

Authentic Pad Kee Mao with Flank Steak: Better Than Takeout Thai Noodles

Drunken Noodles with Beef (Pad Kee Mao): Spicy Thai Recipe Made Easy



TIME
10 min

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INGREDIENTS

Swaps and Notes:

Noodles: While wide rice noodles are traditional (and best for that "drunken" texture), you can substitute dried fettuccine or linguine in a pinch, though the flavor profile will change slightly.

Protein: Pad Kee Mao works with almost any protein.

Swap the beef for chicken (you'll love the flavors if you also like my Easy Cheesy Chicken Sliders with Marinara Garlic Butter), shrimp, or firm tofu. Adjust cooking time accordingly.

Heat: Bird's-eye chilies are hot. For a milder dish, use 1-2 jalapeño or serrano peppers instead, or simply omit the fresh chilies and add a pinch of chili flakes for color.

Thai Basil: Do not substitute regular Italian basil. The flavor is totally different. If you cannot find Thai basil, skip it-don't use the wrong kind.

Step-by-Step Directions:

Soak the 8 oz wide rice noodles in boiling-hot water (off the heat) for about 10 minutes, or until just tender. Drain and rinse them well in cold water to stop the cooking and prevent sticking. Set aside.

In a small bowl, toss the 1 lb thin-sliced flank steak with the 1 Tbsp cornstarch and 2 tsp of the reduced-sodium soy sauce. This is called velveting and ensures the meat stays tender.

In a separate small bowl, whisk together the remaining 2 tsp soy sauce, 1 Tbsp fish sauce, 1 Tbsp oyster sauce, 2 tsp dark soy sauce, and 1 tsp brown sugar. Set the sauce aside-having it ready is crucial for stir-frying.

Heat 1 Tbsp of neutral oil in a large wok or skillet over very high heat. When the oil is shimmering, add the steak and sear it for 2-3 minutes until it's browned and just cooked through. Do not overcrowd the pan; cook in batches if necessary. Remove the beef and set it aside.

Add the remaining 2 Tbsp of neutral oil to the wok.

Toss in the sliced yellow onion, sliced red bell pepper, and the Thai bird's-eye chilies. Stir-fry for about 3 minutes until the vegetables start to soften.

Add the 3 minced garlic cloves and stir-fry for only 30 seconds-don't let the garlic burn!

Add the drained noodles and the cooked steak back into the wok with the vegetables.

Pour the prepared sauce mixture over everything.

Toss quickly and vigorously for about 1 minute until the noodles are evenly coated and heated through. The high heat should slightly caramelize the sauce on the noodles.

Remove the wok from the heat immediately. Stir in the 1½ cups fresh Thai basil leaves. The residual heat will wilt the basil beautifully.

Serve immediately with lime wedges and a sprinkle of bean sprouts for garnish.

Tips for Success:

Use High Heat: This is not a slow simmer dish. You need high, scorching heat to achieve that authentic smoky flavor and prevent the noodles from becoming mushy.

Prep Everything First (Mise en Place): Stir-frying happens fast. Have all your ingredients-sauce, beef, noodles, and veggies-prepped and next to the stove before you turn on the heat.

Don't Overcook the Noodles: The noodles will finish cooking in the wok. Soak them until they are just al dente (a little chewy). If they're too soft to start, they'll break apart when you toss them.

The Sauce is the Boss: Don't skip the fish sauce or dark soy sauce. They are non-negotiable for the right depth of flavor and color.

Serving Suggestions and Pairings:

Cooling Drink: The spicy heat of the noodles is best cut by a sweet-tart beverage. A glass of This Blueberry Lemonade is My Favorite Refreshing Drink for Sunny Days works wonders.

Appetizer: Start the meal with a light, easy appetizer like Edamame sprinkled with sea salt, or try These Sheet Pan Quesadillas are My Favorite Way to Feed a Crowd Fast if you're feeding a crowd.

Side Dish: A simple bowl of Cucumber Salad dressed with a little rice vinegar and sugar is a great contrast to the rich, spicy noodles.

Nutritional Information (Approximate):

Storage and Leftover Tips:

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Final Thoughts:

DIRECTIONS

1. Prep the Noodles and Beef:
2. Soak the 8 oz wide rice noodles in boiling-hot water (off the heat) for about 10 minutes, or until just tender. Drain and rinse them well in cold water to stop the cooking and prevent sticking. Set aside.
3. In a small bowl, toss the 1 lb thin-sliced flank steak with the 1 Tbsp cornstarch and 2 tsp of the reduced-sodium soy sauce. This is called velveting and ensures the meat stays tender.
4. 2. Mix the Sauce:
5. In a separate small bowl, whisk together the remaining 2 tsp soy sauce, 1 Tbsp fish sauce, 1 Tbsp oyster sauce, 2 tsp dark soy sauce, and 1 tsp brown sugar. Set the sauce aside-having it ready is crucial for stir-frying.
6. 3. Sear the Beef:
7. Heat 1 : Tbsp of neutral oil in a large wok or skillet over very high heat. When the oil is shimmering, add the steak and sear it for 2-3 minutes until it's browned and just cooked through. Do not overcrowd the pan; cook in batches if necessary. Remove the beef and set it aside.
8. 4. Stir-Fry the Aromatics and Veggies:
9. Add the remaining 2 : Tbsp of neutral oil to the wok.
10. Toss in the sliced yellow onion, sliced red bell pepper, and the Thai bird's-eye chilies. Stir-fry for about 3 minutes until the vegetables start to soften.
11. Add the 3 minced garlic cloves and stir-fry for only 30 seconds-don't let the garlic burn!
12. 5. Combine and Finish:

13. Add the drained noodles and the cooked steak back into the wok with the vegetables.
14. Pour the prepared sauce mixture over everything.
15. Toss quickly and vigorously for about 1 minute until the noodles are evenly coated and heated through. The high heat should slightly caramelize the sauce on the noodles.
16. Remove the wok from the heat immediately. Stir in the 1½ cups fresh Thai basil leaves. The residual heat will wilt the basil beautifully.
17. Serve immediately with lime wedges and a sprinkle of bean sprouts for garnish.
18. Tips for Success: Use High Heat: This is not a slow simmer dish. You need high, scorching heat to achieve that authentic smoky flavor and prevent the noodles from becoming mushy.
19. Prep : Everything First (Mise en Place): Stir-frying happens fast. Have all your ingredients-sauce, beef, noodles, and veggies-prepped and next to the stove before you turn on the heat.
20. Don't : Overcook the Noodles: The noodles will finish cooking in the wok. Soak them until they are just al dente (a little chewy). If they're too soft to start, they'll break apart when you toss them.
21. The : Sauce is the Boss: Don't skip the fish sauce or dark soy sauce. They are non-negotiable for the right depth of flavor and color.
22. Serving Suggestions and Pairings: Pad Kee Mao is a hearty meal all by itself, but for a full Thai-inspired spread, consider balancing the heat with something cool and refreshing.
23. Cooling : Drink: The spicy heat of the noodles is best cut by a sweet-tart beverage. A glass of This Blueberry Lemonade is My Favorite Refreshing Drink for Sunny Days works wonders.
24. Appetizer: Start the meal with a light, easy appetizer like Edamame sprinkled with sea salt, or try These Sheet Pan Quesadillas are My Favorite Way to Feed a Crowd Fast if you're feeding a crowd.
25. Side : Dish: A simple bowl of Cucumber Salad dressed with a little rice vinegar and sugar is a great contrast to the rich, spicy noodles.

SWAPS & NOTES

Wide Rice Noodles 8 oz Look for the flat, fresh or dried variety.

Flank Steak 1 lb Thinly sliced against the grain.

Cornstarch 1 Tbsp For velveting the beef.

Reduced-Sodium Soy Sauce 4 tsp (divided) Used for both the marinade and the sauce.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Use High Heat: This is not a slow simmer dish.

You need high, scorching heat to achieve that authentic smoky flavor and prevent the noodles from becoming mushy.

Prep Everything First (Mise en Place): Stir-frying happens fast.

Have all your ingredients-sauce, beef, noodles, and veggies-prepped and next to the stove before you turn on the heat.

