	cauliflower flowerets (or other white vegetable)
3 fingers	bamboo shoots, pre-cooked, finely sliced (optional)
3	long beans, cut into 4 cm (1½ in) pieces
1 bunch	sawtooth herb, three fingers-width, tailed and cut in half
½ – 1 C	collard greens (or <i>bok choy</i>), cut in 4 cm (1½ in) pieces
2 – 3 stems	dill, cut into 4 cm (1½ in) lengths
2 very large or 4 medium	oyster mushrooms, torn in 1 – 2 cm (½ in) wide shreds
1 large bowlful	water with 1 teaspoon of salt for refreshing vegetables
½ large head	garlic, strung on toothpicks or satay sticks for grilling
3 or more	red chillies (amount to taste or omit), strung on toothpicks for grilling
2 thin slices	galangal or ginger
2 T to ½ C	sesame seeds, dry roasted. A mixture of white and black seeds is desirable, although white alone is fine.
2 T	soy sauce, <i>padek</i> or fish sauce (or to taste)
8 C	water

Serves four to six as part of a Lao meal.

COOK'S NOTES

A particularly delicious *soop pak* is made in the rainy season with long beans, cassava flowers and very young fiddlehead ferns. Julienne heart of coconut tree also works well. For an authentic flavour, aim for a background hint of sesame and galangal (or ginger) balanced toward a slightly bitter taste. Be light with the *padek* or fish sauce. Also, experiment by increasing the amount of sesame seeds.

Method

1. Prepare the vegetables as described, placing the readied ones in a large bowl. Add water and 1 teaspoon of salt. Rinse vegetables in the brine, picking off any wilting pieces. Let soak briefly.
2. Put fresh water into the bottom of a steamer or a sticky rice pot and bring to the boil.
3. Toast the sesame seeds. Place in a mortar. Pound until most of the seeds are broken. Remove and set aside.
4. When the water comes to the boil, tip the vegetables into the steamer, allow them to drain and then place the steamer over the boiling water. Steam for 10 – 15 minutes depending on preferred crispness.
5. Roast the garlic and chillies. Cool. Remove their charred skins. Add the peeled garlic, chillies and galangal/ ginger to the mortar. Pound until a paste forms. Adding a dash of salt helps the blending.
6. When the vegetables are ready, toss them briefly in the steamer to expel the steam. Invert the steamer over a low-sided, wide bowl. Let the vegetables cool. Sprinkle them with the pounded sesame seeds and the pounded galangal/ginger and garlic paste. Add 2 tablespoons of soy sauce. Gently use your hands to mix the ingredients together well. Taste and adjust with sauce if needed.
7. Turn into a serving bowl, garnish with coriander and serve as part of a Lao meal. This dish goes well with sticky rice or can be used as a picnic dish.



Fish *moke* ຫມົກບາ *moke bpa*

This type of *haw* is widely cooked in Laos and Thailand, although ingredients can differ. *Haw* describes any preparation involving a stuffing steamed or grilled in a banana leaf wrapping. In this recipe, the stuffing utilizes catfish which has a firm flesh that holds its shape well when cooked. Lemongrass and basil leaves provide fragrance.

Ingredients

1 500 –750 g (1 – 1½ lb)	catfish (or similar firm-fleshed fish)
2 stalks	lemongrass, white parts only, finely sliced
1	chilli
1 large clove	garlic
1 t	salt
½ t	chicken stock powder
2 T	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), leaves only
2 T	dill
1 T	uncooked sticky rice soaked until soft, then pounded to a pulp in a mortar; alternatively 1 tablespoon of ground, roasted sticky rice
1 T	fish sauce
For 2 – 4 packets	banana leaf cut into 4 – 8 rectangles 25 x 30 cm (10 x 12 in) and soaked in hot water until pliable

Serves four to six as part of a Lao meal, two to four with only sticky rice.

Method

1. Cut the fish flesh into chunks 2 x 4 cm (1 x 1½ in).
2. Put the sliced lemongrass, chilli and garlic in a mortar together with the salt and stock powder.
3. Pound the ingredients with a pestle until they are broken down and stick together juicily (or use a blender or food processor).
4. Finely chop the dill leaves and add to the mortar. Pound until the ingredients form a rough paste. Mix in the basil leaves.
5. Transfer the paste to a larger bowl, and then toss the chunks of fish into the paste. Mix together with a spoon until the fish is well-coated.
6. Add the ground sticky rice and 1 tablespoon of fish sauce. For an authentic, family-style *moke bpa*, incorporate the chopped fish head, trimmed tail and fin wings. Mix all well. If using the extra fish bits, add more finely sliced green herbs, another tablespoon each of ground rice and fish sauce and another ½ teaspoon of stock powder.

7. Assemble the *haw* as described on page 66.
8. Alternatively, arrange the two pieces of banana leaf to form an X. Spoon a cup of the mixture into the middle at the cross. Gather the banana leaf ends together at the top and tie with string. Repeat, using all the mixture and leaf.
9. Steam the packets for 25 – 30 minutes.
10. Remove the packets from the steamer and open them up, one per plate. Trim the banana leaves of any overhang. Serve with sticky rice.

Variations

- *Moke* can be made with small, succulent boneless pieces of pork, duck, turkey or chicken. Omit the dill with these meats, using instead pounded shallots or finely chopped Chinese chives. Sprinkle the filling mixture with water to keep it moist.
- The stuffed banana leaf packets may be either steamed or grilled.



Fried pork ຈີນຊີ້ນໜູ *jeun sin moo*

Ingredients

1 kg (2 lb)	pork ribs or pork belly
2 t each	salt and pepper (more with a larger amount of meat)
2 t	prickly ash berries (<i>mak ken</i>), ground (optional; or Sichuan pepper, optional)
2 C	oil
To f nish	prepared sweet chilli sauce

Method

1. Partially slice the meat between each rib without cutting all the way through. Chop ribs into hand-width lengths; slice the pork belly into wide fingers.
2. Rub meat with salt and pepper. Additionally, rub in the *mak ken* if using. Let the meat rest so the flavours can develop.
3. In a wok or deep frying pan, heat 2 cups oil until it stops spitting. Add the pork pieces and shallow fry, turning them occasionally until the meat is juicily tender on the inside and crisp on the outside (about 5 minutes).
4. Remove the pork and drain on paper towels. Serve with a small dish containing bottled sweet chilli sauce or prickly ash berry *jeow*, page 88.

Variations

- Dry fry the salt, pepper and optional ground *mak ken* or Sichuan pepper before rubbing the seasonings into the meat.
- Fry the meat for an initial 5 minutes, remove and drain. Return to the oil for 1 minute of further cooking. This creates darker and crisper meat.



Roasted (grilled) pork ປັງຊີ້ນໜູ *ping sin moo*

Ingredients

1 kg (2 lb)	pork rib strips, 10 cm (4 in) long
1 head	garlic, peeled and crushed
	salt, to taste
To f nish	lettuce
	cucumber and tomato slices
	prepared sweet chilli sauce

Method

1. Rub the pork strips with crushed garlic and salt. Let the meat rest for several hours if possible.
2. Slowly barbecue or grill the pork over a low charcoal fire, turning occasionally for 45 minutes – 1 hour until cooked. Alternatively, roast in an oven on fan grill at 190° C (375° F) for up to 45 minutes, turning occasionally.
3. Chop the ribs into individual pieces. Serve with a prepared sweet chilli sauce presented in a small dish. Garnish the serving plate with lettuce, slices of cucumber and tomato.



Tsi mushrooms steamed in banana leaves ຫໍ່ຫໍ່ນົງເຫັດສະມອດ *haw neung het samawd*

With the rains come myriads of mushrooms. The Akha collect and sell them in the Namtha Valley. One of the most popular is the tsi mushroom or ahum tsi in Akha or het samawd in Lao. For this preparation, the mushrooms are steamed in a banana leaf with soaked sticky rice, shallots, garlic, chilli, spring onion greens and Lao basil.

Ingredients

2 C	dried <i>tsi</i> mushrooms, that have been soaked for 10 minutes, then drained and squeezed dry
1½ T	raw sticky rice, soaked in water for 20 minutes minimum, then drained
1½ t	salt
4 large cloves	garlic
8	green chillies (a mix of light green and red); use less if preferred
4	red shallots
2 stalks	lemongrass, finely sliced
2 leafy stems	basil (<i>pak i tou Lao</i>), leaves and flower heads; removed finely chop both to create a large handful
1 large handful	spring onion greens, sliced finely (1 cup loosely packed)
½ C	pork, minced finely (optional)
2 T	thin soy sauce
4 pieces, 30 cm (12 in) square	banana leaf for wrapping

Method

1. In a mortar, put 1½ teaspoons of salt, the garlic, chillies, shallots and finely sliced lemongrass. Pound with a pestle for 2 minutes. Add the soaked rice and pound for a further 3 minutes. When well-integrated, add a handful each of chopped basil, spring onions and any other herbs being used. Add the minced pork and pound for 2 minutes. Add the drained, soaked mushrooms. Pound another 3 minutes (a total of 10 minutes). Add the soy sauce. Pound to mix in evenly and taste the mixture for saltiness. Add more salt or soy sauce, if needed, and mix in.
2. Make two *haw* by following the instructions on page 66. Alternatively, simply gather the banana leaf ends together and tie them with a string.
3. Cook the packets in a covered steamer over boiling water for 30 minutes.
4. Remove the packets from the steamer, open them on individual plates and trim the banana leaf wrappers to fit the shape of the plates. Serve with sticky rice.

Variation

- Ginger leaves and dill may also be added.



Fried, crispy fish with garlic ຈີນ ປາໃສ່ຜັກທຽມ *jeun bpaai sai pak tiam*

Although this fish is shallow fried, it is not oily. Rather, the oil is essential to create the recipe's distinctive crispiness.

Ingredients

1 25 cm (10 in)	tilapia or other whole fish, cleaned, rinsed and dried
6 cloves	garlic, peeled
2 t	salt (or chicken stock powder)
1 T	flour (optional)
1 C	vegetable oil
	coriander sprigs for garnish

Serves several, if accompanied with additional dishes, as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. Make diagonal slashes 2 cm (1 in) apart along both sides of the fish. Cut through the skin, but not into the flesh.
2. Smash the garlic with the flat side of a knife blade.
3. Sprinkle the fish with the salt (or chicken stock powder) and rub the garlic on both sides of the fish. Set the garlic aside. Lightly dust the fish with flour. Let the fish and seasonings rest for a few minutes to allow the flavours to penetrate.
4. Heat the oil in a frying pan. Test the heat of the oil by dropping in a garlic clove. If it sizzles, the oil is hot enough for the fish to be added. Add the remainder of the garlic cloves to the pan. Place the fish carefully in the oil. Wait 30 seconds. Gently move the fish about in the pan for 10 – 15 seconds so that it cooks on the bottom without sticking. After 4 minutes, flip the fish. Again, after 30 – 60 seconds, move the fish in the pan. Remove the garlic from the oil. After another 4 minutes, or when the fish has become crispy, remove it to drain on paper towels. Place it on a serving plate and garnish with coriander and the fried garlic.
5. Accompany with rice.

Variations

- Stuff the fish with a smashed stalk of lemongrass.
- Use a bigger fish with head and gills removed; allow a longer cooking time.



Fried rock algae (river weed) chips ໄອ່ແຜ່ນຈີນ *kai paen jeun*

Between January and March, when the river runs cool and clean in Luang Namtha, light green river weed appears on its rocks, growing to between 50 and 200 cm (20 – 80 in) long. This ‘weed’ is actually algae. The local people collect, wash and then spread the algae in thin sheets on large woven bamboo or mesh trays to dry. A mixture of boiled tamarind water, salt and seasoning powder is prepared to enhance the algae’s flavour. *Kai paen* made in Luang Namtha province is distinctive for the ginger root juice which is added to the mix. The flavouring liquid is carefully brushed over the sheets. Next, spices, including sesame seeds and ground galangal and pieces of tomato, onion and garlic, are scattered on the algae. As they dry in the sun for a day or two, the sheets absorb the various flavours. Once dry, the sheets can be stored for a long time if kept in the open air.

To prepare for eating, the sheets are cut into pieces which are fried or crushed first and then lightly fried. The latter is eaten with sticky rice for breakfast.

The Boat Landing prepares algae by flash frying. The secret is to cook the pieces very quickly—in and out.

1. Cut the dry river weed sheets into 7 x 14 cm (3 x 6 in) pieces. Fold each piece in half and secure with half a toothpick.
2. Heat a small amount of vegetable oil in a frying pan. When the oil is hot, add several pieces. Immediately flip each one, frying for only 3 – 5 seconds per side. Longer cooking will turn the weed bitter, and it will burn.
3. Serve with sticky rice or *aw lahm*, page 108. Fried river weed is also very popular as a beer snack.





Salads, yams and light dishes

ປະເພດ ຍ່າ ຊຸບຜັກ ຕ່ຳສົ້ມ

bpaphet yam, soop pak, tam som



- 140 Watercress salad, northern-style ຍ່າ ຜັກສະຫຼັດ ຫຼວງພະບາງ
yam pak salat Louang Phabang
- 141 Lao green papaya salad ຕ່າ ໝາກຮຸ່ງ *tam mak hoong*
- 142 Steamed green beans with sawtooth herb and either ginger or sesame seeds
ຊຸບໝາກຖົ່ວຍາວ *soop mak tua nyaow*
- 143 Lao omelette ໄຂ່ຈີນ *kai jeun*
- 144 Omelette with acacia fronds ໄຂ່ຈີນໃສ່ຜັກລະ *kai jeun sai pak la*
- 145 Rice noodles with spicy broth ເຂົ້າຂປູນ *kao poon*

Watercress salad, northern-style ຍ່າ ຜັກສະຫຼັດ ຫຼວງພະບາງ *yam pak salat Louang Phabang*

Watercress salads are synonymous with Luang Prabang. There are many variations. Some are very oily; some are very sweet. The dressing here uses a reduced amount of oil. It has an excellent balance between sweet, sour and salty effects and is redolent of cooked garlic. The egg yolk enriches and thickens the dressing which contrasts brilliantly with the cress' bitterness. This recipe is heavily influenced by Luang Prabang's French colonial period. It is not traditional fare, but it is occasionally served at weddings and on other celebratory occasions in Luang Namtha.

Ingredients

Salad

1 large bunch	watercress (or 1 cup Chinese or regular celery leaves or 1 cup rocket)
4	eggs, hard-boiled, whites only; reserve the yolks for the dressing
2 C	mesclun using whatever greens are available
½ C	coriander leaves
½ C	mint leaves
1	cucumber, peeled and sliced
10	cherry tomatoes or 2 medium tomatoes

Dressing

⅓ C	light oil
4 T	garlic, chopped
4	egg yolks, chopped
3 T	sugar
2 T	fish sauce
2 T	soy sauce
4 T	lime juice

To finish

¼ C	dry-fried peanuts, chopped
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Method

1. Heat a wok or pan and dry fry the peanuts. Set the nuts aside to cool. When cool, chop.
2. Heat the oil on a medium heat. Add the chopped garlic and fry until golden brown, stirring frequently so it does not burn (about 2 minutes).
3. While the garlic is frying, mix together the chopped egg yolks, sugar, fish sauce and soy sauce in a deep bowl or screw-top jar. When the garlic is ready, remove it from the heat and cool. Add the garlic and its cooking oil to the mixture.

Whisk or shake to blend well.

4. Add the lime juice and mix. Taste and adjust the sugar and lime juice.
5. Wash the watercress thoroughly in clean water; drain and discard any thick stems. Cut cherry tomatoes in halves. If using larger tomatoes, cut into wedges about 1 cm (½ in) thick at the widest part.
6. Assemble the salad on a large, flat plate or in a bowl by forming a bed of watercress which is topped with the other herbs and leaves, tomatoes and sliced egg whites in a nice pattern. Drizzle the dressing over the salad and sprinkle the chopped peanuts over the whole. Serve the salad immediately, as it will quickly wilt.

Variations

- For a sweeter version, reduce the lime juice; for a sourer version, increase the lime juice. Do not reduce the sugar amount. Equal or other sugar substitute may be used as a replacement sweetener.
- The number of eggs can be reduced to 2 or 3. The dressing will be thinner.
- Save any remaining dressing in a screw-top jar and refrigerate for later use.



Lao green papaya salad ຕຳ ທາກຮຸ່ງ *tam mak hoong*

This salad (called *tam mak hoong* or *tam mak hung* in Laos and *som tam* in Thailand) can be eaten either as a snack, often with pork rinds, or as part of a meal. Here is a basic recipe. Use it as a guide, but please don't be restricted to it. How *tam mak hoong* is prepared is highly personal. Emphasize the flavours you prefer. Some people like it sweet/sour with only fish sauce being used. Many Lao like it searingly hot and pungent, echoing the amount of chilli and *padek* used. Street vendors selling the salad usually use MSG. As each salad is made to order, it is easy to request MSG not be used. Luang Namtha papaya salad is made with crab paste, a locally made flavouring, which adds a very pungent note. Crab paste may be left out or use shrimp paste, *kapi*.

Ingredients

½	a papaya, green and unripe; a freshly picked one is best
2 large cloves	garlic, peeled
3 medium	green chillies; adjust the number of chillies and their colour to control the heat
1 t	salt
1½ T	sugar
½ t	crab paste or shrimp paste (optional)
1	apple eggplant, either a green or yellow one, cut into eighths just before using
½ medium	tomato, sliced into 4 wedges or several halved cherry tomatoes
¼ C	<i>padek</i> to taste (or 1 teaspoon – 3 tablespoons fish sauce)
2 large or 3 small	limes, cut in thirds and seeded

Serves two to four as part of a Lao meal.



Method

1. Peel one side of the green papaya with a vegetable peeler. With a flat-bladed knife such as a cleaver, chop a series of parallel cuts vertically into the flesh, as finely as possible. This will be easiest to do cradling the fruit in one hand while chopping with the other. Horizontally shave off the cut pieces using the knife. Repeat this, creating a heaped dessert plate of fine, long papaya slivers. Set aside. Alternatively, use a potato peeler, mandolin, lemon zester or microplane. Don't shave through into the seed cavity.
2. Put the salt, sugar, crab paste, wedges of eggplant and peeled garlic into a mortar and pound until mixed together in a juicy mass (1 – 2 minutes). Add the *padek* (or fish sauce) and squeeze in the lime juice. Briefly stir together, and then add the slivers of papaya and the tomato wedges. Pound all the ingredients together, turning the mixture in on itself with a spoon at the same time so that everything is thoroughly mixed together. The papaya should be bruised but not pulped, so it releases its taste and can be penetrated with the flavours of the other ingredients.
3. Sample the mixture and adjust its flavour with sugar or more lime or fish sauce/*padek*.
4. Serve on a flat plate with a mix of any of the following: sticky rice, lettuce, cabbage or other salad greens, dried beef or pork rinds.

Variations

- This recipe is the basis for many gently pounded salads. Instead of using papaya, try shredded carrot, jicama, shredded green mango, santol (*grathon*), finely sliced cucumber, string beans, Chinese melon or long beans.
- Add dried shrimp with the chillies instead of crab paste.
- Add tamarind paste with the chillies.

Steamed green beans with sawtooth herb and either ginger or sesame seeds

ລຸບໝາກຖົ່ວຍາວ *soop mak tua nyaow*

Muang Sing villagers operating the community-based ecotourism trekking business Akha Experience taught The Boat Landing staff this recipe when they trained at the guest house in July 2005. Traditionally, this Akha salad is made with either ginger or sesame seed, but never both. Each version is delicious and great served warm or cold.

Ingredients

250 g (½ lb)	green beans, topped and tailed; use long, string or French beans
12 cloves	garlic, roasted and peeled; cook the entire head before peeling the required cloves
1 piece	ginger, thumb-size, roasted and peeled (if not using sesame seeds)
2 – 3 T	sesame seeds (if not using ginger)
2 – 3 T	light soy sauce
1 t	salt
2 t	fish sauce
2 T	mint leaves, chopped
2 T	sawtooth herb, chopped
2 T	spring onion, white stalk and greens, finely chopped
1 T	Vietnamese mint leaves, chopped
2 T	small coriander plants, stalk and leaves, chopped (use only if Vietnamese mint is not available; use a larger amount if sawtooth herb isn't available)

Serves two to four depending on the number of accompanying dishes.



Method

1. Slice the beans diagonally or halve them. Steam the vegetable for a few minutes until lightly cooked. Remove to a mixing bowl.
2. Dry roast the sesame seeds until golden. Remove them before completely browned. Set aside to cool.
3. Put the peeled, roasted garlic cloves and salt in a mortar. Slice the roasted ginger if using. Add to the mortar. Pound the ingredients together until well-integrated. Tip this mixture over the beans.
4. Add the soy and fish sauce and gently mix into the salad by hand. Add the chopped mint, sawtooth herb and coriander.
5. Add the dry roasted sesame seeds if using and gently mix in by hand.
6. Transfer the mixture to a serving dish.

Variation

- Be a non-traditional hedonist and use both sesame seeds and ginger. The taste is great!
- Complete your Akha experience by serving the beans with Akha pork balls (page 109), ginger chicken soup (page 113), sawtooth herb *jeow* (page 86) and sticky rice.



Lao omelette ໄຂ່ຈີນ *kai jeun*

This dish is cooked more in the manner of a Spanish frittata than a French omelette. All the ingredients are mixed together before cooking, and the mixture is not moved around the pan. It is cooked into a solid round on both sides and flipped several times before folding over. The flipping removes air and makes it more solid which Lao consider a desirable attribute for an omelette. It is eaten with sticky rice or a warmed baguette for breakfast or as a supplementary dish in a Lao meal.

Ingredients

3 thin	spring onions, washed and trimmed
3 small	coriander plants, washed and trimmed
1	snake bean
1	green chilli (optional)
2 T	oil
2	eggs
½ t	salt
¼ t	black pepper
½ medium	tomato
¼ medium	onion
2 T	vegetable oil

Serves one for breakfast or four as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. Finely chop together the spring onion and coriander. Finely chop the snake bean and chilli.
2. Crack 2 eggs into a bowl, add the salt and pepper and beat together with a fork. Shave the tomato in fine slices along with one-quarter of the onion. See *soi* slicing technique, page 64. Mix in the spring onion, coriander, snake bean and chilli.
3. Put a frying pan on a medium heat. When hot, add oil and heat.
4. Stir the egg mixture and pour it into the pan. Let it set for several minutes. Flip the omelette with a spatula; let the other side brown. The consistency should be such that it can be flipped several times with impunity.
5. Fold it over on itself, if serving as a breakfast omelette, and slide it onto a plate. If serving along with several other dishes, slide the omelette, unfolded, onto a serving plate.

Variations

- Omit the snake bean and chilli for an herby omelette.
- Add chopped dill to the mixture before cooking.
- Add chopped ham for a Western touch.
- Omit the snake bean and tomato and add 3 tablespoons of water and a ½ cup of red ant eggs if they are at hand. Scramble instead.



Omelette with acacia fronds ໄຂ່ຈີບໃສ່ຜັກລະ *kai jeun sai pak la*

The aromatic fronds of either pak la (acacia pennata) or pak ka (acacia insuiavis) are cooked into a tasty Lao-style omelette which is, by definition, firm not soft. The trees grow both in the wild and in northern gardens. Pak la and pak ka leaves can also be used to season soups, but both are shown off best highlighted in an omelette.

Ingredients

3	eggs
2 T	garlic, chopped
1 C	<i>pak la</i> or <i>pak ka</i> fronds, finely chopped
½ t	salt
½ t	pepper
4 T	oil

Serves two to six depending on the number of accompanying dishes.

Method

1. Break the eggs into a bowl. Add salt and pepper and mix with a fork lightly.
2. In a wok, heat 2 tablespoon of oil. Toss in the chopped garlic and fry until translucent. Add the leaves and ¼ teaspoon of salt. Stir fry, pushing the vegetables down for 1 minute.
3. Remove the vegetables to the egg mixture; fold in.
4. Reheat the wok or frying pan, add a further 2 tablespoons of oil, heat well and pour in the mixture. Let it cook undisturbed for several minutes, and then flip or turn the omelette over. Cook several minutes more and turn again. Repeat at least twice. Occasionally push down on the omelette to release air and flatten it. Fold the omelette in half, pushing down on it. Flip the folded omelette twice, pushing down on it with each flip.
5. Transfer to a plate for serving.



Rice noodles with spicy broth ຄໍາປຸ້ນ *kao poon*

Considered the national dish of Laos, *kao poon* is not as common as *kao soi* is in Luang Namtha, but when cooked the traditional way (see Variations, below), it is the culinary equivalent of making a silk purse out of a sow's ear. My southern Lao friends could not support a Lao cookbook without a recipe for *kao poon*, so here it is, masked as a 'light dish'!

Ingredients

500 g (1 lb)	fish, rinsed and scaled if needed
1 kg (2 lb)	meaty pork bones (or meaty chicken carcasses), washed
2 l (4 pt)	water
2 t	salt
1 stem	lemongrass, knotted
1 small head	garlic, top sliced off
1	onion (or 6 shallots), peeled and roughly chopped
6 slices	galangal (or use ginger)
3 large stems	coriander, knotted together
3	spring onions, each tied in a knot
2 T	<i>padek</i> (or fish sauce) to taste
300 g (9 oz)	blood cake cut in 2.5 cm (1 in) cubes, rinsed (optional)
300 g (9 oz)	pork, minced
2 t	red chilli powder (or to taste)
3 C	coconut milk (optional)

Accompaniments

2 layers (1 kg/2 lb)	fresh <i>kao poon</i> noodles (or dried <i>kao poon</i> or rice vermicelli noodles)
	½ unripe papaya or one carrot, shredded
Choose from the tastiest vegetables available.	½ banana flower, shredded
Have a mixture of colours and textures. These are suggestions.	1 wedge of cabbage, shredded
	½ cup cooked bamboo shoot, chopped
	6 spring onions, finely chopped
	1 cup bean sprouts
	1 cup mint sprigs
Arrange all on a platter for diners to help themselves.	1 cup yard-long beans, chopped
	6 or more lime pieces, for squeezing
	6 or more fried, dried chillies, finely pounded or whole

Serves six generously.

Method

1. In a large pot, bring the water to the boil. Add salt, lemongrass, garlic, onion, galangal, coriander and spring onions. Bring back to the boil and add the pork bones. Simmer and skim foam as it comes to the surface. Add the fish and fish sauce.
2. When the fish is cooked, remove it from the broth. Set aside to cool. Continue to simmer the broth until the pork can be easily separated from the bones (about 1 hour after coming to the boil).
3. Separate the pork bones from the broth. Strain the broth, setting aside any galangal, onion, shallot or garlic pieces. Discard any residue. Wash the pot.
4. Return the broth to the clean pot to simmer longer.
5. Add the cubes of blood cake. When they rise to the top of the broth, remove them and set aside.
6. Separate the fish from the bones and mash the fish. Remove the meat from the pork bones and cut into small pieces. Add the mashed fish, pork pieces and the uncooked minced pork to the broth.
7. Squeeze out the garlic from the reserved garlic cloves. Pound the galangal, garlic paste, onion and shallots together with the chilli powder. If not using coconut milk, add the pounded mixture to the broth. Taste and add salt, fish sauce or *padek* to taste.
8. If using coconut milk, put it and the pounded mixture in a small saucepan. Simmer until fragrant and the oil has separated. Add to the broth and stir in. Taste. Add salt or fish sauce or *padek* if desired.
9. To prepare the *kao poon* noodles, refresh fresh skeins in cold water, cut into large pieces and arrange in overlapping layers on a plate. For dried noodles, put them in a bowl with plenty of boiling water. Use a fork or chopsticks to separate the noodles. Remove from the hot water and drain after about 3 minutes. Arrange on a platter as with fresh noodles, above.
10. Place the platters of vegetables and noodles on the table. For each diner, put a handful of noodles in a bowl and spoon hot broth over them. Diners then add other ingredients to individual taste and mix them all together before eating.

Variations

- This dish is traditionally made with a small amount of fish, a pig's head, pig's lung and three-layer pork. Coconut milk is not added in northern Laos.



Lahp and sa dishes...& out and about

*ປະເພດລາບແລະສ້າ **bpaphet lahp leur sa***

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Above, clockwise from top: Northern Lao tofu *lahp*;
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 Lanten woman cutting banana f over
 Opposite: Eggplant *sa*

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Chicken *lahp* with vegetables and variations ລາບໄກ່ ວັກກັບ *lahp gai pak gap*

Ingredients for a Lao raw or cooked meat lahp are extremely variable reflecting a cuisine which is prepared with whatever is readily available from the forest, stream or garden. Consider this recipe an outline of fundamentals. Once you get the feel for lahp, experiment with abandon!

Ingredients

2 C	chicken, boned, including the heart and liver, if desired, cleaned and sliced
3 T	water
2 cloves	garlic, chopped
5	brown or red shallots, finely sliced
3 small	red chillies (or 1 t chilli flakes)
1 stalk	lemongrass; use only if very fresh and tender (optional)
1 T	fish sauce or <i>padek</i> , liquid only
1 – 2	limes, juiced (optional)
2 T	ground, roasted rice powder
½ C	mint leaves, small, rinsed and patted dry
1 C	banana flower, finely sliced (optional); soak in acidulated or salted water until ready to use
	<i>Other ingredients such as finely shredded kaffir lime leaves, coriander, lemongrass, chopped galangal or bitter small eggplants may be included as desired. See page 72.</i>
To finish	3 small red chillies mint sprigs (optional)

Accompaniments

1	cucumber, thickly sliced; peel only if the skin is tough and bitter
Choose at least three.	one large-leafed green such as lettuce, cabbage or pepper (betel) leaves one bitter or crisp vegetable such as apple eggplants or long beans, cut into 5 cm (2 in) lengths one or more herbs such as sweet basil (<i>pak boualapha</i>), coriander, sawtooth herb, dill, mint or whole chillies

Serves three to six depending on the number of accompanying dishes.

Method

1. Prepare the ground, roasted rice powder. See page 54.
2. Finely mince the meat to an airy paste using a cleaver or heavy knife. This will take about 10 minutes. The goal is to aerate the meat fully by repeatedly turning the mixture onto itself and mincing until a paste is created. Cover and set aside. Chop the garlic and finely slice the shallots, three chillies and the lemongrass. Set aside.
3. Remove the mint leaves, tearing them into small pieces if they are larger than a pinkie fingernail.
4. Prepare all the other ingredients to be mixed with the cooked meat.
5. Heat a wok or frying pan. Add the minced meat and sliced organs to the dry pan. Do not use any oil.
6. Move the meat about in the pan, breaking up any lumps. Add a few tablespoons of water to prevent sticking if the meat is very lean. Keep moving the mince until the colour goes out of it. Take care not to overcook, as that will both dry the meat and diminish its flavour.
7. Transfer the mince to a bowl to cool.
8. Fry the garlic in 1 teaspoon of oil until slightly golden. Add to the mince.
9. Add the *padek* or fish sauce and the optional lime juice. Mix together with your hands, squeezing the ingredients lightly while tumbling. Sprinkle in the sliced lemongrass, shallots and chillies and mix. Add the optional banana flower and any other ingredients being used. Combine. Add the ground, roasted rice powder. Mix, allowing the flavours to integrated juicily.
10. Taste and adjust the lime juice, fish sauce and/or rice powder. When all is well mixed, toss in the mint, combining lightly. Transfer the *lahp* to a serving plate and garnish with mint sprigs. Complete by tucking three small red chillies stems or bottoms upright into the surface of the salad.
11. Wash and trim the accompanying vegetables; slice the cucumber into thick diagonal pieces. Arrange them on a plate along with the herbs. The taste of the herbs is an important part of the *lahp* dining experience. Do not stint on them. Eat the herbs separately, or one or two may be included in each bite of *lahp* accompanied by some rice or the vegetable used for scooping the salad.
12. Serve with sticky rice.

Variations

- For beef *lahp*, use steak. For a raw *lahp*, use only fillet. Hand-mincing the meat will ensure airiness. The lime juice and fish sauce may need to be increased to taste. Beef *lahp* may be served raw – a Lao steak tartare – or cooked. If using raw meat in *lahp*, it is essential, of course, the meat be of fine quality from a safe source. This caution is equally important if one is offered raw *lahp* in a restaurant or home.
- For pork *lahp*, use shoulder meat if possible. Again, by mincing the meat yourself, a fresh, airy *lahp* is guaranteed. Some pork skin, finely sliced and deep-fried until crisp, can be added to the *lahp* for additional flavour and texture.

Below: Wedding feast in Luang Namtha township. Dishes include *lahp* and accompanying salad vegetables (*pak gap*), grilled pork, Lao salad, a pork-based soup (*gaeng*) and sticky rice. Note the full serving plates, even after diners have finished their main course and fruit has been served for dessert, indicative of Lao hospitality.



Pork *lahp*, Luang Namtha-style with vegetables ລາບຊີ້ນໜູ ຜັກກັບ *lahp sin moo pak gap*

Here is The Boat Landing's recipe for a most fragrant and tasty salad. Luang Namtha's *lahp* differs from those of other provinces in that the meat is lightly fried in oil, it contains banana flower and it does not incorporate lime or lemon juice. In Luang Namtha, lime juice is only added to beef *lahp* and some *sa* dishes.

Ingredients

2 T	ground, roasted rice powder
1 C	pork shoulder, minced or in one piece
1 t	oil
2 cloves	garlic, chopped
1 T	fish sauce or <i>padek</i> liquid (or to taste)
3	chillies, finely sliced
1 C	banana flower (optional), finely sliced across the width of the flower from the tip end; let sit in acidulated water
10 stems	small-leaf mint
3 stems	coriander
6 – 7 small	spring onions

Accompaniments (*pak gap*)

1	cucumber, sliced; peel only if the skin is tough and bitter
Use small amounts of at least three.	one large-leafed green such as lettuce, cabbage or pepper (betel) leaves
	one bitter or crisp vegetable such as apple eggplants or long beans, cut into 5 cm (2 in) lengths
	one or more herbs such as sweet basil (<i>pak boualapha</i>), coriander, sawtooth herb, dill, mint or chillies

To finish

3	red chillies
	mint sprigs (optional)

Serves four with other dishes.

Method

1. Prepare the ground, roasted rice powder, page 54.
2. Finely mince the meat into an airy paste with a Chinese cleaver or heavy knife. Fully aerate the meat by repeatedly turning it onto itself and mincing. This will take about 10 minutes. Cover and set aside.
3. Heat a dry wok and add 1 teaspoon of oil. Add the garlic, stir fry until slightly golden and then add the minced meat. Move the meat about the pan, breaking up any lumps. Keep moving the mince

until the colour goes out of it. Don't overcook as this will result in dry, flavourless pork.

4. Transfer the cooked mince to a mixing bowl to cool.
5. Pick the leaves off the mint and coriander, tearing them into small pieces if they are bigger than a pinkie fingernail. Finely slice the spring onions, using all the green and a bit of the white.
6. Add the *padek* (or fish sauce) to the cooled meat. Mix in the liquid with a clean hand. Squeeze the mixture together lightly while mixing. Sprinkle in the chillies and incorporate. Add the finely sliced banana flower. Mix. Add the ground, roasted rice powder. Mix until the flavours are juicily integrated.
7. Taste and adjust the fish sauce (and/or rice powder). Toss in the mint, coriander and spring onions. Lightly mix in. Transfer to a serving dish and garnish with mint sprigs and the small red chillies stuck erect in the top of the *lahp*.
8. Prepare the accompanying vegetables by trimming and washing them. The cucumber and lettuce or cabbage pieces are used to scoop up the *lahp*. Herbs accompanying the *lahp* are an important part of the eating experience. Provide and eat plenty.
9. Place the vegetables and herbs on a plate, garnishing them with sliced cucumber and chillies. Serve the *lahp* with these and sticky rice.

Variations

- For a beef *lahp*, use steak. For a raw *lahp* use fillet only and mince it yourself for airiness. Lime juice is generally used in making beef *lahp*; more fish sauce may well be needed.
- For chicken *lahp* use thigh meat if possible. It has more flavour than breast. Mince the meat yourself so it is fresh and airy.



Spicy fish salad ລາຮຸ ລາຮຸ *lahp bpaak pak gap*

What makes this cooked fish lahp so special is the smoky richness imparted by a well-pounded mixture of roasted garlic, shallots and eggplant. That mixture, laced with chopped chillies, also incorporates fish stock. The result is stir-fried to a dry, but juicy, consistency. Fresh herbs give that distinctive lahp zing.

Ingredients

2 C	fresh fish, with some skin
10	shallots
6	apple eggplants
1 bulb	garlic
¼ C	Vietnamese mint, rinsed
¼ C	spring onion greens, rinsed
¼ C	coriander leaves, rinsed
2 – 3 extra	shallots, peeled and chopped (2 table- spoons)
4 cloves	garlic, peeled and chopped (2 table- spoons, plus 1 tablespoon used later)
2 T	oil
3 T	<i>padek</i> (or 2 tablespoons fish sauce)
1½ – 2 C	water
2 small	red chillies, chopped
3 T	ground, roasted rice powder
1 – 2 T	fish sauce

Accompaniments (*pak gap*) and to finish

1	cucumber, sliced; peel only if the skin is tough and bitter
Use small amounts of at least three.	dill, whole chillies, lettuce or cabbage, mint, coriander, sawtooth herb or any other bitter herb
3	red chillies

Serves three to eight depending on the number of accompanying dishes.

Method

1. Remove the skin from the fish, cut into 5 cm (2 in) pieces and set aside for later use. Finely mince the fish with a Chinese chopper or heavy knife to an airy paste. This will take about 10 minutes – the time it takes to fully aerate the fish by repeatedly turning the fish mixture onto itself and mincing to a paste. Cover and set aside.
2. Thread the shallots onto 2 toothpicks. Trim the eggplants and halve them. Do not use any with brown seeds. They are old and bitter.
3. Roast the shallots, eggplants and garlic in a charcoal fire (for alternative cooking methods, see page 68). Turn occasionally. Remove each item to cool when the skins are completely blackened and the insides are soft.
4. While the other ingredients are roasting, in a wok add 2 tablespoons oil, heat and then add the chopped raw garlic and shallots. Fry until translucent. Add the *padek* (or fish sauce) and water. Simmer a minute while stirring and add the fish skin. Add ½ teaspoon salt; simmer for 4 minutes. Use a wok spoon to break the fish skin into smaller pieces. Set aside to cool.
5. Put the unpeeled, blackened eggplant in a medium-size mortar. Peel any loose skin off the shallots and garlic, and then also add them to the mortar. Pound to a black mush. (It *should* be black at this stage!)
6. Add the minced fish to the mortar and pound to mix. Add 5 tablespoons of the cooked fish juice, 1 tablespoon chopped raw garlic and the chopped chillies. Stir together. Sprinkle the ground, roasted rice powder over the mixture; add 4 tablespoons more fish juice. Adjust the amount of liquid and rice powder if necessary to get a thick, pancake batter consistency. Taste and add more fish sauce if needed (1 – 2 tablespoons). Mix well.
7. Heat a dry wok, transfer the fish paste from the mortar and stir fry to remove excess moisture and cook the fish. Spread and flatten the mixture over the wok to hasten the process. Turn the heat off. Add the chopped Vietnamese mint, spring onion greens and coriander leaves and mix together.
8. Transfer to a plate and garnish with sliced cucumber and chillies. Serve with sticky rice and the accompanying raw vegetables and herbs arranged on a separate plate.

For method photographs, see page 155.



Northern Lao tofu salad ລາບຕົ້າຮູ້ *lahp tow hu*

This is a vegetarian version of a traditional lahp. Frying the tofu until golden adds a unique texture to the salad.

Ingredients

½ C	vegetable oil
2 blocks 500 g (1 lb)	firm tofu, cut into 3 cm (1¼ in) cubes
2 large cloves	garlic, sliced
½ C	water or vegetable stock
1 T	soy sauce
½	banana flower shaved from the tip end across the petals into a bowl of salted or acidulated cold water (or substitute with red or white cabbage)
2 T	soy sauce
2 T	ground, roasted sticky rice
2	chillies turning red, finely sliced
½ C	spring onions greens only, finely sliced
3 T	mint leaves, chopped
3 T	coriander, finely chopped
To f nish	
1-2	yard-long beans, trimmed to 10 cm (4 in) pieces
1	cucumber, peeled; cut in 6 mm (¼ in) rounds, halved
1	tomato cut in wedges or large dice

Serves one to four depending on the number of accompanying dishes.

Method

1. Heat oil in a wok until hot. Add the tofu. Fry the cubes over a medium hot heat, turning occasionally to ensure even browning, until they are golden (about 4 – 5 minutes). Remove from the oil, drain and cool.
2. Place the tofu cubes on a chopping board and coarsely mince them with a large knife or chopper. Place the mince into a large bowl. Set aside.
3. Reheat 2 tablespoons of the tofu oil in a frying pan. Add the garlic, fry until barely golden and then add water (or stock) and 1 tablespoon of the soy sauce.
4. Squeeze out the banana flower slivers and add them to the minced tofu. Combine lightly. Add 2 tablespoons of soy sauce. Mix in the fried garlic and some juice from the frying pan.
5. Sprinkle the ground, roasted sticky rice over the mixture. Mix it all together by hand. Taste and adjust the soy sauce if necessary.
6. Add the sliced chillies, chopped spring onions, mint and coriander. Lightly mix. Pile the completed salad on a serving dish.
7. Garnish with cucumber slices, yard-long bean pieces and tomato wedges.



Pork spicy salad, Muang Sing-style ສ້າງໄວ້ ຊີ້ນໜູ *sa low sin moo*

The Boat Landing Restaurant has modified this Tai Lue dish which traditionally would include pig blood, as do Akha pork balls, page 109. Its spicy zip comes from mak ken, a small, dried berry similar to Sichuan pepper. Carrots are used by the local restaurants for colour; however, traditionally, banana flower is used instead.

Ingredients

250 g (½ lb)	lean pork, chopped finely
¼ – 1 C	carrot, chopped into a ½ cm (¼ in) dice
½ C	red or brown shallot, chopped
3 T	duck fat or vegetable oil
2 T	garlic, chopped
2 T	fish sauce
½ – 1 t	chicken stock powder
1 – 2 t	chilli pepper, ground
1 T	prickly ash berry (<i>mak ken</i>), ground
2 – 3 T	Vietnamese mint (or a small handful each of small coriander and mint)
1 medium	green chilli, finely chopped (or more to taste)

Method

1. Prepare all the chopped ingredients except the herbs.
2. Heat a wok. Add the duck fat or oil. When hot, add the chopped garlic followed by the minced pork, fish sauce and instant stock.
3. Stir fry for 2 minutes until opaque.
4. Toss in the chopped carrot and shallots and swoosh about with a wok spoon or spatula. Sprinkle in the chilli pepper and *mak ken*. Mix. Keep stir frying until the carrot and shallots are lightly cooked and the pork is done. Taste and adjust seasonings if needed.
5. Remove the wok from the heat. Finely chop the herbs and mix into the *sa*. Transfer the mixture to a serving plate.

Variations

- Use firm tofu instead of pork (deep or shallow fry the cubes first and then mince them; alternately, simply crumble the tofu).
- Substitute chicken or duck; thigh meat is the more succulent.
- If *mak ken* is not available, use Sichuan pepper or a mix of ground Sichuan pepper and black peppercorns.
- For a low fat version, use 6 tablespoons of fresh chicken stock to simmer the ingredients rather than sautéing and leave out the stock powder. When the moisture has evaporated, season with salt.



Spicy duck salad ສ້າ ດັບ໊ດ *sa bpet*

A *sa* is different from a *lahp*; the meat in *sa* is less finely minced and usually has lime juice added. A Boat Landing *sa* also uses shredded banana flower and does not use pounded, roasted rice. This recipe can also be made with chicken or beef. Lacking a banana flower, texture and similar astringency may be provided by finely shredded Belgian endive.

Ingredients

300 g (11 oz)	duck thigh and breast; most fat and all skin removed; mince meat
1 large handful	duck skin and fat (separated), including the duck's tail
or	duck skin only
⅓ C	vegetable oil
2 large cloves	garlic, sliced crossways
2 T	fish sauce
1 t	chicken stock powder (optional)
1	red and 3 green chillies, finely chopped
¼	banana flower, shaved finely to make 1 cup; remove hard petals near the stalk; cut directly into a bowl of cold water
2 stalks	lemongrass, finely sliced; place in the bowl with shaved banana flower
5 stems	coriander
3	spring onions, greens only, volume slightly more than coriander
⅓ C	mint leaves
3 – 5	kaffir lime leaves (depending on size)
2	limes, juiced
2 T	fish sauce (or more to taste)
To finish	cucumber slices, thin tomato wedges, 15 cm (6 in) long bean pieces and red and green chillies

Serves four to six as part of a Lao meal.

Method

1. If using duck skin *and* fat: heat a wok and add them. Stir fry until the fat is rendered and the skin is crisp and golden brown. Remove the skin and set aside in a small bowl. Drain the wok of duck fat.
2. If using duck skin *but not the fat*: heat the wok, add oil and when heated, add the skin. Fry until the skin is crisp and golden. Remove the skin, setting it aside.
3. Reheat the wok. Add oil if the skin was browned in fat. Otherwise, reuse the oil from step 2. When hot, add the garlic. Stir fry briefly. Add the minced duck;

stir fry for 2 minutes. Add 2 tablespoons of fish sauce and the stock powder (optional). Continue to stir fry until browned. Remove to a large bowl.

4. Finely slice the cooled duck skin into 3 mm wide (⅛ in) pieces. Add to the duck/garlic mixture.
5. Squeeze out the banana flower shavings and sliced lemongrass. Add to the duck mixture.
6. Chop the coriander, spring onion greens and mint leaves. Roll the kaffir lime leaves together and shred finely. Add these ingredients and the sliced chillies to the duck mixture and mix.
7. Add the lime juice and 2 tablespoons of fish sauce. Taste for hot, sour and salty flavours. Adjust with more lime juice, fish sauce and/or salt as necessary.
8. Pile the salad on the centre of a plate. Surround with garnishes of cucumber slices and thin wedges of tomato. On another plate, arrange the cut long beans, more sliced cucumber and red and green chillies. Serve with sticky rice.

Variations

- **Spicy pork salad ສ້າ ຊິ້ນໝູ່ *sa sin moo***
Leave out steps 1, 2 and 4 above and substitute minced pork for the minced duck.
- **Spicy chicken salad ສ້າ ໄກ່ *sa gai***
Leave out steps 1, 2 and 4 above and substitute minced chicken for the minced duck. The heart and liver, cleaned and finely sliced, may be added to the wok with the chicken meat.
- **Spicy fish salad ສ້າ ປາ *sa bpa***
Simmer the fish, drain and flake. Stir fry the garlic in 2 tablespoons of oil. Remove to a bowl. Add the flaked fish, fish sauce, squeezed banana flower shavings and finely sliced lemongrass. Chop ⅓ cup dill and follow the recipe above from step 6 onwards.





Above left: Slicing banana f over into acidulated water to prevent browning

Above right: Frying duck fat and skin until the fat is rendered and the skin is crispy

Below, clockwise from top left: Ingredients for f sh lahp; f sh stock for enriching f sh lahp; charred shallots, garlic and apple eggplants; roasting f sh lahp ingredients in embers



Kmhmu' hospitality



Ban Goop is a small Kmhmu' village not yet on the tourist map. When we arrived there with Pawn and Bill as part of an approved trek survey trip, we were the first white people in villagers' memories, though there was a myth that someday white people would come. As it was late in the rice harvesting season, most of the women were in the swidden rice fields, two hours trek away, harvesting the sticky rice crop. Mr Bin and Mr San did all the cooking as is the Kmhmu' tradition for guests. They were very skilled at making the most of the few food resources at hand. Ban Goop villagers generate

minimal cash, mainly by selling foods harvested from the jungle. Theirs is a subsistence economy. Salt is the only purchased kitchen item. Its price is a major subject of discussion. Vegetables, chillies, food harvested from the jungle, fresh water fish and sticky rice are staples. Eggs are scarce, and it is a great honour to be given one. On rare and special occasions, a pig or chicken may be killed and cooked in several different dishes. A particular treat are dried, fried bamboo borer moth larvae (douang mae), which taste a bit like matchstick potatoes, but are much nuttier.



Fish with fiddlehead ferns, Khmu'-style ເອາະປາໃສ່ຜັກກູດແບບກຶມມຸ
aw bpaasai pak goot bap Khmu

Ingredients

1 large handful (300 g)	fresh small fish
1 large handful	fiddlehead ferns, stripped from their stems
1 handful	dried tobacco leaves (<i>yah soop</i>), (optional)
Several	dried chillies
	salt to taste
	water just to cover

Method

Place the fish and fern fronds in a medium pot. Break the chillies directly into the pot in 1 cm (½ in) pieces. Add tobacco and salt. Mix together well. Add water to barely cover the mixture, and then simmer over a low fire until the fish are cooked through. Transfer to a bamboo trencher or plate to serve.

Chicken, Ban Goop-style ເອາະໄກ ແບບກຶມມຸ *aw gai bap Khmu*

Ingredients

2 l (4 pt; 8 C)	water
2 t	salt
1 handful	uncooked, pounded sticky rice
5	chillies, broken into 1 cm ($\frac{1}{2}$ in) pieces
1 small	chicken (excluding the liver, intestines heart and feet), chopped into 3 – 4 cm ($1\frac{1}{2}$ in) pieces
1 stalk	lemongrass, knotted
2 stems	<i>pak koot hai</i> leaves (a forest fern)
1	banana flower

Method

1. Put the water, salt, pounded rice and broken chillies in a medium pot and bring to the boil.
2. Add the chicken pieces and the stalk of lemongrass, after rubbing it between your hands to soften and release the aroma. Add the *pak koot hai* leaves.
3. Remove the outer petals of the banana flower. Peel off the inner leaves one by one and add to the stew. Boil for 30 minutes until the chicken is cooked and the banana flowers and leaves are soft enough to mash.
4. Roughly mash the vegetables while still in the stew pot by twirling a stick between your hands so that it spins back and forth. Alternatively, remove the vegetables and mash or pound to a rough pulp. Return the pulp to the stew. Taste and add salt if necessary.

Roasted chilli and chicken liver jeow ແຈ້ວແບບກຶມມຸ *jeow Khmu*

Ingredients

8 big	dried chillies
1	chicken liver (there was only one chicken in the village to be had!)
	salt to taste
1 bunch	spring onions, four fingers-width, greens only, chopped

Method

1. String the dried chillies, top and bottom, between 2 sticks; the chillies will resemble ladder rungs. Use enough chillies to cover the palm of your hand.
2. String the chicken liver (and, optionally, any other cleaned entrails for a cook's snack) between 2 sticks, as above. Grill the chillies and chicken liver over embers or a low gas flame (or over an element on tinfoil). Transfer to a mortar when chillies have charred spots and give off a rich aroma and the liver is cooked through. Add salt and pound to a rough paste. Mix in the chopped onion greens, pounding lightly to bruise and release their flavour. Taste the *jeow* and add more salt if needed.



The Boat Landing staff picnic, December 2003

The staff of The Boat Landing announced that early December, before the rush of Christmas and New Year guests, would be a great time for a picnic. Kees and I piled into the back of the four-wheel drive pickup along with half of the staff and all of the stuff. We carried several large black plastic basins stacked on top of each other, a flagon of water, two crates of Beer Lao, plenty of Pepsi, a round chopping board and various boxes. Large hanks of dried rice vermicelli peeked out from plastic bags. An hour of travelling over a dusty, bumpy road brought us to one of Laos' many Bailey bridges. On its far side, we unloaded at a local picnic spot on the banks of a tributary of the Nam Tha River.

The women immediately set about checking the produce on offer to picnickers by the local women. Close inspection of their forest gathered food led to good-natured haggling and tut-tutting over prices. In the end, five bundles of rattan, several banana flowers, a log of mai sakahn and some shiny round yellow eggplants were purchased amicably. I bought two logs of mai sakahn to clean, dry and take back to New Zealand.

Meanwhile, everyone else had unpacked the truck, gathered wood and lit a fire. The crates of Beer Lao and soft drinks were put in the river to cool. The river was also used to rinse the dry noodles. When the black basins were unstacked, twenty-five live fish were revealed swimming around in the bottom one. Meals on wheels!

Each of us had a job helping to prepare the meal. One group of women washed and chopped galangal, eggplant, garlic and lemongrass and threaded chillies onto bamboo sticks to grill for a jeow. One of the men felled a bamboo pole and slit it into sticks between which the fish were wedged for grilling.

Of most interest to me was the dispatch and preparation of the fish. Each fish was caught, held flat firmly with the left hand to prevent serious wriggling. It was then cut with a sharp cleaver across the lower eighth of its upper side, creating a deep gash from just below the mouth and above the lower front fin, back along the tummy. This was done on one side only. Next the guts were pulled out and placed in a basin. Still twitching, each fish was flicked into a tub of clean water, so blood and any residual bits could be washed off. Fish dispatching apparently takes practice. One of the lads tried it under Chan's supervision, but his first fish got away half chopped. It flopped about everyone's feet, much to the hilarity of the group. After another flapping – chopping – flapping – escape attempt, Chan took over the serial dispatching. The failed apprentice was relegated to fish gutting.

Once the fish had been washed and rinsed, Mae lightly rubbed salt on each side. A thin, ten-inch bamboo skewer was pushed down each fish's gullet and through its length with an extra couple of inches of bamboo extending beyond the fish. This kept the fish flat and in one piece while grilling. A couple of the prepared fish were then wedged, at the widest part of their bellies, between a pair of two-foot long, flat strips of split bamboo. These strips were tied with finely cut bamboo ribbon.

Felled, thick tree branches created rests over our low fire for the bamboo strips. There the fish hung, being turned occasionally. Grilling took about 15 – 20 minutes. Needless to say, with such experts in charge, none fell in the fire!

While the fish were being readied, another staff member created a tepee-like structure over the fire with the rattan. He turned the rattan sticks occasionally, removing them entirely when they had blackened and had softened inside. Once the charred, spiny outer sheath of the rattan was pulled away, the succulent white flesh was revealed. The stripped sticks were added to the feast.

The rinsed vermicelli was soaked in very hot water which had been boiled over the fire. It was then rinsed again and drained in large handfuls into a banana leaf lined plastic basket.

Using the riverside rocks as a kitchen table, a sweet-sour chilli dipping sauce was concocted. Mae used the last two fish, scaled and chopped into chunks, to make a fish soup which she set to simmer in a pot on the embers.

Greens and herbs, including coriander and mint, were laid out on banana leaves with the noodles, shucked rattan, pieces of banana flower and barbecued fish. On each leaf, banquet-style, there was enough food for three or four people. Sticky rice, which had been cooked back at The Boat Landing, and bowls of a pickled vegetable dish, also made earlier, were added to each set.

We sat down, and the feasting began.

Grilled fish ປັງ ບາ ປິງ ບາາ

Here is the recipe for the grilled fish served at the picnic. If the skin is to be eaten, get the fishmonger to scale the fish. Choose fish that have clear, glistening eyes and are not smelly. The fish should look and smell very fresh, shiny and be firm, but resilient, to the touch.

Ingredients

Small fish such as tilapia, cleaned and gutted, sufficient for the number of diners

Salt

25 cm (10 in) bamboo skewers, one for each fish

Strips of split bamboo (1 cm x 50 cm [$\frac{1}{2}$ x 20 in]), a pair for every 2 – 3 fish, and fireproof ties, such as wire or thin green bamboo strips (if grilling on an open fire). Alternatively, use a wire grill.



Method

1. Wash the fish, removing any remaining guts. Slit the vein along the inside of the back bone if that has not been done. Wash away any blood. Rinse the fish and drain. (Scale fish only if the skin is to be eaten.)
2. Lightly rub 2 teaspoons of salt into the skin of each fish. Push a bamboo skewer down the gullet through the inner length of the fish, so only a few inches of the skewer extend outside of the fish. This keeps the fish flat and together while grilling. (A Vientiane variation is to stuff a bruised lemongrass stalk down the mouth and through into the tummy before grilling. This imparts a wonderful flavour to the flesh. Grilled tilapia street stalls are very common in the capital. At these, much larger and fatter fish are available.)
3. Option 1: Place the fish on a wire grill over a low fire or gas flame. Grill, turning occasionally until the skin is crisp and the flesh is white, succulent and separates easily, but does not crumble when a knife is inserted through the skin (usually about 15 – 20 minutes, depending on size).
4. Option 2 open fire: Tie the bottoms of two long, flat strips of split bamboo together. Wedge 2 – 3 of the prepared fish between the strips at the widest part of each fish, heads in the same direction; see photo to left. Tie the strip tops together with a fine bamboo ribbon or metal wire. Repeat until all fish are wedged between strips. Select a couple of thick tree branches to form a support across a fire which has burned down to glowing embers and low flames. The top of the branches should be 20 – 25 cm (8 – 10 in) above the embers. Suspend 2 or 3 of the fish clusters between the branches, turning occasionally. Grilling takes about 15-20 minutes depending on the size of the fish and the intensity of the heat. Serve with sticky rice and a *jeow* as part of a Lao meal which could also include a fish soup.
5. Alternatively, serve the fish Vietnamese picnic-style which is popular in Luang Namtha. Flavourful morsels of a variety of flavours are combined and wrapped in lettuce or a piece of cabbage leaf to suit the taste of each diner. The assemblage may include grilled fish, rice vermicelli, pieces of sliced lemongrass, slivers of ginger or galangal, roasted peanuts, sliced garlic, cucumber, tomato or sliced yellow eggplant, sprigs of mint and coriander, spring onions sliced in 5 cm (2 in) lengths, pickled green vegetables and a sweet-sour chilli dipping sauce.

Sweet-sour chilli dipping sauce, Vietnamese-style *ccỏ́c sỏ́m jeow som*

Some like this sauce on the sweetish side; others like the balance to be more sour and salty. It's a matter of personal taste.

Ingredients

½ C	water
1 t	salt
3 T	sugar (or to taste)
1 T	fish sauce
4 T	lime juice
2 t	ginger, finely chopped
2 t	garlic, finely chopped
½ – 1 t	red and green chillies, finely chopped

Generously serves four people picnicking Vietnamese-style.

Method

1. Mix the water, salt and sugar to taste. Allow to sit and dissolve, stirring occasionally. Add fish sauce and stir in the chopped ingredients. Wait 5 minutes for the flavours to develop. Taste for adjustments.
2. Add the lime juice. Taste again and balance with fish sauce, salt and/or sugar if needed.



Rice dishes

ປະເພດເຂົ້າ
bpaphet kao



Upland swidden rice harvesting



- 164 Sticky rice ເຂົ້າໜຽວ *kao niao*
- 165 Steamed plain rice ເຂົ້າຈ້າວ *kao jao*
- 166 Fried rice with Vietnamese balm and pork ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວພັກຂີ້ອັນ ໃສ່ ຊີ້ນໝູ
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- 167 Vegetable soup for Lao fried rice dishes ແກງຜັກ *gaeng pak*
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Lowland paddy planting



kao koua Louang Phabang sai jeow bong

- 168 Luang Namtha fried rice ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວຫຼວງນ້ຳໃສ່ນ້ຳປຸ່ງ *kao koua Luang Namtha sai nam bpoo*
- 168 Muang Sing fried rice ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວເມືອງສິງໃສ່ໝາກຖົ່ວເຫົນາ *kao koua Muang Sing*
- 169 Fried rice variations ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວ ຕາມໃຈ *kao koua tam jai*
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ໝາກເຜັດ *kao koua luammit sai sin moo leh mak pet*

Sticky rice ຄໍ້າຫນົວ *kao niao*

Sticky rice is Laos' staple food, accounting for two-thirds of its rice consumption. There are many varieties, both old, traditional seeds and new, higher yielding varieties developed to improve food security in subsistence economy villages. Some sticky rice is grown dry on steep upland slash and burn fields. Other varieties are grown in wet paddy fields. Non-mechanized rice production is very labour intensive, making every grain of rice precious. When Pawn was going on a three-month study trip to America, his chief concern was whether sticky rice was available and, if it were not, how he would survive without it. His concern mirrors that of many Lao travelling outside of their country.

Preparing sticky rice is very easy and fail safe if it is soaked long enough and if the steamer does not touch the boiling water below it. A most important step in preparation is to free the steam from the finished, cooked rice by prodding and flattening it with a paddle or spatula.

How to prepare sticky rice

Step 1: washing and soaking

Place the raw sticky rice in a bowl. Allow ½ – 1 cup of uncooked rice per person. Count on Asian diners eating more rice than Westerners. Briefly wash the rice to rinse away any husks or impurities. Do not over wash. Cover the rice with at least 2 cm (1 in) of water. Let it soak 6 hours.

The long soaking is essential. Don't try to short-cut it, or the rice will be starchy and lumpy, no matter how long it is steamed. If time is limited, the rice may be soaked in hot water for 2 hours. With any less time, however, it is impossible to cook sticky rice; substitute long grain, non-glutinous rice for the meal. To test whether the rice has been sufficiently soaked, try squashing a grain with your fingers. If it gives easily, it is ready for steaming.

Step 2: transferring the rice to a steamer

Drain off the rice water. (Try using this water later as a hair rinse. It is especially good for bringing out the gloss in long hair.)

Put water one-third up the side of the traditional, aluminium steamer (*maw nung*) bottom. Place the pot on the heat and bring the water to the boil.

Meanwhile, tip the drained sticky rice into the traditional conical bamboo steamer (*houad*). Smooth the top of the rice, and then place the *houad* in the *maw nung*. Make certain that the *houad's* bottom is not in the water, or the rice will be soggy.

A pot and steamer may be used in place of the

traditional equipment. Line the steamer with cheese cloth or a loose-weave fabric which will prevent the rice grains from falling out but allow the steam to pass through.

Step 3: steaming the rice

Cover the rice container with a bamboo lid or clean tea towel. Let the rice steam for 20 – 30 minutes. Ensure the water does not boil away. The cooking time depends on the rice's age. Fresh rice takes less time. If cooking a large amount of sticky rice, half way through the steaming, flip the contents over as they lie in the steamer. Alternatively, cook the rice longer – up to 40 minutes.

Step 4: presenting and storing the rice

When the grains are soft with no 'bone' and when they have released a sweet, nutty taste, take the *houad* off the pot. Tip its contents onto a clean surface, cloth or banana leaf. Using a wooden paddle or spatula, flatten and spread the rice to release the steam. Let the rice rest a moment, and then turn the edges of the rice inwards to create a flattish ball. Divide the whole into smaller balls to fit inside individual sticky rice baskets if they are being used. Alternatively, serve the rice family-style, putting the entire mass on one plate for the table.

Step 5: using leftover sticky rice

- To keep the rice warm and supple if it is to be eaten later in the day, store it in cheese cloth in a sticky rice basket. It may also be wrapped in a cloth and placed in an insulated cool bucket of similar size, a practice often used in Lao restaurants.
- Leftover sticky rice may be stored in a plastic bag in the fridge and resteamed later, briefly.
- Cooked rice can also be shaped into thin wafers and sun dried. These pieces may then be grilled and added to stews as a thickening agent. Larger dried rice cakes, prepared the same way, may be deep-fried and used as a base for savoury or sweet toppings.

Steamed plain rice ເຂົ້າຈ້າວ *kao jao*

The easiest way to steam plain rice is to use a rice cooker and follow its directions. Barring a cooker, here's how to do it.



Method

1. Use a pot with a tight lid that is twice the volume of the raw rice being cooked. If the lid isn't snug, use a weight to hold it down firmly, so steam does not escape.
2. Allow $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of rice per person. For people who eat a lot of rice, use $\frac{3}{4}$ – 1 cup of rice per person. In Laos a host always provides more rice than will be eaten.
3. Wash the rice three times. The easiest way to do this is to put the pot under a running tap, swoosh the rice around so impurities float to the top and then pour off the water. Repeat the process two times. It should be noted, however, that some Lao wash rice only once. Water is often scarce. Cooks believe washing rice too much will rinse away nutrients and produce rice with less flavour. Lao also prefer rice grains to stick together slightly. They do not favour separate grains as some other cultures do.
4. To cook the rice, add enough water to cover it by one forefinger joint (about 2 cm or just less than 1 inch). This works out to about $1\frac{1}{2}$ – 2 cups of water to 1 cup of rice. If the rice is very old or dry, add a bit more water; if it is new rice, add less. Lao rice usually needs less water than that in the West. Use $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups of water to 1 cup of rice.
5. Bring the rice to the boil, uncovered, on a high heat. Give the rice a quick stir, cover tightly and turn the heat to low. It will take about 15 minutes for all the water to be absorbed. Do not lift the lid. (If your heat does not go very low, cook for 5 minutes, and then remove the pot from the heat and let it stand, covered, for 15 more minutes. It will cook on stored heat.)
6. After 15 minutes, remove the pot from the heat. Let it sit, covered, a few minutes. Take the lid off and fluff the rice with a fork, rice paddle or chopsticks. Put the lid back on and let the rice sit for 5 or more minutes before serving.

Fried rice with Vietnamese balm and pork (ຂ້າຂົວພັກຂີ້ອັນ ໃສ່ ຊີ້ນໝູ *kao koua pak kiorn sai sin moo*)

The dish is always served with a light soup. See opposite page.

Ingredients

¼ – ⅓ C	oil
¼ C	garlic, chopped
¼ – ½ C	pork, finely sliced
1	apple eggplant, cut into eighths
⅓ – ½ C	bamboo shoots, thinly sliced in 1 cm (½ in) lengths
⅓ – ½ C	oyster mushrooms including stems, sliced
⅓ – ½ C	yard-long beans, chopped into 1 cm (½ in) pieces
½ C	red onion, diced into 1 cm (½ in) pieces
2 C loosely packed	cooked long grain rice, cold
2 T	soy sauce
2 T	oyster sauce
5 – 6	Vietnamese balm leaves, chopped finely, plus several sprigs for garnish
To finish	
1 small	tomato, sliced around its waist, then quartered

Generously serves one (or two if accompanied by another dish).

Method

1. Heat the oil in a wok until it is hot; add the chopped garlic. Stir fry over a medium – high heat until the garlic starts to turn golden (no more than 30 seconds). Toss in the pork. Stir fry for 1 minute until the meat whitens. Add the eggplant, followed by the bamboo shoots, tossing between each addition. While continuing to move the ingredients in the wok, add the chopped beans, red onion and sliced mushrooms, integrating after each addition.
2. Add the cold, cooked rice. Move it into the other ingredients and around the wok until it's mixed in and warm. Sprinkle the soy sauce and oyster sauce over the ingredients, continually stir frying until all are hot and mingled.
3. Take the wok off the heat, toss in the Vietnamese balm and lightly combine with the rest of the dish.
4. To present, place the tomato slices in the bottom of a deep, oiled bowl large enough to hold the rice. Spoon the rice on top; pack down firmly. Place the serving plate over the bowl top and quickly invert. Gently pull back the bowl, leaving the moulded rice on the plate. Garnish with sprigs of Vietnamese balm.

Variations

- This dish is distinctive for its Vietnamese balm flavouring. As a variation, use one or a mix of aromatic herbs such as dill, coriander, Vietnamese mint or basil in its place.
- Turkey, duck, chicken or tofu cubes, shallow fried and then broken up, can be substituted for pork.

COOK'S NOTES

Lao plain rice grains are typically plumper and shorter than Basmati or Thai jasmine rice grains. Brown rice has a similar chewy texture to Lao plain rice, so it works well for Lao fried rice dishes.

Vegetable soup for Lao fried rice dishes ຄຳກຸ່ມຮັກ *gaeng pak*

Fried rice dishes in Laos are always accompanied with a mild soup. This recipe can be easily expanded; increase the proportions of ingredients depending on the number of people being served.

Ingredients

1 C	water or vegetable stock
2 T	soy sauce
½ C	Chinese cabbage (or other <i>brassica</i>), chopped into 3 cm (1¼ in) pieces
½ C	Chinese flowering cabbage, chopped into 3 cm (1¼ in) pieces
½ block	firm tofu, cut into 4 cubes, 2 cm (1 in) ground black pepper to taste

Serves one.

Method

1. In a frying pan or small pot, add the water or stock and soy sauce. Bring to the boil, and then reduce the heat to a simmer. Add the Chinese greens followed by the tofu cubes. Simmer for 3 minutes.
2. To serve, spoon the soup into a small Chinese bowl. Grind on black pepper to taste.



Luang Prabang fried rice ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວ ຫຼວງພະບາງ ໃສ່ແລ່ວບ່ອງ *kao koua Louang Phabang sai jeow bong*

The special flavour of Laos' fermented pastes adds zing to these popular Boat Landing contemporary variations.

Ingredients

¼ – ½ C	oil
¼ C	garlic, chopped
¼ – ½ C	chicken, boneless and finely sliced
1	apple eggplant, cut in eighths
½ – ½ C	bamboo shoots, finely sliced 2 mm x 1 cm (¼ in x ½ in)
½ – ½ C	yard-long beans, cut 1 cm (½ in)
½ C	red onion, diced 1 cm (½ in)
½ – ½ C	oyster mushrooms, sliced
2 C	long grain rice, cooked and cooled
2 T	soy sauce
1 – 2 T	Luang Prabang chilli paste (or any sweet and mild spicy chilli paste)
2 T	oyster sauce
To f nish	
1 small	tomato, sliced

Serves one (or two if accompanied by another dish).

Method

- Heat oil in wok until hot, and then add the chopped garlic. Stir fry over medium – hot heat until garlic starts to turn golden (30 seconds max). Toss in the chicken. Stir fry for 1 minute until colour becomes white, and then add the eggplant followed by the bamboo shoots, tossing between each addition. Keep things moving all the time. Add successively the chopped yard-long beans, red onion and mushrooms.
- Add the cooked rice; toss until mixed and warm. Sprinkle over the soy sauce, chilli paste and oyster sauce. Keep stir frying until all is hot and mingled.
- To present, place some tomato in the bottom of a deep, oiled bowl (eg, rice bowl or coffee cup). Spoon the fried rice on top of the garnish and pack down firmly until the bowl is full. Put a plate on top of the bowl and invert both. Lift the bowl up, leaving the moulded rice on the plate.
- Serve with a clear soup to cleanse the palate.

Variations

- Luang Namtha fried rice ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວຫຼວງນ້ຳໃສ່ນ້ຳປູ
*kao koua Luang Namtha sai nam bpoo***
Replace the 1 – 2 tablespoons of Luang Prabang sweet chilli paste with ½ – 1 teaspoon of Luang Namtha field crab paste dissolved in 1 tablespoon of water.
- Muang Sing fried rice ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວເມືອງສິງໃສ່
ໝາກຖົ່ວເທົາ *kao koua Muang Sing sai
mak tua nao***
Replace the 1 – 2 tablespoons of Luang Prabang sweet chilli paste with 2 teaspoons of *kao soi* paste (fermented soybean paste with chilli).
- Turkey, duck, pork or broken up shallow fried tofu cubes can be substituted for chicken in any of these dishes.
- Garnish any fried rice recipes with dry-roasted sesame seeds.



Fried rice variations ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວ ຕາມໃຈ *kao koua tam jai*

Fried rice is infinitely variable. It is a great way to use leftover rice. The key ingredients are:

- **Oil or fat** for stir frying the rice mixture. Use peanut, soy or safflower oil. Adding some sesame oil will create a subtle flavour in the dish.
- **Cold, cooked steamed rice;** sticky rice will not work.
- **Several various chopped vegetables and/or fungi** such as onions, shallots, garlic, beans, yard-long beans, peas, pea pods, bamboo shoots, baby corn, apple eggplant, any green vegetable with stalk but not too much leaf, soaked dried mushrooms and oyster mushrooms.
- **A contrasting texture and flavour** to the vegetables. This could be meat, tofu, shrimp or smoked fish, finely sliced omelette or fried egg. The most commonly used meats are pork, chicken, beef, duck and roast pork.
- **An herbal flavour agent** which might be fresh coriander, dill, Vietnamese mint, spring onions, bunching onions, Chinese chives, lemon balm, basil, pepper and/or chillies.
- **Flavouring and moistening agents** including one or more of soy sauce, oyster sauce, fish sauce, vinegar or lime, water or stock, salt, sugar, chilli soybean paste, crab paste or shrimp paste.
- **Tabletop garnishes and flavourings for each diner** to adjust the sour, hot, salty and sweet notes as they like. A well stocked assortment would include at least one item to provide each of these four tastes. Consider wedges of lime or lemon, flaked dried chilli, chilli paste, shrimp paste, fish sauce, fresh chillies, finely sliced chillies soaked in fish sauce or white vinegar, pepper, sugar, chopped peanuts, crispy fried fish, deep-fried onion and garlic slivers.

Hints

- If leftover rice is not at hand, cook rice well in advance of making fried rice to allow it to cool completely. The rested rice will have more flavour and will separate into grains more readily than freshly steamed rice.
- Make sure the wok or frying pan is hot before adding the oil. Use the best oil available. Don't spare the oil or the rice will stick to the pan. Make sure it is hot before any ingredients are added to it. Hot oil coats the rice grains and allows the flavouring agents to suffuse the rice. If it is not hot enough, the oil will penetrate the grains.
- Alternately, use a non-stick pan and only a little oil. Add stock or water if the rice is very dry and the other ingredients do not create sufficient moisture.
- Stir fry an egg in the oil first before adding other ingredients. Another way to use egg is to make a very thin, one-egg omelette. Let it cool, and then cut it into very narrow strips. These should be added to the hot rice just before serving or used as a garnish.
- A beaten, raw egg incorporated into fried rice at completion will dry and fluff the rice if the mixture is too moist.



Pork, chilli and mixed vegetable fried rice ເຂົ້າຂົ້ວ ຜັກລວມມິດໃສ່ ຊີ້ນໜູ ແລະ ໜາກເຜັດ *kao koua luammit sai sin moo leh mak pet*

Ingredients

¼ – ½ C	oil
¼ C	garlic, chopped
2	red chillies, chopped finely
¼ – ½ C	pork, finely sliced
1	apple eggplant, cut into eighths
½ – ½ C	baby corn, cut into 1 cm (½ in) chunks and then vertically into quarters (or corn kernels)
½ – ½ C	fresh oyster mushrooms and stems, sliced
½ – ½ C	beans or pea pods, chopped into 1 cm (½ in) pieces
½ C	red onion, diced into 1 cm (½ in) pieces
2 C	long grain rice, cooked and cooled
2 T	soy sauce
2 T	oyster sauce
5 – 6	coriander sprigs, chopped finely
To finish	
1 small	tomato, sliced around waist, then quartered
	Mint or basil (<i>pak boualapha</i>)

Serves one (or two if accompanied by another dish).

Method

1. Heat oil in a wok until hot and add the chopped garlic. Stir fry over medium – hot heat until garlic starts to turn golden (maximum of 30 seconds). Toss in the pork and chilli. Stir fry for 1 minute until the meat becomes white, and then add the eggplant followed by the corn, tossing between each addition. Keeping things moving all the time, add successively the chopped beans, red onion and sliced mushrooms.
2. Add the cooked rice, crumbling it to remove any big lumps, and then toss all ingredients together until mixed and warm. Sprinkle the soy sauce and oyster sauce over the mixture. Keep stir frying until all is hot and mingled. Taste and adjust flavourings if necessary.
3. Take the wok off the stove, toss in the coriander and lightly combine with the rest of the dish.
4. While the accompanying soup, page 167, is simmering, arrange the rice's presentation. Place tomato slices in the bottom of a deep, oiled bowl such as a rice bowl or large coffee cup. Spoon the rice on top of the tomato, up to the top of the bowl. Pack down firmly. Place the serving plate over the top of the bowl and quickly invert. Gently remove the bowl leaving the moulded rice on the plate. Garnish with sprigs of mint or basil.
5. Another nice way to present fried rice is to cut a semi-circle of banana leaf or a small galangal leaf, shape it into a cone and secure with a toothpick. Turn it upright like an ice cream cone and firmly stuff the cooked rice inside. Invert the leaf on a serving plate.





Above left: Lanten ceremony using rice, with most now on the floor, Ban Hong Leuay
Above right: Kalom (Tai Yuan) spirit house with offerings of sticky rice, The Boat Landing Guest House and Restaurant, Ban Khone

Below: Yao Mien offerings of plain rice to recently departed ancestor spirits during an ordination ceremony. Each small offering is labelled with an ancestor's name, Ban Jhong Xa, Muang Sing district





Sweets

ຂອງຫວານ

kawng waan



- 173 Fruit ຫາກໄມ້ *mak mai*
- 173 Agar sweets ຂະຫນົມ *kanom* or *khanom*
- 173 Crushed ices ນ້ຳຫວານ *nam waan*
- 174 Cooked sweet dishes
- 174 Deep-fried and egg treats

Sweet dishes are usually prepared as snacks or for festive occasions rather than offered at the end of a Lao meal. Then, a platter of sliced fruit is more likely to be served. In Luang Namtha, everyday sweet treats are usually bought at the market, while special festive delights are made at home for traditional celebrations or ceremonies. The Boat Landing Restaurant serves fruit after dinner and makes its own banana and coconut cakes. Although this book does not contain recipes for sweet dishes, a description of common ones follows. They are not too different from Thai desserts. Recipes are readily available both in print and on the Internet.

Fruit ຫາກໄມ້ *mak mai*

Locally grown fruit commonly eaten in northern Laos includes watermelons, pomelos, bananas, papayas, pineapples, oranges and sweet tamarind pods. Jack fruit, mangoes, dragon fruit, lychees, rambuttans, longans and durians are seasonal delicacies. Apples, guavas and Chinese pears are imported from China.

Fruit is sold at the market or at roadside stalls. In larger settlements, itinerant fruit vendors sell their wares from pushcarts, rapidly preparing mango, guava, papaya, pineapple and other tasty fruit to order and presenting them sliced with their accompaniments in a plastic bag, ready to eat. Fruit such as mango and guava are often eaten when not quite ripe, dipped in a mix of sugar and chilli flakes for contrasting flavour. A sweet fruit may be accompanied by a salt and chilli mixture or a slice of lime.

When mangoes are in season, a popular market snack is *kao niao mak muang*, a handful of sticky rice garnished with sweetened coconut cream, some dry roasted sesame seeds and pieces of sweet, ripe mango. Sometimes the rice is prepared with coconut milk; other times it is served plain with only mango and no trimmings. Sticky rice also is eaten with other fruit. It may be topped with chunks of ripe durian in season or with squashed *mak cor*, a purple-skinned plumlike fruit with a dry golden centre. Sticky rice can also be partnered with a topping of peeled, grilled hog plum, *mak gawk*.

A sweet snack may be as simple as a red sweet potato in its skin, roasted on a charcoal stove by a roadside vendor. Peeled bananas and plantains are also grilled and sold the same way.

Agar sweets ຂະຫນົມ *kanom or khanom*

Most fresh markets have sweet treat (*kanom*) vendors who cook and sell standard snacks along with the vendor's homemade seasonal specialties.



One type of Lao sweet, *kanom waan*, is a firm jelly. Agar strands or agar powder is the seaweed-based setting agent. This sweet is found throughout Asia. It is usually made with coconut milk and is presented in a wild variety of forms, colours and flavours. Common types in Laos are trays of agar jelly which have contrasting coloured or flavoured layers and are cut in small diamond shapes to serve; rich two-layered coconut *kanom* served in tiny banana or padanus leaf containers; cubes of agar jelly rolled in freshly grated coconut and colourful molded jellies created from varying flavours including sweet corn, coconut, banana, pumpkin, padanus leaf, green tea, mint and red bean.

Crushed ices ນ້ຳຫວານ *nam waan*

Another refreshing sweet available throughout Asia, including Laos, is *nam waan*. This is a cooling concoction of crushed ice and one's selection of cooked beans, water chestnuts, sweet corn, agar jelly or tapioca products in various shapes and flavours. The combination is topped with a sweetened, diluted coconut liquid and perhaps an extra dollop of coconut



cream and sugar syrup. The easiest way to enjoy these very sweet dishes is from a market or local *kanom waan* vendor. Alternatively, cans of prepared ingredients may be purchased from an Asian supplier. Then, these crushed ice desserts can be assembled at home with a dollop of coconut cream and sugar syrup to suit.



Cooked sweet dishes

Sticky rice, coconut, bread fruit, jack fruit, durians, sweet plantains and bananas are regularly used as ingredients for cooked sweet dishes. A market favourite, which is also made at Lao New Year, is *kao tom*, sticky rice flavoured with coconut milk, stuffed with banana and steamed in a piece of banana leaf.

A sweet dish always sold at festivals is sweet coconut sticky rice roasted in bamboo (*kao lahm*). It is made with either white or purple sticky rice. Soaked sticky rice is mixed with coconut milk and stuffed into lengths of thick bamboo, plugged with a fiber stopper and then roasted over embers until the rice has absorbed the coconut milk and is cooked. A couple of cracks with a mallet and the bamboo can be stripped away and the lusciously rich rice enjoyed.

Another sticky rice dish, *tom nam*, is red, purple or white sticky rice cooked until plump in sweetened coconut milk, then topped with more coconut milk. This is a sensuous and filling dessert. *Tom nam houa bua* is sticky rice mixed with coconut milk and lotus root. It is eaten for breakfast as well as as a snack.

Kanom makers also stew pieces of bread fruit, jack fruit, taro and other firm fruit or starchy vegetables. Raw chunks are simmered in palm or sugar-sweetened coconut milk until the syrup is thick and flavoursome, and the fruit is tender.



Deep-fried and egg treats

There are lots of deep-fried sweet treats. Bananas, sliced or whole, are dipped in a tapioca or rice flour-based batter, and then deep-fried for a succulent and calorie laden snack. A sweetened version is also available. Airy balls of rice or tapioca flour dough are rolled in sesame seeds and deep-fried.

The last, most common type of sweet contains eggs. *Sang kaya mak eu*, steamed egg custard in a whole pumpkin, is a dish shared with Thailand and a very common market food in Laos. Another common market dish is egg custard (*kanom maw gaeng*). This is a baked coconut-flavoured slice topped with deep-fried onion. At the other end of the scale, and the most difficult to make, are gold egg threads (*foi thong*). These very, very long noodles are made of duck egg yolk drizzled through a special cone into boiling, padanus leaf-flavoured sugar syrup. Traditionally, they are served at Lao weddings and other ceremonial occasions. Their length symbolises long life.



Drinking *lao hai* in an upland
Khmhu' village, Nalae district

Drinks ເຄື່ອງດື່ມ *keuang deum*

- 176 Water ນ້ຳ *nam*
- 176 Tea ຊາ *sa*, ນ້ຳ ຊາ *nam sa*
- 177 Coffee ກາເຟ *ga feh*
- 177 Juices ນ້ຳໝາກໄມ້ *nam mak mai*
- 177 Soft drinks ນ້ຳໂຊດາ *nam soda*
- 177 Beer ບຸຍ *bia*
- 178 *Lao Lao* ເຫລົ້າ ລາວ *lao Lao*
- 179 Jar alcohol, rice wine ເຫລົ້າໄຫ *lao hai*

Water ນ້ຳ *nam*

Northern Lao villagers most commonly offer guests a glass of boiled water (*nam tom*) or weak tea (*nam sa*). In modest local restaurants countrywide, either water or tea, free of charge, is standard. Recently, some of the country's more upscale restaurants no longer automatically present a glass of chilled water; patrons are expected to order and pay for bottled drinking water (*nam derm*). Not all Lao are happy with this trend which they consider a lack of hospitality.

Never assume that water in Laos is potable. The one exception is if a glass of water is brought to your restaurant table in a major city. It is safe to presume the water has been decanted from an industrial-size container of bottled water in the kitchen. Most reticulated tap water is not suitable for drinking without boiling or treatment. Ice is safe if it is machine made. Shaved or crushed ice from a block is always suspect.

Much work has been done by the government, in conjunction with various development projects, to promote and provide safe water. Bottled water is widely available except where the cost and effort of transporting it is prohibitive to the local people. This is the case in many upland villages.

Locally produced bottled water has been treated, usually by UV light or reverse osmosis. Stream, river, well and tap water are often boiled before drinking in villages. Boiling, however, takes fuel, either charcoal or wood. This must first be hand gathered from the forest or chopped. Much development aid has been directed toward the installation of village wells and pumps to reduce the distances of fetching water. There are still many areas of upland Laos, though, where inhabitants in more isolated settlements must carry water long distances. Education programmes are aimed at training people to make their own water bio-filters or to boil water before drinking. There are many schemes to build small dams for irrigation and domestic use. More water treatment plants for smaller cities and water reticulation projects are planned. The need is great; there is still much more work to be done.

Tea ຊາ *sa*, ນ້ຳ ຊາ *nam sa*

Tea is grown, and green, oolong and black tea are all produced from its leaves in Laos. The main cultivation areas are in the Bolaven Plateau in the South and Phongsaly, the northern province adjoining Luang Namtha. Small tea plantations are also maintained by Akha in the uplands of Luang Namtha province. Well-known brands from Phongsaly are Sinouk High Mountain Smoked Green Tea from Korman village and the rare Pu'er Green Tea marketed by Lao Mountain



Coffee. Paksong Golden Green Tea and others are grown on the Bolaven Plateau where the bushes are often interspersed with coffee trees. China's Yunnan province, which borders Luang Namtha, is a major producer of tea, so bulk Chinese tea leaves are easily found in the North's local markets.

In northern villages, green tea is the most commonly drunk. It is usually served warm. Where water is boiled to kill amoeba and parasites, some green tea leaves are often added to the water for flavour. This weak tea poured over ice cubes is also offered at restaurants. Sweetened iced tea is available from stalls and restaurants. Tea leaves are also chewed.

Laos has a growing export market in mulberry tea. Mulberry is widely grown in the North as its leaves are used to feed silkworms. (There are well-established, successful schemes in the northern provinces in which farmers have been encouraged to forsake traditional poppy cultivation for income alternatives such as mulberry trees and silk cultivation.) Dried fruit infusions are also popular. Bael fruit tea (*tum*), is one of these. *Tum* is sipped by pregnant women in Laos; it is also a treatment for bowel problems.

Coffee ກາຟະ *ga feh*

Lao coffee is usually made very strong and sweet. Finely ground coffee is spooned into a 'coffee sock'. This is a soft, white cotton cone which hangs from a wire frame with handle. It is suspended over a metal jug, and boiling water is poured through. The filter is left to rest a few minutes before it is removed. A large helping of sweetened condensed milk is spooned into a glass or mug, and the hot coffee is poured on top. This makes a beautifully contrasting drink — the cream of the milk in the bottom of the glass against the deep dark brown of the coffee on top. It is up to the drinker to stir the two together, or not. A chaser of hot water or weak tea may be served as an accompaniment. This is the standard coffee available at street stalls and in workplaces. Nescafé is marketed fiercely in both Lao and Thailand. It is not regarded as the ugly duckling it is in the West, but rather, it enjoys a much higher status. It now gives the local Lao Dao instant coffee a run for its money. In Laos' urban centers, one can savour brewed Lao grown coffee beans, Western-style, from commercial machines where each cup is individually prepared.

Coffee plantations were established on Laos' southeastern Bolaven Plateau, Champasak province, during the French colonial period starting in 1915. The first successful harvests, however, were not realized for some 15 years. Today the main varieties grown are robusta and the highly prized Arabica. The latter comprises less than 20 percent of production, but that percentage is growing. Lao Mountain Coffee is an emerging quality producer of Arabica coffee. It works with a local organic and fair trade coffee producers' group, Jhai Coffee Farmers' Cooperative. Dao Coffee and Sinouk Café Lao are other well-known Lao brands. Much of Lao's robusta coffee bean crop is sold to Nescafé in Thailand.

Juices ນ້ຳໝາກໄມ້ *nam mak mai*

Throughout the country, street vendors offer cooling sugar cane juice, rolled and crushed to order, and other refreshing drinks. A lime drink, *nam mak naaow*, is very popular. It is made with juice, ice, sugar syrup and water. Delicious organically grown passion fruit juice is available in Vientiane. Stalls and restaurants offer blended smoothies using crushed ice and local fruit such as mango, papaya, banana and watermelon. Western variations using milk, ice cream or yogurt are popular with tourists and foreign residents. Slowly, the Lao population is learning to enjoy this backpacker staple as well.

Opposite: Akha girl carrying water
Right: Beer Lao, small bottles for export

Soft drinks ນ້ຳໂຊດາ *nam soda*

Soft drinks are bottled locally under license by the Lao Soft Drink Co., Ltd. plant on Thadeua Road outside of Vientiane. It produces Pepsi, Mirinda, 7-Up, soda and drinking water. Until early this decade, Pepsi was the only Western cola manufactured and available in Laos, reflecting the market hold Pepsi had in both Laos and Thailand. Although the Pepsi bottling plant was built in the '60s, it was not until the Lao Soft Drink Co., Ltd. was established in 1971 that the first locally produced drinks went on sale. These days, Coca Cola and its sister products, energy drinks and a range of bottled ice teas and other infusions are all imported from Thailand and widely available.

As in Thailand, soft drinks are frequently decanted by vendors from bottles into plastic bags holding ice. A straw is inserted and a rubber band is cunningly used to keep the bag closed and the straw in place. This habit has created a Catch-22 of recycling—glass drink bottles are ensured of being returned to the bottler for reuse, but the plastic bags inevitably become roadside trash.

Beer ຕູ້ *bia*

In Laos, beer is frequently served with ice. Tourists and local foreign residents have caught on to this thirst-quenching practice which is ideally suited to Laos' tropical climate. In villages, rather than everyone having an individual glass, a single glass is shared amongst the group. It is topped up as it is passed along. No one may go home until all the beer is drunk. Villagers in the North



usually drink very cheap Chinese beer, but Beer Lao is highly valued for special occasions. And no wonder. Beer Lao (ບຸຍ ລາວ *bia Lao*) is superb. It is a refreshingly flavoursome pilsener. Lao Brewery Co., Ltd. also produces a light beer, a dark beer, Tiger Head bottled water and it brews Carlsberg under license. *The Bangkok Post* described Beer Lao as the 'Dom Pérignon' of Asian beers. It has won awards from Russia, France, the Czech Republic, Belgium, the US, Australia and New Zealand. In April 2008, Lao Brewery introduced Lane Xang Beer, a 5.5 percent lager. The new brew retains the flavour of Beer Lao but is slightly drier and crisper on the palate.

Beer Lao enjoys something of a cult following, with brand loyalty assiduously pursued. The brewery is a joint venture with the Lao government, which holds a 49 percent share. In the past it was a state-owned enterprise and earlier still, a private company. Lao Brewery is the greatest brand marketer in the country, surpassing Knorr and Pepsi. The company is constantly innovating paraphernalia which appeal to tourists and residents alike. Restaurants and stalls sport Beer Lao awnings, pennants, napkin holders, ice buckets, glasses and table sun umbrellas. The company also widely distributes logo bedecked jackets and T-shirts, coasters, ash trays, serving trays, tablecloths, calendars featuring lovely Lao women, fridges, kegs and large billboards. Beer Lao umbrellas

were used to shade the army and police security details at the Vientiane-hosted ASEAN heads of government meeting in 2004. The company also provided a massive digital countdown board on Vientiane's main boulevard for the country's December 2009 hosting of the SEA Games. A Beer Lao song can be downloaded at the company's website: <http://www.beer-lao.com>. The company is also a generous sponsor of a large number of community events including sports activities, dragon boat racing, education and health activities and beauty pageants.

In March 2008, Asia Pacific Breweries Ltd., Singaporean producer of Tiger Beer, opened a manufacturing plant in Vientiane. The Lao government owns 25 percent of the operation. Tiger has given Beer Lao a marketing challenge, trying to match it billboard for billboard, promotion for promotion.

Lao Lao ເຫລົ້າ ລາວ *lao Lao*

Another local beverage is sticky rice spirit, the ubiquitous *lao Lao* (alcohol Lao), also called *lao kao* (alcohol white) — the first *lao* is spoken with a low-falling tone while the second *Lao* is pronounced with a high (or rising) tone. Frequently mislabelled a whiskey by foreigners, this spirit is commonly distilled in villages. It ranges from rot gut to aromatic hooch, but all versions



come with a serious kick. *Lao satoe*, the liquid drained off *lao Lao* mash before distillation, is also drunk. It is a cloudy white colour and has a very yeasty, sweet taste.

At festive occasions such as *baci* ceremonies, feasts or any situation where goodwill is shared, it is traditional for every adult to be offered two liqueur-size glasses of *lao Lao* in quick succession for good luck. (In more affluent families, certainly at Vientiane weddings, *lao Lao* has been replaced by Johnny Walker.) One is expected to toss back the drink in a gulp – no sipping allowed! – and then return the glass to be refilled for the next guest. This is the custom, but the brew is so potent that remaining calmly vertical, rather than doubling up without spluttering, is an achievement in itself! One may sip or, alternatively, pour the contents through the floor boards or onto the ground if the celebration is well underway. It is expected that women's drinking may taper off after awhile. One may also demur with a health problem or if drinking counters religious belief.

Medicinal *lao Lao* is made by steeping specially selected herbs or animal parts in the spirit, like a herbal schnapps. Hill tribe medicine doctors (*mor yah*) have been known to help trekkers ready for their early morning onward journey by offering a double shot of *lao Lao*. It decidedly numbs aching muscles.

Homemade *lao Lao* is sold in markets and shops in recycled glass or plastic bottles or in plastic bags. Manufactured *lao Lao* is also available and is very cheap. It does not have, however, the same good taste as home brew. It may be safer, though, as village distilled *lao Lao* is a bit hit or miss with alcohol proportions.

Jar alcohol, rice wine ຕາວິ້າໄຫ *lao hai*

Another local brew is rice wine (*lao hai*), literally, 'alcohol jar'. It tastes a bit like sake and is sweeter, fruitier and less potent than *lao Lao*. A mash of cooked, soaked sticky rice and rice husks or bran is combined with a powder starter (a bit like making ginger beer). After several fermentation steps taking up to four days, the mixture is transferred to large pottery jars. It must then ferment for seven to fourteen days before being drunk. A longer period is recommended, though, as the beverage develops over time, like wine. This is also sold in some markets.

Lao hai is used in ceremonies and on other communal and special occasions by the Kmhmu', Hmong and people from Tai subgroups, such as the Tai Dam, Tai Daeng and Tai Neua. A unique feature of its consumption is that two people drink it simultaneously through long reed straws directly from the pottery jar in which it was fermented. A recent innovation is to use plastic tubing, including that intended for medical drips, to replace the reeds. After the first pair has sipped, the vessel is topped up with water, and the drink is passed on to another two. And so on. Occasionally a stick is used to mix the alcohol and water. As village water is often untreated and contains illness-bearing organisms, you may wish to offer bottled water to the occasion.

Opposite left: Beer Lao promotions alongside spirit houses on sale

Opposite right: A *lao Lao* still in Ban Khone Kham
Below: *lao Lao* on sale at local market, Luang Namtha





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gourd
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also Kmhmu' rattan stew
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parcels

Transcription of Lao using the English alphabet

Lao is a tonal language with some sounds that have no English equivalents. There is no standard transcription form using the English alphabet. Contemporary Lao transcription has been influenced by French, Thai, American and British transliteration. This makes it problematic and endlessly debated. For example, common transcriptions vary for food-related terms, e.g. names of ingredients, fruit, vegetables, techniques and traditional dishes. To deal with this, the author lists common transliterations for Lao terms in the Index and in the Ingredients section under the English name for the ingredient.

For this book, English transcriptions have been simplified, so readers of different language backgrounds can pronounce the Lao by reading a word as if it were English; no pronunciation chart is necessary. No attempt has been made to indicate tones, and only basic distinctions are made between aspirated and unaspirated consonants and short and long vowels. Some exceptions have been made for clarity or where a common English word would influence pronunciation; see table examples.

Lao	Transcription using English alphabet
ໂ ອ	aw. As in 'law' (eg, <i>naw mai</i> ; bamboo shoot). Other transcription systems use o . This can produce mispronunciation when said as 'oh' (eg, <i>no mai</i> for 'bamboo shoot').
ຸ ອ	ae. Pronounced 'a' as in 'sad'.
ຸ ອ ຸ ຸ	ae. Pronounced 'a' as in 'cat'.
ອ	aw. At the start of or within a word (eg, <i>kawng</i> , dessert; <i>jeow bawng</i> , Luang Prabang chilli paste; <i>aw lahm</i> , Lao spicy stew); Other transcriptions use o . This can produce mispronunciation (eg, <i>kong</i> , dessert; <i>jeow bong</i> , Luang Prabang chilli paste; <i>o lahm</i> , <i>lao</i> spicy stew). o. Used ONLY in the Ingredients section where transcription using o , to follow common usage (eg, <i>pak hom</i> , mint). N.B. This is pronounced <i>pak hawm</i> .
ງ	g. Exceptions: <i>kapow</i> , holy basil and <i>kapi</i> , shrimp paste. k. As final consonant.
ຂ and ຍ	k. At the start of or within a word. (Some systems use kh for ຂ and/or ຍ as these consonants are strongly aspirated.)
ຢ	y. At the start of or within a word. i. As final consonant.
ດ	d. At the start of or within a word. t. As final consonant.
ບ	b. At the start of or within a word. p. As final consonant.
ຸ ຸ ຸ	bp. ph. p. Some transcription systems use ph for ຸ as well and p for ຸ.



The cooks, Chan, Joy and Tuey



The Boat Landing Guest House and Restaurant



Kees and Dorothy



The little known cultures and cuisine of northern Laos are reflected in the recipes of its local ethnic groups and Luang Namtha Province's premiere ecotourism lodge.

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- ✿ A description of Lao preparation and cooking techniques
- ✿ An explanation of traditional cooking equipment
- ✿ A bibliography, including web links
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