

Coconut, lime and herbs *transform rice and shrimp*

Malaysia's Coconut Shrimp and Rice Salad



Suffused with fresh herbs, this rice dish makes for a refreshing light meal.

Story by **ALBERT STUMM**

GARDENS IN northeast Malaysia overflow with aromatic plants unfamiliar to most of us—wild betel, turmeric, flowering torch ginger, galangal, kaffir lime—as well as more common lemon grass, mint, cilantro and many types of basil.

And they all play a role in nasi ulam, a richly herbal and vibrantly textured rice salad. Rooted in traditional medicine, it originally was intended to cleanse the body of toxins, says Christina Arokiasamy, author of “The Malaysian Kitchen.”

“What nasi ulam is, is a whole bunch of goodness in one bowl,” she says, noting that the dish evolved after the arrival of Chinese immigrants in the 15th century. Their descendants intermarried with locals, adopted the dish and added coconut and fried fish, then served it with a spicy sambal chili sauce. The result is a pleasant cacophony of flavors and textures defined by vivid, bright contrasts.

Despite the lengthy list of herbs and seasonings, making nasi ulam is a simple process. Cooks prepare jasmine rice, scenting the cooking water with one or more of the herbs and

often coconut milk. After the rice cools, the remaining herbs are thinly sliced and stirred in, keeping their flavors fresh, not cooked. Savory fish sauce or shrimp paste adds richness, and fried fish adds substance.

At Milk Street, we loved the combination of ample fresh herbs paired with rice and savory seafood. But we needed to simplify. We started with the herbs, limiting our recipe to basil, cilantro and mint. We replicated the subtle taste of kaffir lime leaves by adding lime juice to the dressing. And in lieu of fried fish, we found that poached shrimp—soaked briefly in the coconut milk dressing—added briny meatiness that complemented the herbs and citrus.

The resulting dish was light but intensely fragrant, with a slight sweetness from the coconut and shrimp and a brightness from ginger and lime juice—a taste of Malaysia made more familiar.

Jasmine Rice and Herb Salad with Shrimp (Nasi Ulam)

Start to finish: 35 minutes
Servings: 4

MALAYSIAN NASI ULAM, a rice dish suffused with Southeast Asian herbs, inspired this recipe. We use readily available herbs and add shrimp to make a light main dish out of the salad. If you find Thai basil, use it in place of Italian basil. You can buy precooked shrimp at most supermarkets, but we recommend poaching your own peeled and deveined shrimp in barely simmering water seasoned with a handful of cilantro stems. Cook just until the shrimp turn opaque, then transfer to ice water to stop the cooking. Dry the

shrimp well before using.

Don't use sweetened shredded coconut flakes; their sweetness will alter the flavor of the dish.

—YVONNE RUPERTI

½ cups jasmine rice, rinsed and drained
½ cup coconut milk
¼ cup lime juice
2 tablespoons fish sauce
3 tablespoons finely grated fresh ginger
8 scallions, thinly sliced, white and green parts reserved separately
Kosher salt
1 pound cooked medium shrimp, tails removed, cut into bite-size pieces
1 cup lightly packed fresh basil leaves, finely chopped
1 cup lightly packed fresh cilantro leaves, finely chopped
½ cup unsweetened shredded coconut, toasted

▪ **In a large saucepan** over medium-high, bring the rice and 2 cups water to a simmer, then reduce to low, cover and cook until tender and the water is absorbed, about 12 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the rice sit, covered, for 10 minutes.

▪ **Meanwhile, line a rimmed baking sheet** with kitchen parchment. When the rice is done, fluff with a fork, then spread in an even layer on the prepared baking sheet. Let cool for 15 minutes.

▪ **In a large bowl**, whisk together the coconut milk, lime juice, fish sauce, ginger, scallion whites and 1 teaspoon salt. Add the shrimp, toss and let stand for 5 minutes. Add the rice, scallion greens, basil, cilantro and coconut and toss. Taste and season with salt. ♦

Perfectly Poached Shrimp

WE SOMETIMES BUY precooked shrimp in a pinch, but they often are rubbery and tasteless. Poaching your own not only is quick and easy, it also delivers better texture and allows you to flavor the cooking water.

In a Dutch oven, bring to a boil **8 cups water, 1 lemon** (halved and

juice squeezed into the water), **5 bay leaves, 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns** and **1 teaspoon whole cloves**. Boil for 3 minutes, then remove from the heat. Add **1 pound uncooked shrimp** (peeled and deveined). Cover and let stand until the shrimp are opaque and cooked through,



4 to 5 minutes. Drain, then quickly transfer to a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking. Once cold, drain, discard seasonings and transfer to a paper towel-lined bowl. Dry well before using. ♦