

THE FOOD OF VIET NAM

 **ILIFAD**
Investing in rural people



**34 easy-to-follow
traditional dishes cooked
by the rural people
and ethnic minority
groups of Viet Nam**

Acknowledgements

This cookbook was produced, on behalf of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), by Maria Luisa Saponaro, Knowledge Management Consultant, under the supervision of the IFAD country team in Viet Nam.

Special thanks go to Ambrosio Barros, the leader of this project and IFAD Country Director, as well as the Head of the Mekong MCO. Without his leadership and dedication, this project would not have come to fruition.

We also express our appreciation to the dedicated individuals who contributed to the creation of this cookbook:

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We extend a special acknowledgment to the farmers whose stories enrich the pages of this book, as well as to all the members of the CSSP and CSAT project teams for their invaluable contributions.

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This work is financed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

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THIS BOOK
IS AN APPRECIATION
DEDICATED TO
ETHNIC MINORITY PEOPLES:
GUARDIANS
OF BIODIVERSITY



Contents

- 7 Foreword
- 11 A typical Vietnamese meal
- 13 **Starters**
- 14 Stir-fried goldenberry vegetables with garlic
- 16 Sun-dried beef
- 18 Smelt-whitings fish salad
- 20 Steamed jumping squid in piper lolot leaves
- 22 White sardine salad
- 24 Tapioca dumplings
- 26 Pancake
- 28 Mini pancake
- 31 **Main courses**
- 32 Steamed pork belly
- 34 Stir-fried bee pupae with lemon leaves
- 36 Fermented fish hotpot
- 38 Mekong Delta style sweet and sour fish broth
- 39 Empowering Agriculture: The Success Story of Ms. Nguyen Thi Ven and the Giồng Trôm Green-Skinned Pomelo Cooperative
- 40 Clam broth with yu choy
- 42 Smoked sausage
- 44 Stir-fired chicken with young ginger
- 45 Cultivating Success: Mr. Ly Huu Nhat's journey with Ri hybrid chicken farming
- 46 Thau tuon vegetable broth
- 47 Empowering female entrepreneurship: A homestay success story in the Cao Bằng province
- 48 Boiled forest bamboo shoots dipped in fish sauce
- 50 Five-coloured sticky rice
- 52 Charcoal grilled hemibagrus (Lang fish)
- 54 Wild leaf hotpot
- 56 Chicken rice
- 58 Grilled beef in bamboo tube
- 60 Rice noodle with boiled pork and blended anchovy dipping sauce

62	Noodle with fish broth
64	Shrimp noodle
66	Bamboo-tube rice
69	Desserts
70	Lime-water dumpling
72	Heaven cake
73	Cultivating Tradition: The story of Tai glutinous rice in the Bắc Kạn province
74	Production and consumption linkage: A good economic development model for ethnic minority people
76	Candied coconut ribbons
78	Mác púp jelly
80	Black jelly
82	Ant-egg cake
84	Buckwheat cake
86	Stuffed sticky rice balls
91	IFAD in Viet Nam
93	Spotlight on the Climate Smart Agricultural Value Chain Development
93	Project Summary
94	Interview with the Project Directors
94	Mr. Nguyen Khac Han: Project Director, CSAT Bến Tre province
96	Mr. Huynh Nghia Tho: Project Director, CSAT Trà Vinh province
99	Spotlight on the Commercial Smallholder Support Project
99	Project Summary
100	Interview with the Project Directors
100	Mr. Hoang Van Giap: Project Director, CSSP Bắc Kạn province
102	Ms. Vu Thi Hong Thuy: Project Director, CSSP Cao Bằng province



Foreword

Food and culture are inextricably linked. Food is more than just sustenance - it shapes our lives, our experiences and our identities. It's a way of expressing ourselves, connecting with others, and passing on rich cultural heritage. Traditional food - and the associated preparation techniques and social customs - is more than just a reminder of the past. It is a connection to historic and cultural roots.

In Viet Nam, food is about nutrition - and it is also about family, community, and tradition. Viet Nam's rich culinary history centres not only on taste, but on sharing meals with loved ones, the pleasure of cooking, and pride in culinary heritage. Vietnamese cuisine mirrors the country's cultural diversity, drawing from ingenious cooking techniques and ingredients.

One of the most effective ways to discover a culture is to start with its cuisine. This book records 34 recipes that form the core of Viet Nam's food culture, from aromatic noodle soups to hearty stews, and offers a glimpse of the lived lives of the country's diverse people. Each region - from Ben Tre to Ha Giang - boasts of a distinctive culinary legacy that is shaped by local biodiversity and the resourcefulness of local communities.

These recipes have been passed down through families for generations and serve as a homage to the role of indigenous communities in preserving local ecosystems and traditional agricultural practices, ensuring that they survive and thrive in the 21st century. Along the coast, you'll see an abundance of seafood dishes, whereas the Mekong Delta - the 'rice bowl' of Viet Nam - has dishes with rice and fruits and vegetables.

You'll find that key ingredients include fish sauce, lemongrass, garlic, shallots and chilli peppers, and the art of Vietnamese cooking lies in carefully balancing sweet, sour, salty, bitter, umami and spicy flavours. I remember first sipping the legendary duck pho in a village on our way to Cao Bang and the explosion of flavours that was completely new to me. That was my first trip to Viet Nam and only my second trip to East Asia. I have since been amazed by and in awe of the ability of Vietnamese cuisine to remain simple by marrying raw products with a variety of spices and herbs, and yet take our palates to uncharted, and delicious, territories. Each gastronomic experience is a new and wonderful adventure, which I wish everyone can enjoy discovering.

Each recipe in this book highlights local food and local culture - and comes from communities that are battling to preserve their way of life in the face of climate change. The projects implemented by the International Fund for Agricultural Development and our partners are aimed at directly supporting these communities to build resilience and better livelihoods. We hope that you will don your apron in support of these communities and embark on a gastronomic journey through Viet Nam, where the flavours will transport you to vibrant markets and tranquil villages.

Ambrosio N. Barros, Head, Mekong Multi-Country Office, IFAD Representative & Country Director - Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Myanmar & Thailand



Viet Nam is home to 54 recognized ethnic groups, with the Kinh people forming the majority. The remaining 53 are minorities. They include the Hmong, Tay, Dao, and Mường, among others, that have historically inhabited the mountainous regions, remote highlands, and coastal areas of the country for centuries.

Ethnic minority groups are an integral part of the Viet Nam's rich cultural diversity. Comprising approximately 15 per cent of Viet Nam's population, their communities have fostered a deep connection to the land, drawing nourishment from the forests, rivers, and fertile soils that have sustained their own distinct languages, worldviews, and traditional lifestyles for generations.

One of the most remarkable aspects of these communities is their role as custodians of Viet Nam's biocultural diversity. Through sustainable farming methods and a deep understanding of local ecosystems, they have safeguarded a wide range of plant and animal species, contributing to the country's ecological diversity and serving as guardians of invaluable genetic resources.

Furthermore, the ethnic minorities of Viet Nam have enriched the country's culinary landscape with their traditions. Their unique dishes often incorporate wild edibles, game meats, and locally sourced herbs and spices, reflecting a deep knowledge and appreciation for the flavours and resources offered by their natural surroundings.

Despite their invaluable contributions to Viet Nam's cultural and environmental heritage, ethnic minorities face numerous challenges, including lack of secure rights to their land, economic marginalization, cultural assimilation and climate change.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the need to support and empower ethnic minorities in Viet Nam. Initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable development, preserving their traditional knowledge and food systems, and protecting their land rights have gained momentum. This offers hope for the preservation of natural resources, through sustainable governance systems whereby ethnic minority groups can access, control and benefit from these resources in fair and equitable ways.

In embracing the culinary tastes and traditions of Viet Nam, this book pays homage to the resilient spirit of ethnic minorities and their invaluable role in preserving the country's cultural and biological diversity, enriching the nation's heritage and inspiring a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of food, culture, and the natural world. Let us recognize and celebrate their contributions as we savour the flavours of Viet Nam's traditional dishes, each one a testament to the wisdom and resilience of these communities.

Ilaria Firmian, Senior Technical Specialist Indigenous Peoples, IFAD



A typical Vietnamese meal



A country's cuisine is a reflection of its people, their way of life, their history and culture, and the stories they continue to tell. It is a journey that begins from the preparation of the dishes all the way to how they are served. The Vietnamese people have endured prolonged periods of war that resulted in widespread poverty. Consequently, the ingredients used in Vietnamese cuisine are often inexpensive, yet the ingenious ways of combining them creates a delectable yin-yang balance, making the food simple in appearance but incredibly rich in flavour.

Sustainability is at the heart of Vietnamese cooking, especially in the rural areas where a no-waste policy is encouraged. Every part of an animal is utilized, including the less desirable cuts of farm animals, such as cows and pigs that are used in blood sausages or soup; the higher quality cuts are used in stir-fries, soups, or other dishes. Similarly, vegetables such as scallions are diced into small bits as a garnish, while the stalks and roots are replanted.

Fish sauce or *nước mắm*, is the most commonly used condiment in Vietnamese cuisine. Made from fermented raw fish, this iconic seasoning is served with most Vietnamese dishes, which are known for their bold flavours derived from creatively mixing inexpensive and simple scraps.

A traditional southern Vietnamese meal typically includes plain white rice, catfish in a

clay pot (*cá kho tộ*), sour soup with snakehead fish (*canh chua cá lóc*), and fish sauce as a condiment. Dishes are prepared keeping taste rather than appearance in mind, and are served family-style, bringing everyone together after a long day of work. Vietnamese cuisine from each region carries distinctive and unique characteristics that reflect the geographical and living conditions of the people.

The southern-style diet is very green: vegetables, fish, and tropical fruits are the main ingredients. In contrast, central Viet Nam's cuisine boasts of strong flavours, owing to the harsh weather conditions and the population's reliance on salt and fish sauce. The staple of northern Vietnamese cuisine is noodles, from where *phở*, the most renowned dish of the country, has travelled to other parts of the world. The foods vary drastically due to the difference in climate and lifestyles throughout the three main regions of Viet Nam.

In this book, we bring you 34 easy-to-follow traditional dishes cooked by the rural communities and ethnic minority groups of eleven different provinces of Viet Nam. These recipes showcase the rich culinary heritage and sustainable cooking practices that have been passed down through generations, reflecting the deep connection between the land and the people who call it home.



Starters





Goldenberry, a tropical herb renowned for its medicinal properties, thrives along the perimeters of fields and lawns. Despite its bitter taste, the plant is entirely non-toxic and boasts cooling attributes, making it a sought-after remedy for various ailments such as heat-clearing, pimples, mouth ulcers, phlegm, coughing, and gastrointestinal issues. Goldenberry's versatility extends beyond its medicinal applications, as its unique flavour profile - slightly bitter yet refreshingly light and cool - makes it a prized addition to numerous culinary creations. Whether boiled, cooked, or stir-fried with meat, goldenberry elevates dishes with its appetizing appeal.

Rau tầm bóp xào tỏi

Stir-fried goldenberry vegetables with garlic

Cao Bằng province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Goldenberry: 500 gm
- Garlic: 5 cloves
- Cooking oil: 1 tablespoon
- Salt/seasoning: 1 teaspoon

Tip:

To ensure optimal freshness, look for goldenberry plants with dark green leaves that are untern and unscratched. Avoid wilted vegetables or those with crushed leaves, and steer clear of specimens with blackened petioles (leaf stalks).

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Wash and dry the goldenberries.
- Chop and crush the garlic cloves.

Cooking the dish:

- Heat a pan over the stove and add 1 tablespoon of cooking oil.
- Stir-fry the minced garlic until fragrant, then add the goldenberries, stirring vigorously over high heat for approximately 2-3 minutes.
- Incorporate 1 teaspoon of seasoning powder and continue stirring to ensure an even distribution of the seasoning.

Stir-fried goldenberries with garlic yield a delectable and refreshing flavour profile. Upon savouring, expect a subtle bitterness followed by a delightful sweet aftertaste, offering a harmonious balance of flavours and texture.



Bò một nắng

Sun-dried beef

SERVES
5

Sun-dried beef, known as Bò một nắng in Vietnamese cuisine, is a beloved delicacy celebrated for its intense flavour. This traditional dish exemplifies the resourcefulness of Vietnamese culinary techniques, transforming humble ingredients into a delectable treat. With its robust blend of spices and meticulous drying process, sun-dried beef offers a tantalizing experience that lingers on the palate long after the last bite.

Gia Lai province

Ingredients

- Beef: 1.5 kg
- Siam green chilli: 5-6
- Lemongrass: 2 stalks
- Purple onions: 5
- Garlic: 1 bulb
- Spices: Sugar, seasoning, salt, Shacha sauce

Recipe

- Begin by peeling off the dry outer layer of the garlic and onions. Proceed to chop and crush them. Peel the outer layer of the lemongrass and chop it into small pieces. Slice the fresh chilli.
- Combine the chopped garlic, purple onion, lemongrass, and chilli in a bowl, mixing well. Add about 3.5 teaspoons of salt, 1.5 teaspoons of seasoning powder, 1 teaspoon of sugar, and 1 teaspoon of Shacha sauce, ensuring thorough incorporation.
- Wash the beef, drain it, then slice it into large pieces, approximately half a finger thick. Proceed to marinate the beef with the mixture prepared in the previous step.
- Don food gloves and evenly spread the spice mixture over all the beef pieces. Allow the beef to marinate for 3-4 hours, allowing ample time for the spices to infuse.
- Transfer the marinated beef to a stainless-steel bowl or bamboo basket, and expose it to sunlight for drying. For optimal fragrance and flavour, the beef should dry for at least 6 hours, ideally from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Tip:

In the absence of sunlight or access to an open-air drying space, consider the following alternative drying methods:

- Method 1: Heat a non-stick pan over the stove until hot, then place the beef. Flip the beef after a minute, continuing to alternate until it firms up.
- Method 2: Utilize a charcoal stove if available, placing the marinated beef pieces and flipping them until they achieve desired firmness.

Sun-dried beef offers a savoury, aromatic experience, perfect for snacking or incorporating into various dishes, showcasing the culinary prowess and creativity of Vietnamese cuisine.



Gỏi cá đực

Smelt-whitings fish salad

SERVES

4

In this time-honoured recipe, the delicate essence of smelt-whitings fish takes centre stage, harmonizing with a vibrant medley of vegetables and tropical fruits. The fusion of flavours, ranging from the tangy sweetness of tomatoes and mangoes to the crisp bite of carrots and onions, creates a harmonious medley of flavours that delights the palate.

Ingredients

- Smelt-whitings fish: 1 kg
- Chicken egg yolks: 2
- Tomatoes: 5
- Carrots: 3
- Mango: 1
- Pineapple: 1
- Purple onion: 1
- Minced garlic: 1 teaspoon
- Roasted peanuts: 50 gm
- Chilli powder: 1 teaspoon
- Lemons: 3
- Cooking oil: 2 teaspoons
- Spices: Salt, monosodium glutamate (MSG flavour enhancer), seasoning powder
- Side herbs: Rice paper, lettuce, Ming Aralia leaves, star fruits

Hà Tĩnh province

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Clean the fish and halve it after removing the spine. Submerge the fish in lemon juice and let it marinate upside down for about 10-15 minutes.
- Drain the fish after marinating, reserving the juice to make the sauce.
- Wash and dice the tomatoes into small pieces.
- Wash, peel, and shred the mango and carrots.
- Peel and shred the onion.
- Peel, cut, and slice the pineapple vertically.
- Wash the side herbs, soak them in salt water for 10 minutes, then drain.

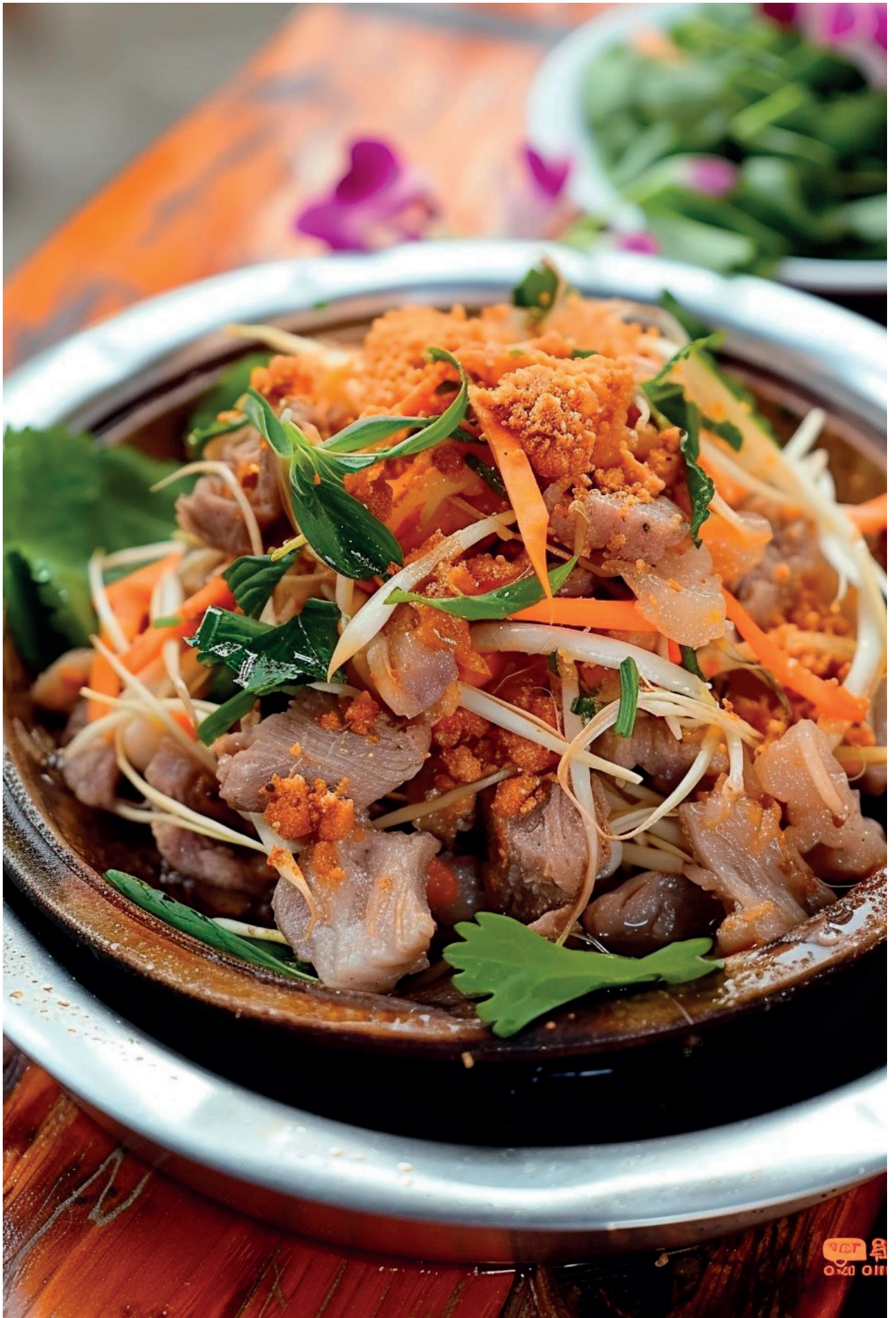
Making the sauce:

- Heat 2 teaspoons of oil and 1 teaspoon of minced garlic in a pot and fry it until golden. Add the diced tomatoes and stir-fry for 3 minutes.
- Mix the leftover lemon juice with 50 ml of plain water.
- Season with spices according to taste.
- Incorporate 1 egg yolk and blend thoroughly.
- Stir in 1 teaspoon of minced roasted peanuts until the sauce thickens.

Making the salad:

- In a large bowl, combine the smelt-whitings fish with shredded carrots, mango, onion, and 5 teaspoons of roasted peanuts.
- Mix all ingredients thoroughly, adding ½ teaspoon of chilli powder for added depth of flavour.
- Adjust seasoning according to taste.

This smelt-whitings fish salad promises a delightful fusion of flavours and textures, embodying the culinary artistry of Vietnamese cuisine.





Renowned as a signature dish hailing from the Hà Tĩnh region, steamed jumping squid embodies the essence of coastal culinary excellence. Situated near the bountiful waters of the Vũng Áng port in Kỳ Anh town, the abundance of squid, nurtured in floating rafts, fuels the gastronomic delight that is this savoury delicacy. Harvested at the peak of their plumpness, with vibrant red and translucent skin, these squid represent the epitome of freshness and flavour.

Mực nhảy cuốn lá lốt hấp

Steamed jumping squid in piper lolot leaves

Hà Tĩnh province

Ingredients

- Squid: 2 kg
- Piper lolot leaf: 2 handfuls
- Ginger: 1 root

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Clean and thoroughly drain the squid, ensuring all impurities are removed.
- Peel and finely shred the ginger.
- Prepare the piper lolot leaves by removing any old or damaged foliage. Wash the leaves, then divide half of them into small pieces, leaving the remaining leaves intact.

Steaming the squid:

- Arrange the chopped piper lolot leaves at the bottom of a bamboo steamer.
- Place the cleaned and prepared squid on top of the leaves, layering it with the sliced ginger and the remaining whole piper lolot leaves.
- Cover the steamer with a lid and steam the squid over medium heat for approximately 15 minutes, or until the squid is tender and fully cooked.
- For added flavour and allure, consider seasoning the dish with a sprinkle of lemon pepper salt or green chilli salt.

This steamed masterpiece, marrying the natural sweetness of squid with the aromatic essence of piper lolot leaves and ginger, promises a culinary journey infused with coastal charm and gastronomic delight.



Gỏi cá mai

White sardine salad

SERVES

2

Ninh Thuận's renowned white sardine salad stands as a culinary gem that has garnered acclaim both locally and internationally, elevating the city's gastronomic reputation to new heights.

Ninh Thuận province

Ingredients

- White sardine fish: 200 gm
- White onion: 1
- Ginger: 1 knob
- Fresh Siam chilli: to taste
- Garlic: half bulb
- Roasted peanuts: 50 gm
- Fried spring onions: 1 tablespoon
- Rice paper: 1 stack
- Tamarind: to taste
- Fresh lemons: 2
- Serving accompaniments: Lettuce, coriander, fish mint, perilla, pineapple, cucumber, shredded green mango

Recipe

- Scale the white sardine, removing the fish head, tail, and spine before slicing into thin fillets. Drizzle freshly squeezed lemon juice over the fish, imparting an almost half-cooked texture. Given the fish's freshness and mild flavour, a brief dip in lime juice is sufficient to enhance its taste without rendering it mushy.
- Peel and thinly slice the ginger, and cut the onion into thin rings.
- Arrange the fish on a plate, placing ginger and onions on one side, and garnish with crushed peanuts and fried onions for added texture and flavour.

Making the sauce:

- Extract pulp from ripe tamarind by soaking it in hot water until fully released.
- Mince the garlic, chilli, and crush roasted peanuts, then blend them with fish sauce, adding a touch of sugar to achieve a harmonious sweet and sour balance.

Plating the dish:

- Wrap the seasoned fish with rice paper and an array of fresh vegetables, including garlic, chilli, and onions to infuse the dish with the fiery essence characteristic of Central Vietnamese cuisine.

This salad offers a delightful fusion of flavours and textures, showcasing the culinary finesse and vibrant essence of Ninh Thuận's culinary heritage.



Bánh bột lọc

Tapioca dumplings

SERVES



Tapioca dumplings, a beloved delicacy cherished across Vietnamese households, encapsulate the essence of traditional cuisine with their tender crust and flavourful fillings. Bursting with a delectable blend of ingredients, these dumplings are a testament to the culinary expertise passed down through generations.

Ingredients

Crust:

- Tapioca flour: 350 gm
- Kudzu flour: 50 gm
- Boiling water: 250 ml
- Salt: ½ teaspoon
- Cooking oil: 1 tablespoon
- Spring onion: 1
- Butter: to taste

Filling:

- Freshwater shrimp: 200 gm
- Pork belly: 150 gm
- Cat ear mushroom: 50 gm
- Pepper: ½ teaspoon
- Sugar, salt: 1 teaspoon
- Fish sauce, minced onions, minced garlic, chilli: to taste

Recipe

Preparing the meat, shrimp, and vegetables:

- Slice pork belly into small, thin pieces, then marinate in a mixture of minced onion, salt, sugar, pepper, and fish sauce.
- Peel, wash, and marinate the shrimp similarly to the meat.
- Soak mushrooms in water, then cut into small pieces.

Quảng Bình province

Making the filling:

- Heat 2 tablespoons of cooking oil in a pan or wok, fry chopped onions until golden. Add meat and stir-fry over high heat until cooked, then set aside.
- Continue frying shrimp until firm and red, then add mushrooms and stir for 2-3 more minutes until shrimp is fully dry.

Making the crust:

- Mix 200 gm of tapioca flour with the kudzu flour and salt. Then add 250 ml of plain water and stir well.
- Add the remaining 150 gm of tapioca flour to the bowl. Wear gloves to knead the dough while it is still hot, so that the dough is smooth and flexible.
- Shape the dough into a long bar and put it in a plastic bag to prevent the dough from drying out.
- Use a knife to cut the dough into small rings and laminate them with butter to create moderately thin textures.
- Put the prepared filling into the dough, fold it in half and use your hands to press the edge of the dough to tighten it, forming a semicircle.
- Finely chop green onions and fry them in a little cooking oil.
- Boil a pot of water, add 1 tablespoon of cooking oil and ½ teaspoon of salt (during medium heat) until the water boils. Then put the cake in to boil. When the cake begins to float, it means the cake is cooked. Take it out and place it in a bowl of cold water.
- Take out the tapioca dumplings, leave them to drain, and then mix with the fried onions.

Making the sauce:

- The sauce used for the Quảng Bình tapioca dumplings is different from the other types of fish sauce. It includes a combination of fish sauce, sugar, lemon juice and water in the ratio 2: 2.5: 2: 9.
- After mixing the liquids, slice a little chilli and add it for extra flavour and colour.

These Quảng Bình tapioca dumplings epitomize the culinary artistry of Vietnamese cuisine, offering a delightful blend of textures and flavours. With each bite, savour the rich heritage and vibrant essence embedded within these treats.



Bánh xèo

Pancake



Bánh xèo is arguably the famous dish of Vietnamese cuisine. A street snack that is named after the sizzling sound it makes while being cooked - *xèo* means sizzling - it is one of Viet Nam's greatest cultural exports in countries such as the United States of America and Australia, where a large Vietnamese diaspora live. Back home, the bánh xèo that combines typical ingredients of southern folk cuisine is very popular with the people in the Mekong Delta.

Ingredients

- Rice flour: 200 gm
- Coconut milk: 50 ml
- Small shrimp: 300 gm
- Pork belly: 300 gm
- Straw mushrooms: 300 gm
- Onions: 2
- Carrot: 1
- White Radish: 1
- Leafy greens: Lettuce, mustard greens, herbs, bean sprouts, spring onions
- Spices: seasoning powder, MSG, salt, fish sauce, turmeric powder, vinegar
- Beer: 1 cup (optional)

Trà Vinh province

Recipe

Preparing the meat, shrimp and vegetables:

- Wash pork belly and slice into thin fillets.
- Clean shrimp, removing heads, tails, and swimmerets, then wash.
- Marinate shrimp and pork belly in ½ teaspoon of seasoning powder and 1 teaspoon of pepper for 15 minutes.
- Wash and prepare straw mushrooms, onions, spring onions, carrots, and white radishes.
- Soak herbs and bean sprouts in diluted salt water for 15-20 minutes, then drain.

Making bánh xèo batter:

- Dissolve the coconut milk in 400 ml of water, then add the rice flour, add 1 tablespoon of turmeric powder, a little of seasoning powder, salt, sprinkle in spring onions and stir well until the flour becomes smooth and no longer has lumps.
- Let the flour rest for about 20-30 minutes so that it can fully rise. The flour should not be too thick, as it will make the crust difficult to cook. You can add 1 cup of beer to the flour mixture so that the crust is crispier when fried.

Making bánh xèo:

- Heat oil in a frying pan, then add pork, shrimp, and a portion of straw mushrooms.
- Pour in a scoop of batter, tilt the pan to coat evenly, and add onions and bean sprouts.
- Cover and cook for 30 seconds until the batter is cooked, then fry until crispy.
- Fold the pancake in half and fry until both sides are crispy. Repeat until all batter is used.

Plating the dish:

- Place the pancake on a plate and garnish with lettuce, greens, herbs, and pickles. Serve with flavourful dipping sauce and enjoy hot.

Bánh xèo is not just a pancake; it is a culinary masterpiece that embodies the essence of Vietnamese street food culture. With its crispy exterior and savoury filling, this iconic dish continues to captivate food lovers around the world.



Bánh căn

Mini pancake

SERVES

4

Bánh căn (mini pancake) and bánh xèo (pancake) from Ninh Thuận province are renowned for their delectable flavour and unique recipe, leaving a lasting impression on anyone fortunate enough to indulge in these exquisite desserts.

Ingredients

For the Rice Flour:

- Rice: 1 kg
- Cooked dry rice: 1 bowl
- Water: 2 bowls

For the Meatballs (Xíu Mại):

- Minced lean pork: 500 gm
- Cassava root: 1
- Purple onion: 1
- Green onion/Spring onion: 1 bunch
- Quail eggs: 20
- Sugar: to taste
- Seasoning powder: to taste
- Fish sauce: to taste
- Fermented anchovy sauce: to taste
- Spices: Salt, ground pepper: to taste

Additional Ingredients:

- Cooking oil
- Garlic: 3 cloves
- Chilli: to taste

Equipment:

- Steamer
- Cake mould

Ninh Thuận province

Recipe

Preparing the Rice Flour:

- Soak the rice in water overnight.
- Blend the soaked rice along with cooked dry rice and 2 bowls of water until a smooth powder forms.

Making the Meatballs (Xíu Mại):

- Wash and mince the pork.
- Peel and dice the cassava root.
- Peel and dice the purple onion.
- Chop the green onion/spring onion.
- In a bowl, combine the minced pork with diced onions, cassava roots, sugar, seasoning powder, fish sauce, and ground pepper. Mix well and let it marinate for about 15 minutes.
- Shape the marinated meat mixture into balls and place them in a steamer.

Preparing the Sauce:

- Fry minced garlic and onion in a pan.
- Add fermented anchovy sauce to the pan. Once it boils, add half a bowl of water and cook together.
- Add chopped chilli, sugar, and adjust seasoning according to taste.

Frying the Spring Onion:

- Wash and chop the spring onions into small pieces.
- Heat a little cooking oil in a pan, add the chopped onions, and stir-fry until fragrant. Transfer the fried onions to a bowl.

Making the Mini Pancakes (Bánh Căn):

- Heat the cake mould. Fill two-thirds of the mould with the rice flour mixture and close the lid.
- Once the surface of the cake is firm, place a quail egg on top, cover, and cook until done.
- Remove the cooked pancake from the mould and repeat until all the flour mixture is used.

Assembly:

Arrange the mini pancakes (Bánh Căn) on a plate. Serve the meatballs in the sauce and sprinkle fried onions on top for added flavour. Enjoy the delightful combination of flavours and textures!





Main courses



Khâu nhục

Steamed pork belly

SERVES

4

Khâu nhục is a Bắc Kạn specialty dish but traces its origins to China. The name “khâu nhục” comes: “Khâu” means “steam until it gets tender”, and “nhục” means “meat”. Translated literally, it embodies the idea of meat that is steamed to perfection until it achieves melt-in-your-mouth tenderness. Enhanced by the rich flavour of taro and a medley of aromatic spices, Khâu nhục delights with its irresistible fragrance and incomparable taste. Due to the labour-intensive nature of its preparation, the Tày people of Bắc Kạn reserve this culinary masterpiece for special occasions, particularly during the cherished Tết (Lunar New Year) festivities.

Ingredients

- Pork belly: 600 gm
- Taro: 300 gm
- Flavouring powder (húng liu): 20 gm
- Five-spice powder (ngũ vị hương): 20 gm
- Ear mushroom: 30 gm
- Fragrant mushroom: 30 gm
- Garlic, pepper: to taste

Bắc Kạn province

Tips:

Khâu nhục demands culinary finesse, involving various cooking techniques and a harmonious blend of spices. The choice of ingredients, such as pork belly and taro, is crucial to achieving the desired flavour and texture:

- **Pork:** Opt for a pig weighing around 70–80 kg, as it strikes the perfect balance between lean and fatty meat. After boiling the pork, meticulously pierce the skin with a bamboo toothpick to facilitate even cooking. Marinate the meat with an array of spices before roasting it to perfection. While roasting, generously brush the pork with honey until the skin develops a tantalizing golden hue.
- **Taro:** Source taro from Bắc Kạn, renowned for its distinctive purple-veined flesh, ideally suited for frying.

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Chop ear mushrooms and fragrant mushrooms.
- Mix flavouring powder, five-spice powder, soy sauce, tau choong sauce, and crushed garlic to create a flavourful marinade.
- Fry the taro.

Layering:

- In a bowl, layer mushrooms and spices, followed by fried taro, and slices of pork belly.
- Alternate layers of filling and pork belly, ensuring an even distribution of flavours.

Steaming:

- Steam the layered bowl for approximately 5 hours until the pork becomes tender and infused with the aromatic spices.

Plating the dish:

- Carefully invert the bowl onto a deep plate, allowing the golden skin of the pork to adorn the top, surrounded by the flavourful filling.

Khâu nhục, with its tender pork belly and aromatic spices, embodies the culinary prowess of the Tày people and the rich cultural heritage of Bắc Kạn province. As a dish traditionally enjoyed during the festive season, it not only delights the palate but also symbolizes the spirit of togetherness and celebration.



SERVES

4

Venture into the north-eastern province of Bắc Kạn in Viet Nam, and you will discover stir-fried bee pupae with lemon leaves, a culinary gem that might initially raise eyebrows but promises an unforgettable dining experience. Despite its unconventional nature, this dish boasts a unique blend of flavours and textures that exemplifies the region's culinary creativity. So, shed any reservations and embrace the opportunity to savour this fragrant and incredibly nutritious delicacy!

Nhộng ong xào lá chanh

Stir-fried bee pupae with lemon leaves

Bắc Kạn province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Fresh pupae: 500 gm
- Lemon leaves: a handful
- Cooking oil
- Fish sauce: to taste
- Spices: salt, pepper

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Begin by blanching the bee pupae in a pot of boiling water for approximately 2 minutes. Drain and set aside.
- Wash the lemon leaves thoroughly and remove the thick centre vein. Slice them thinly or leave them whole, depending on your preference.

Stir-frying:

- Heat a pan over low flame and add the blanched pupae. Stir-fry evenly for about 10 minutes until they start to emit a rustling sound reminiscent of dry leaves.
- Season with salt and continue cooking until the pupae are tender and infused with flavour.
- Drizzle cooking oil and fish sauce over the pupae, allowing them to absorb the savoury notes. Stir-fry for a few more minutes to ensure thorough flavour infusion.

Incorporating lemon leaves:

- Introduce the sliced or whole lemon leaves to the pan, stirring quickly to blend all the flavours harmoniously.

Plating the dish:

- Turn off the stove and transfer the aromatic stir-fried bee pupae onto a serving plate. Pair it with steamed rice for a complete culinary experience.

Stir-fried bee pupae with lemon leaves is not only a testament to the ingenuity of Bắc Kạn's culinary tradition but also a delightful exploration of unique flavours and textures. Embrace the opportunity to indulge in this unconventional dish, and you will be rewarded with a memorable gastronomic adventure.



Lẩu mắm

Fermented fish hotpot

SERVES

4

Embark on a culinary adventure through the heart of Vietnamese cuisine with fermented fish hotpot, known as Lẩu mắm. This traditional dish, beloved for its rich and intricate flavours, blends fermented fish with an array of fresh vegetables in a savoury broth, promising a dining experience like no other. Through the fermentation process, the fish develops a bold tanginess, while the hotpot method allows the ingredients to meld harmoniously, resulting in a delectable and aromatic feast. Whether you are a seafood enthusiast or simply seeking new flavours, fermented fish hotpot is sure to tantalize your taste buds and transport you to the bustling streets of Viet Nam.

Bến Tre province

Ingredients

- Yellowtail catfish: 300 gm
- Pork belly: 300 gm
- Roasted pork: 300 gm
- Tiger prawn: 300 gm
- Squid: 300 gm
- Garlic: 4 cloves
- Henicorhynchus fish paste (Linh fish): 100 gm
- Pineapple: 100 gm
- Goat horn pepper: 1
- Lemongrass: 3 stalks
- Purple onion: 6
- Fresh coconut water: 500 ml
- Eggplant: 2
- Cashew colour oil: 3 teaspoons
- Salt/seasoning powder: a pinch
- Rock sugar: 2 teaspoons
- Fresh noodles: 500 gm

Recipe

Making the fish sauce:

- Combine 500 ml of plain water, 500 ml of fresh coconut water, and 200 gm of Linh fish paste in a pot.
- Cook over medium heat for 5 minutes until the fish paste dissolves.
- Strain the mixture through a sieve to remove fish bones, yielding a smooth fish sauce for the broth.

Preparing the seafood:

- Soak the squid in diluted salt water for 5 minutes to remove any fishy odour. Rinse and cut into bite-sized pieces.
- Prepare the yellowtail catfish by cutting it into pieces and rubbing with salt to remove any sliminess. Wash thoroughly.
- Clean the tiger prawns and remove the whiskers.

Boiling the seafood:

- Boil a litre of water and add peeled and crushed purple onions. Cook the prawns for 3 minutes until done, followed by the squid for 2 minutes, and finally the yellowtail catfish for 3 minutes. Reserve the water used for boiling.

Preparing other ingredients:



- Soak the pork belly in diluted salt water for 5 minutes to eliminate any strong odours. Slice thinly.
- Crush lemongrass, garlic, and purple onion. Cut pineapple into bite-sized pieces and soak eggplant slices in salt water.

Cooking the pork belly:

- Heat cashew oil in a pot and stir-fry minced garlic, lemongrass, and purple onion until fragrant. Add pork belly slices and seasoning powder, stir-fry until firm.

Making the hotpot broth:

- Pour the reserved water from boiling seafood into the pot with stir-fried pork. Add prepared fish sauce, pineapple, lemongrass, seasoning powder, and rock sugar. Simmer for 10 minutes until pork is tender. Add eggplant and simmer until softened.
- Serve the hotpot broth with boiled squid, shrimp, and fresh herbs.

Tip:

Complement your hotpot with an assortment of fresh greens such as water spinach, squash flower, bitter greens, water lily, water hyacinth, or water mimosa.

Indulge in the enchanting flavours of fermented fish hotpot, a cherished Vietnamese delicacy that captivates the senses with its aromatic broth and harmonious blend of ingredients.

SERVES

4

Experience the vibrant flavours of the Mekong Delta with this tantalizing Mekong Delta style sweet and sour broth, a refreshing delight perfect for sultry summer days. Crafted from the delectable stripped catfish, renowned for its firm, fragrant flesh, this dish promises to offer a symphony of cool, sweet, and sour notes that will leave your taste buds dancing with delight.

Ingredients

- Stripped catfish: 1 fish (about 1 kg)
- Colocasia gigantea: 2
- Pineapple: ½
- Tomatoes: 3
- Tamarind: 2
- Okra: 10
- Red goat horn pepper: 2
- Bean sprouts: 150 gm
- Minced garlic: to taste
- Purple onions: 2
- Cilantro: to taste
- Rice paddy herb: to taste
- Spices: sugar, salt, seasoning powder, fish sauce, cooking oil

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Clean the stripped catfish, removing the intestines and gills. Use hot water to remove any slime from the skin. Rub the fish with salt and sliced lemon to eliminate any fishy odour. Cut the fish into bite-sized slices.
- Marinate the fish slices with salt, seasoning powder, and chopped purple onion for 20 minutes to allow the flavours to infuse.

Canh chua cá miền tây

Mekong Delta style sweet and sour fish broth

Bến Tre province

- Prepare the vegetables by slicing the okra, pineapple, colocasia gigantea, and tomatoes into thin pieces. Extract tamarind juice by soaking tamarind pulp in warm water, breaking it down, and straining to obtain the liquid.
- Peel and chop garlic, and slice chilli into thin pieces.

Making the broth:

- Heat oil in a pot and fry chopped onion and garlic until fragrant.
- Add the marinated fish slices and stir gently until the fish is firm.
- Pour in water, pineapple, tomatoes, and tamarind juice. Bring to a boil, skimming off any foam to keep the broth clear. Season to taste.
- Add okra and colocasia gigantea, and simmer for 2-3 minutes.
- Finally, add bean sprouts and chopped cilantro before turning off the stove.

Plating the dish:

- Ladle the flavourful broth into bowls and serve with fish sauce and sliced chilli for an extra kick.

With its refreshing blend of fresh ingredients and tantalizing spices, this dish is sure to transport you to the vibrant waterways of the Mekong Delta, where every spoonful is a journey of culinary delight.



Empowering Agriculture: The Success Story of Ms. Nguyen Thi Ven and the Giồng Trôm Green-Skinned Pomelo Cooperative



Ms. Nguyen Thi Ven stands as a shining example among the sixty-seven dedicated members of the Giồng Trôm green-skinned pomelo cooperative. Nestled within the picturesque Lương Hòa commune of the Giồng Trôm district, this region is renowned for its lush citrus fruit trees. Here, where a network of rivers and canals weaves through the landscape, depositing nutrient-rich alluvium, the soil becomes a fertile bed for not only pomelo but also coconut and various other fruit trees.

In 2021, Ms. Ven, steward of a 2,000 m² pomelo orchard, received a vital boost from the Bến Tre MPTF Project. With 50 kg of smart fertilizer provided, she embarked on a journey to revitalize and expand her pomelo garden. Moreover, she underwent comprehensive training in technical expertise, organic farming techniques, and the utilization of advanced technological equipment available through the cooperative.

Thanks to the invaluable assistance from the IFAD-funded Climate Smart Agricultural Value Chain Development project, Ms. Ven's pomelo orchard flourished over the span of two years, witnessing a remarkable increase in yield from 500 kg/year to an impressive 800 kg/year. Selling her produce at an average price of VND 50,000/kg to the cooperative under their contractual agreement, Ms. Ven reaped the rewards of her hard work.

Beyond the bountiful harvest of pomelos, Ms. Ven ingeniously utilized the water storage ditches on her land to cultivate various species of freshwater fish, including stripped catfish, giant gourami, and catfish. The proceeds from the sale of these fish at the market provided an additional stream of income for her family. Moreover, they served as a delectable source of nourishment, enriching the family table with dishes like sour fish broth, steamed fish with soy sauce, and fried fish with fish sauce and ginger, among many others.

Through her unwavering dedication and resourcefulness, Ms. Nguyen Thi Ven not only transformed her pomelo orchard into a thriving enterprise but also diversified her income streams, ensuring a sustainable livelihood for her family while contributing to the vibrant agricultural landscape of the region.

Canh ngao rau cải

Clam broth with yu choy

SERVES

4

Clam broth with yu choy, known as “Canh ngao rau cải,” is a delightful Vietnamese dish showcasing the delicate balance of fresh seafood and greens, offering a symphony of flavours that is both comforting and nourishing. As the aroma of savoury broth wafts through the air, prepare to embark on a culinary journey that celebrates the essence of Vietnamese cooking.

Bến Tre province

Ingredients

- Yu choy: 1 bunch or 500 gm
- Fresh clams: 1 kg
- Cooking oil: 2 spoons
- Purple onion: 2
- Spices: to taste
- Seasoning powder: to taste
- Salt: to taste

Recipe

- Wash the yu choy and slice into pieces, approximately 4-5 cm long.
- Wash the clams, soak them in water mixed with a little salt and chilli powder for about 1 hour – this will let the clams release the sand. Wash the clams again before boiling.
- Wait for the water to boil and remove the foam. When the clam mouths open, turn off the stove, and take the clam meat out.
- Remember to squeeze the clam intestines thoroughly so there is no residue left.
- Filter the water used for boiling the clam for making the broth. Stir fry the clams with purple onions to make them more flavourful. Add a little salt, pepper and stir the clams until the spices dissolve evenly, then turn off the stove. Do not stir the clams for too long or they will shrink and lose their sweetness.
- Boil the filtered clam water again, add the yu choy and cook for about 2 minutes, then add stir-fried clams with fried onions, and add spices to taste.
- Wait for the broth to come to a boil again, then turn off the stove and serve.

Whether savoured as a nourishing meal or shared amongst loved ones, this delightful dish leaves a lasting impression - a testament to the timeless allure of Vietnamese culinary artistry.

MAIN COURSES



Lạp sườn

Smoked sausage

SERVES



Smoked sausage, also called “lạp sườn” or “lạp xưởng”, is a typical dish of the Tày and Nùng ethnic minority groups in Cao Bằng, and is often prepared on Tết days, when the country celebrates the Lunar New Year.

The main ingredient to make this dish is the local black pork, which has a unique, delicious smell. We recommend using a lean pork shoulder and a lean pork butt; ensure that the meat is fresh with a bright pink colour and sticky upon touching.

Cao Bằng province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Pork butt/shoulder: 3 kg
- Pork chitterlings: 300 gm
- Soup powder: 2 spoons
- MSG: 2 spoons
- Seasoning powder: 1 spoon
- Mountain ginger leaf powder: 2 spoons
- Cardamom: 1 spoon
- Doi seeds: 1 spoon
- Rice liquor: 100ml
- Honey: 2 table spoons

Recipe

Preparing the chitterlings:

- Ensure the black pig chitterlings are thick, bright red, and elastic.
- Remove the outer layer of lard and scrape off any powder layer inside the intestinal wall.
- Wash the tripe with diluted salt water and soak it in rice liquor until it turns white.

Marinating the pork:

- Slice the pork into thin fillets and mix in the spices thoroughly.
- Let the meat marinate for about 3 hours to absorb the flavours.

Stuffing the meat into the pig's chitterlings:

- Evenly stuff the meat into the chitterlings to ensure uniformity.
- Tie the sausages with string into equal pieces for hanging.

Smoking the sausage:

- Smoke the sausages over charcoal and sugarcane smoke until they turn to nice red colour. Sugarcane helps create an appealing aroma and colour for the sausage.
- Fresh sausages are smoked for the first 2 hours to tighten the meat, then turned over and smoke for another 4 hours.
- During the smoking process, sugarcane will be burned in the stove to make fragrant smoke and natural mahogany colour, and also increasing preservation time.

Cooking:

- Fry the sausages in an oil pan or charcoal grill until golden brown.
- Slice the sausages into bite-sized pieces or stir-fry them with fresh garlic leaves for a delectable dish.

Indulge in the rich flavours and cultural heritage of smoked sausage, a culinary treasure from the highlands of Cao Bằng, Viet Nam.



SERVES
4

Stir-fried chicken with ginger is a cherished culinary gem among the ethnic minority groups of Cao Bằng, especially during the chill of winter. This hearty dish, brimming with rich flavours, is a quintessential comfort food best enjoyed with a side of steaming rice. The tender succulence of the chicken, coupled with the warm, spicy notes of ginger, creates a symphony of tastes that lingers on the palate and in the memory, making it a beloved favourite for families.



Gà xào gừng non Stir-fired chicken with young ginger

Cao Bằng province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Free-range chicken: 600 gm
- Fresh or young ginger: 10 gm
- Garlic: 5 gm
- Fish sauce: 2 tablespoons
- Ground pepper: ½ teaspoon

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Wash the chicken thoroughly and chop it into bite-sized pieces, placing them in a large bowl.
- Peel and wash the ginger and garlic. Proceed to shred the ginger and mince the garlic.

Marinating the chicken:

- Prepare a spice blend by combining 2 teaspoons of sugar, 2 teaspoons of seasoning powder, ½ teaspoon of pepper, and 2 tablespoons of fish sauce.
- Marinate the chicken with the spice mixture, ensuring each piece is evenly coated. Allow it to marinate for about 30 minutes to allow the flavours to infuse into the meat.

Cooking the dish:

- In a pan, fry the minced garlic until it releases its aroma and turns slightly golden.
- Add the marinated chicken to the pan and stir-fry over low heat, ensuring even cooking.
- Once the chicken starts to turn golden and fragrant, incorporate the shredded ginger, stirring well to distribute the spices evenly.
- Adjust the seasoning with salt or additional seasoning powder to suit your taste preferences. Finally, turn off the heat.

Serve this delectable stir-fried chicken with ginger alongside steamed rice, allowing the flavours to meld together harmoniously for a truly satisfying mealtime experience.

Cultivating Success: Mr. Ly Huu Nhat's journey with Ri hybrid chicken farming

Cao Bằng province



Since mid-2022, Mr. Ly Huu Nhat has been actively engaged in the Ri hybrid chicken farming initiative, a project supported by the Commercial Smallholder Support Project (CSSP) programme. Embracing this endeavour with enthusiasm, Mr. Nhat embarked on a mission to introduce and cultivate a new breed of poultry in Hoai Khao village, aptly named after its rich history as “White Buffalo” territory.

Reflecting on this transformative journey, Mr. Nhat shared, “Hoai Khao village has long been synonymous with raising buffaloes and cows due to its colder climate, which posed challenges for other livestock and poultry species. However, the introduction of Ri hybrid chickens has been a game-changer. These chickens exhibit remarkable resilience to the cold weather, coupled with their robust nature and adaptability to local feed sources.”

With the support of the project, Mr. Nhat received sixty 34-day-old breeding chickens, along with essential supplies such as poultry feed and disease prevention medicines. Over the course of six months, the commercial chickens flourished, attaining an average weight of 2.5 kg each while preserving the distinctive traits and meat quality of the local breed. They were subsequently sold at the commune market for an average price of VND 80,000/kg, yielding Mr. Nhat a profit of VND 12 million from the initial batch alone. Encouraged by this success, he reinvested his earnings to procure additional breeding chickens, successfully raising three more batches of Ri hybrid chickens to date.

In a testament to the growing popularity of his poultry venture, Mr. Nhat expanded his market reach beyond the commune, supplying chickens to local homestays in the village. Dishes featuring these freshly sourced chickens, including grilled, boiled, or stir-fried variations with ginger, have swiftly become culinary highlights for tourists exploring the charms of the Hoai Khao Community Tourism Village. Through his dedication and entrepreneurial spirit, Mr. Nhat has not only transformed his own livelihood but also contributed to the burgeoning tourism experience in his cherished village.

Canh rau thau tuôn

Thau tuon vegetable broth

SERVES

4

Thau tuon vegetable broth, a cherished dish among the ethnic minority groups inhabiting the lofty mountains of Viet Nam, holds a unique significance deeply rooted in both culinary and medicinal traditions. Thriving amidst the rugged terrain of ravine streams and cliff faces, the thau tuon plant, a member of the vine family, serves as a versatile staple for the Dao Tien ethnic community. Beyond its culinary application, thau tuon is esteemed for its medicinal properties, revered by the locals for its efficacy in alleviating bone and joint pain, fading bruises, and promoting overall well-being. Known as “Doi Cho Luong” by the Dao Tien people and “thau tuon” by the Tày community, this vegetable adds a subtle bitterness to dishes while contributing a delightful flavour when combined with a silky broth made with pork bones or chicken.

Cao Bằng province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Pork bones: 500 gm
- Thau tuon vegetables: 300 gm
- Fish sauce: to taste
- Seasoning: Salt, MSG, seasoning powder, pepper

Tip:

Chicken can serve as an alternative to pork bones in this recipe.

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Chop the pork bones into small pieces and put in a large bowl.
- Prepare a large bowl of salt water, cut the thau tuon into bite-sized pieces and soak them in the diluted salt water for 30 minutes or more to keep the vegetables green, and also to reduce its bitter taste.
- After soaking, wash the vegetables again and let them dry.

Seasoning the pork bones:

- Mix the pork bones with seasonings such as seasoning powder, MSG, pepper, and fish sauce.
- Let it marinate for 10 minutes to allow the flavours to absorb.
- Let it rest for 10 minutes so that the spices are absorbed.

Making thau tuon vegetable broth:

- Fill up a very large pot with 3 litres of water. Add the seasoned pork bones and let them braise for 5-10 minutes.
- Pour in about 2 litres of water and let the bones simmer for an additional 30 minutes.
- Once the broth sweetens, put the vegetables in and continue simmering for 10-15 minutes. Taste the broth and if the sweetness is fine, turn off the flame.

Thau tuon vegetable broth epitomizes the harmonious fusion of culinary prowess and medicinal wisdom, offering a tantalizing blend of flavours and therapeutic benefits cherished by generations of ethnic minority communities in Viet Nam’s mountainous regions.

Empowering female entrepreneurship: A homestay success story in the Cao Bằng province

Cao Bằng province



Since 2020, Ms. Chu Thi Hanh has played a pivotal role as a dynamic team leader within the CSSP project, operating in the picturesque Cao Bằng province. Her team, comprising fifteen dedicated members, all of whom are women, showcases the strength and resilience of female entrepreneurship in the region. Among them, four women manage their own thriving homestays, a testament to their determination and initiative.

Through the Competitive Co-financing Fund, facilitated by the CSSP project, these enterprising women have leveraged revolving loans to enhance their homestays, undertaking renovations and procuring essential supplies. Bolstering their efforts, the project has furnished them with dining tables, chairs, and wardrobes, fostering a welcoming and comfortable environment for guests.

Ms. Hanh, a passionate advocate for preserving and sharing the rich cultural heritage of the Dao Tien people, infuses her homestay experience with authentic traditions and customs. She actively imparts knowledge and skills to her fellow group members, whether through enhancing their embroidery techniques to adorn indigo cloth with intricate Dao Tien patterns or by sharing cherished recipes of traditional dishes renowned for their nutritional benefits.

At her homestay, Ms. Hanh orchestrates immersive experiences that offer visitors a glimpse into the vibrant tapestry of Dao Tien culture. From the solemnity of the beeswax harvest ceremony to the joyous festivities of the new rice celebration, guests are immersed in the timeless rituals and traditions of the village.

Despite its relatively short existence, Ms. Hanh's homestay has flourished into a beloved destination, welcoming an average of six visitors each month. This influx not only enriches cultural exchanges within the community but also serves as a steady source of income for Ms. Hanh and her family, empowering them to thrive economically while preserving and promoting the cultural heritage of their cherished Dao Tien village.

Măng sặt luộc chấm mắm

Boiled forest bamboo shoots dipped in fish sauce



Cao Bằng province

Embark on a journey to Nguyên Bình district in Cao Bằng province, where the verdant embrace of nature unfolds in all its splendour. Nestled in the northeast of Viet Nam, this region unveils a treasure trove of natural wonders, from majestic primeval forests adorned with exotic flora to mountains that bestow their unique bounty upon the land. Among these gifts lies the forest bamboo shoot known as “mang sat,” a culinary delight cherished by the locals of Nguyên Bình.

Mang sat, a member of the bamboo family characterized by its slender, straight trunk, thrives along the ravine streams meandering through the dense forests of Nguyên Bình town, Tĩnh Túc town, and the Thành Công commune. For generations, the bamboo shoot has held a special place in the hearts and palates of Nguyên Bình residents.

Aligned with the lunar calendar, September and October mark the time when locals venture into the forest to harvest bamboo shoots. With a limited season lasting only two months, prompt harvesting is essential to capture the shoots at their peak sweetness and texture. Harvesting bamboo shoots demands skill, patience, and a deep understanding of the terrain. Only a select few possess the expertise to unearth these hidden treasures without causing damage to the delicate bushes.

Once harvested, bamboo shoots lend themselves to an array of delectable dishes, from stir-fries infused with garlic to hearty stews and charcoal-grilled delicacies. However, one recipe stands out for its ability to preserve the natural essence of bamboo shoots: boiled forest bamboo shoots dipped in a refreshing fish sauce.

Ingredients

- Fresh bamboo shoot: 400 gm
- Water: 500 ml
- Fish sauce: to taste
- Salt: A pinch or two



Recipe

- Add a little salt in 500 ml of water. Boil the water.
- When the water is bubbling, put the bamboo shoots in, stir gently and boil for about 5 more minutes until tender.
- Once cooked to perfection, remove the bamboo shoots from the pot and dip them into a luscious fish sauce, allowing their natural flavours to shine through.

With each bite, savour the delicate harmony of flavours, a testament to the exquisite simplicity of nature's bounty transformed into a culinary masterpiece.

Xôi ngũ sắc

Five-coloured sticky rice

SERVES

4

Cao Bằng province

Surrounded by mountain ranges that act as natural fences, Cao Bằng has many fertile lands, creating diverse subtropical climate zones. In the lowlands, there are many fertile fields used to cultivate the Pi Pat sticky rice—one of the country’s most unique agricultural products that boasts of a particularly delicious flavour. The people of Cao Bằng hold Pi Pat sticky rice in high esteem, proudly associating it with their culinary heritage. In the Tày language, “Pi Pat” evokes the imagery of duck fat—a fitting comparison given the aromatic essence and glossy texture of this rice when cooked to perfection.

Cultivating Pi Pat sticky rice is an artistry in itself, requiring meticulous care and patience.

From sowing to harvest, it takes five months for the rice to reach its full maturity. As the harvest season approaches in late September and early October of the lunar calendar, the fields come alive with the vibrant hues of ripened rice, signalling the time for the unique harvesting ritual to commence.

Using steel blades, each spikelet of rice is meticulously cut and gathered—a labour of love that ensures the preservation of Pi Pat sticky rice’s exquisite qualities. Once harvested, the rice is carefully dried in the kitchen or left to bask in the gentle sun on porches, ready to be transformed into aromatic dishes and flavourful cakes.

Among the culinary delights born from Pi Pat sticky rice is the five-coloured sticky rice—a cherished delicacy often prepared during special occasions such as the grave-visiting festival and Tết holidays. This vibrant creation captures the essence of tradition and celebration, each colour symbolizing a unique facet of the cultural tapestry woven by the people of Cao Bằng.





Ingredients

- Glutinous rice: 2 kg
- Dried gardenia fruits: 5
- Pineapple leaves: 100 gm
- Magenta leaves: 100 gm
- Asian pigeonwings flowers (clitoria ternatea or butterfly pea flowers): 10 gm
- Salt: ½ teaspoon

Recipe

Preparing the rice:

- Rinse the sticky rice a few times with water, then soak it for six hours or overnight for the sticky rice to swell. Later, take the rice out and drain the water.
- Divide the soaked sticky rice into five equal parts (to divide into the following colours: white, purple, yellow, blue and green).

Cooking:

- Wash the magenta leaves. Put the pot on the stove, add about 400 ml of water, and boil over high heat. When the water is boiled, put the magenta leaves in. Lower the heat and boil the leaves for about 10-15 minutes until the water turns purplish-red, then add 200ml of water to the pot. Continue boiling for 10-15 minutes over medium heat and turn off the stove. Use a sieve to filter the water.
- In another pot, add 2 bowls of water, add the gardenia fruits, boil and mash them until they become smooth.

- Put 100 gm pineapple leaves and 300 ml water into a blender and blend until smooth. Use a sieve to filter the juice.
- Wash 10 gm of butterfly pea flowers, then boil them with 200 ml of water until the colour of the flowers fade and the water becomes darker. Use chopsticks to stir them well and boil over medium heat. Use a sieve to filter the butterfly pea water.

Combining the rice and the coloured water:

- Take 4 portions of rice and soak them in four bowls of the coloured water for 2-4 hours, and then take them out to drain.
- Put the sticky rice into the steamer and divide the lines between the colours with the stencils. Use chopsticks to poke a few holes so the sticky rice can drain well.
- Steam until the water boils, then lower the heat and continue steaming for another 30-40 minutes.
- Serve with toasted sesame and peanut salt or coconut milk.

As the aroma of this beloved dish fills the air, it serves as a reminder of the enduring spirit of community, celebration, and reverence for nature's gifts.

Cá lăng nướng than

Charcoal grilled hemibagrus (Lang fish)

SERVES

4

Charcoal-grilled hemibagrus, a beloved mountain and forest delicacy cherished by visitors to Đắk Nông, offers a tantalizing taste of the region's natural bounty. Sourced from the pristine waters of the Srepok River, this catfish variety, known for its sweet, chewy, and fragrant meat, captures the essence of Đắk Nông's culinary heritage.

Đắk Nông province

Ingredients

- Lăng fish: 2 kg
- Galangal: 200 gm
- Turmeric: 30 gm
- Fermented rice: ½ bowl
- Fish sauce: to taste

Recipe

- Begin by preparing the fish. Remove the skin and spine, then cut the fish into square and rectangular pieces, ensuring each portion is of uniform size.
- Marinate the fish with a blend of spices, including galangal juice, turmeric mixed with fermented rice, shrimp sauce, and fish sauce. Allow the fish to marinate for approximately one hour, allowing the flavours to infuse thoroughly.
- Once the fish has absorbed the spices, it is time to grill. If possible, use a charcoal stove for an authentic smoky flavour. Place each marinated piece of fish on the grill and brush with a light layer of oil. Listen for the sizzle of the fat, indicating that the grilling process has begun. Quickly flip the fish to the other side, ensuring even cooking, until each piece is golden brown and exudes a mouth-watering aroma of perfectly cooked meat.

Plating the dish:

- Serve the grilled hemibagrus with an array of accompaniments to enhance the dining experience. Offer rice paper and fresh herbs, slices of green banana, sour star fruit, and rice noodles.
- Encourage guests to create their own wraps by rolling the grilled fish and accompaniments in rice paper. For an added kick of flavour, provide a dipping sauce made with a harmonious blend of sweet and spicy fish sauce.

With each bite, savour the exquisite flavours and textures of a dish that embodies the spirit of the region's rich natural landscape and cultural heritage.



Lẩu lá rừng

Wild leaf hotpot

SERVES

4

Wild leaf hotpot, known as Lẩu lá rừng, holds a special place in the hearts and kitchens of the people of Đắk Nông, offering a delectable blend of flavours and an abundance of health benefits. This cherished dish, crafted from over 10 types of forest leaves, celebrates the rich biodiversity of the region while promoting wellness through its nutritious ingredients. Originally foraged by ethnic minority groups, these forest leaves were once humble accompaniments to field meals. However, as culinary practices evolved, these leaves emerged as stars in their own right, culminating in the creation of the beloved wild leaf hotpot. The diverse array of forest leaves in this dish each contributes unique flavours and health benefits. From the astringent notes of freshwater mangrove leaves to the digestion-aiding properties of cinnamon and basil, every leaf plays a vital role in enhancing both the taste and nutritional value of the hotpot.

Đắk Nông province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Pork belly: 400 gm
- Pork bone: 500 gm
- Shrimp: 400 gm
- Meat sauce: 300 gm
- Various types of leaves: Freshwater mangrove, yacón, fish mint, gnetum, plantain, cinnamon, basil, thuyền đất
- Seasonings: Fish sauce, pepper, green chilli
- Nem thính (shredded pork skin with roasted rice powder)

Recipe

- Begin by washing the leaves, pork belly, and shrimp thoroughly.
- Blanch the pork bones to remove any impurities, then boil them over high heat and simmer for 30 minutes to create a flavourful broth.
- Boil the pork belly until cooked through, then slice it into thin pieces. Utilize both the pork and the bone broth for the hotpot base.
- Season the broth to taste, then add the shrimp and simmer for 3 minutes before adding the assorted forest leaves. For added flavour and texture, the leaves can also be rolled with nem thính and meat sauce before being dipped into the hotpot.

With each spoonful of this aromatic and nutritious hotpot, savour the harmonious blend of forest-fresh flavours and indulge in the nourishing goodness of Đắk Nông's culinary heritage.



Cơm gà

Chicken rice

SERVES

2

Chicken rice, known as “Cơm gà” in Vietnamese, is a must-try specialty for visitors exploring the Central Highlands, particularly in the vibrant province of Đắk Nông. Bursting with flavours and prepared with care, this dish embodies the essence of local culinary tradition.

Ingredients

- Chicken thighs: 4 pieces
- Rice: 500 gm
- Turmeric: 1 root
- Garlic: to taste
- Chilli: to taste
- Lemon juice: to taste
- Sugar: to taste
- Seasoning: salt, pepper

Đắk Nông province

Recipe

Preparing the chicken thighs:

- Begin by washing the chicken thighs and removing any unwanted odours by rubbing them with salt.
- Marinate the chicken thighs with a dash of salt and pepper, allowing the flavours to infuse for a few minutes.
- Boil the marinated chicken thighs in a pot of water for approximately 5 minutes, then remove them.
- Heat oil in a frying pan until hot, then fry the chicken thighs until they turn golden yellow, ensuring they are evenly cooked and the skin becomes crispy.

Cooking the rice:

- Wash the rice thoroughly and cook it in a pot of water infused with a little turmeric, imparting a vibrant yellow hue to the rice.
- Once the rice is cooked, set it aside to cool.
- In a separate pan, heat 2 tablespoons of cooking oil and sauté onions and garlic until fragrant. Add the cooked rice and stir well, seasoning with salt, pepper, and MSG for enhanced flavour.

Preparing the sweet and sour sauce:

- In a small bowl, combine 2 tablespoons of fish sauce, 1 tablespoon of lemon juice, 1 tablespoon of sugar, 2 tablespoons of water, minced chilli, and garlic. Mix well to create a flavourful sauce.

Plating the dish:

- Plate the rice and golden chicken thighs, accompanied by the sweet and sour sauce.
- Indulge in the tantalizing flavours of Đắk Nông hill chicken rice, savouring each bite as you delight in the harmony of savoury chicken and fragrant rice, complemented by the zesty sweetness of the sauce.

With its irresistible aroma and mouth-watering taste, Đắk Nông hill chicken rice promises to be a culinary highlight of your Central Highlands adventure.



Thịt bò nướng ống tre

Grilled beef in bamboo tube

SERVES

4

Grilled beef in bamboo tube, known as Thịt bò nướng ống tre in Vietnamese, holds a cherished place in the culinary heritage of the Central Highlands, particularly in Pleiku, the capital of the Gia Lai province. This mouth-watering dish encapsulates the rich flavours and cultural traditions of the region, making it a must-try for anyone exploring its culinary landscape.

Gia Lai province

Ingredients

- Sirloin or flank steak: 1 kg
- Seasonings: Lemongrass and é leaves or wild vegetables

Recipe

Preparing the beef:

- Begin by thoroughly washing the beef, then slicing it into thin fillets approximately 2-3 cm in thickness.

Preparing the vegetable and spice mix:

- Crush the lemongrass and finely chop the é leaves or wild vegetables to create a fragrant spice mixture.
- Combine the crushed lemongrass and chopped é leaves or wild vegetables with the beef, ensuring the meat is evenly coated. Allow the beef to marinate for about 30 minutes to infuse it with the aromatic flavours.

Grilling the beef in bamboo tube:

- Select a young bamboo tube to encase the beef for grilling. Wash the bamboo tube thoroughly before use.
- Place the marinated beef inside the bamboo tube, ensuring it is securely packed to prevent the meat from falling out during grilling.
- To enhance the flavour and aroma, cover the top of the bamboo tube with pineapple leaves before placing it over a charcoal stove for grilling.
- Grill the beef for approximately 30 minutes, rotating the bamboo tube occasionally to ensure even cooking. As the outer shell of the bamboo tube begins to take on a burnt yellow hue and the irresistible aroma of grilled beef fills the air, the dish is ready to be enjoyed.

Plating the dish:

- Once grilled to perfection, remove the bamboo tube from the charcoal stove and carefully extract the succulent grilled beef.
- Season the grilled beef with é leaf salt to accentuate its flavours and elevate the taste experience.

With its tantalizing aroma and irresistible taste, Thịt bò nướng ống tre promises to be a culinary masterpiece that will leave a lasting impression on your taste buds.





Rice noodle with boiled pork and blended anchovy dipping sauce, known as Bún Mắm Nêm, boasts a unique flavour profile thanks to the anchovies sourced from the South Central coastal area of Ninh Thuận. The high salinity of the sea water, combined with the Đầm Vua and Ninh Chữ salts, imparts an unparalleled saltiness and richness to the fish.

Bún mắm nêm

Rice noodle with boiled pork and blended anchovy dipping sauce

Ninh Thuận province

Ingredients

- Pork belly: 500 gm
- Fresh rice noodles: 1 kg
- Anchovy dipping sauce: 250 ml
- Lemon: to taste
- Pineapple: to taste
- Garlic: to taste
- Chilli: to taste
- Fresh herbs: Basil, perilla, split water spinach stems, cucumber, star fruit, and green banana

Recipe

Preparing the pineapple mix:

- In a bowl, combine the anchovy dipping sauce with minced pineapple marinated in sugar, crushed garlic, and chilli.
- Add a dash of MSG, a splash of water, and a squeeze of lemon juice, mixing well to create a slightly viscous mixture.

Preparing the pork belly:

- Wash the pork belly with salt, then boil until fully cooked.
- During boiling, season the pork belly to infuse it with a unique flavour.
- Once cooked, remove the pork belly from the water and soak it in a bowl of ice water to achieve a beautiful white colour.
- Thinly slice the pork belly and arrange it on a plate.

Making the blended anchovy dipping sauce:

- Select the freshest anchovies, wash them thoroughly, and drain excess water.
- Use a blender to grind the anchovies, adding salt, sugar, and roasted rice powder in the specified ratios.
- Transfer the mixture to a jar, stir well, and let it dry in the sun for 20-30 days until fully cooked and ready to use.

Plating the dish:

- In individual serving bowls, place fresh rice noodles at the bottom.
- Top the noodles with a selection of fresh herbs and slices of boiled pork.
- Drizzle a spoonful of the blended anchovy dipping sauce over the noodles and mix thoroughly before serving.

Bún Mắm Nêm offers a tantalizing blend of flavours and textures, showcasing the unique culinary traditions of Ninh Thuận and delighting the palate with each bite.



Bún nước lèo

Noodle with fish broth

SERVES

4

Noodle with fish broth, known as Bún nước lèo in Vietnamese, offers a tantalizing journey into the heart of Trà Vinh's Khmer-inspired cuisine. A symphony of flavours awaits those who indulge in this rustic yet enchanting dish, where the aromatic essence of Prahok, the crispy texture of roasted pork belly, tender snakehead fish meat, and the delightful fragrance of Autumn crocus mingle harmoniously in a bowl of clear broth.

Ingredients

- Snakehead fish: 1 (or 1 kg of mudskipper)
- Prahok (mudfish paste-mắm bò hóc): 100 gm (or 50 gm of Linh fish paste and 50 gm of Sac fish paste)
- Lemongrass: 5 stalks
- Autumn crocus: a few pieces
- Galangal: 1 piece
- Straw mushrooms: to taste, sliced
- Pig/duck blood curds: to taste, half-cooked (about 70 per cent)
- Roasted pork: to taste
- Spring rolls/fried cakes with shrimp and minced pork (bánh giá): to taste
- Fresh noodles: for 4 servings
- Bird's eye chilli: to taste
- Chilli vinegar: to taste
- Chilli salt: to taste
- Accompanying herbs: Banana flowers, bean sprouts, water lily, basil, menta aquatica, and laksa leaves, to taste
- Sugar, to taste

Trà Vinh province

Recipe

Preparing the fish, vegetables and meat:

- Clean the snakehead fish, rub it with salt and vinegar, and rinse it again.
- Peel off lemongrass, wash and crush them. Wash the Autumn crocus and the galangal, roast them until they emit an aroma. Then put them in a mortar and pound them.
- Wash and slice the straw mushrooms.
- Half-cook the pig blood curds (about 70 per cent).
- Wash and drain the accompanying herbs, mixing them together.

Boiling the fish:

- Boil about 2.5 litres of water, adding crushed lemongrass. Once boiling, add the snakehead fish and cook until done. Remove the fish, drain, and filter out the meat.

Filtering the fish paste and broth:

- Cook the fish paste with water, Autumn crocus, and crushed galangal until dissolved. Pour this mixture into the pot of fish broth, adding crushed straw mushrooms and lemongrass. Skim off any foam to clarify the broth.

Making the broth:

- Add the fish meat and minced lemongrass to the pot, seasoning with sugar to taste. Boil the broth, skimming off any foam, and add the pig blood curds.

Plating the dish:

- Place noodles in a bowl, top with herbs, and pour the broth over them. Serve with roasted pork, pig blood curds, spring rolls, and fried cakes with shrimp and minced pork. Accompany with chilli salt or chilli vinegar for added flavour.

Crafted with care and attention to detail, this dish tantalizes the taste buds and captivates the senses, offering a symphony of flavours. From the delicate balance of spices to the freshness of the accompanying herbs, every element contributes to the rich tapestry of taste that defines Trà Vinh's culinary heritage.

Whether enjoyed as a comforting meal on a chilly evening or as a culinary exploration of Trà Vinh's cultural legacy, Bún nước lèo is sure to leave a lasting impression.



Bún suông

Shrimp noodle

SERVES

4

Bún suông, also known as bún đuông, is a delectable shrimp noodle dish originating from the province of Trà Vinh in the Mekong Delta. Named after the shrimp patties, which bear a resemblance to the distinctive shape of red palm weevils, this dish captivates with its fresh, tender flavours and the hallmark Trà Vinh-style broth that sets it apart.

Ingredients

- Weevils (shrimp patties): 500 gm
- Pork bones (for making the broth): 1 kg
- Pig trotters: 1
- Pork leg roast or pork belly: 400 gm
- Pork rind: 200 gm
- White radish: 2
- Onion: 1
- Dried squid: 2 (medium size)
- Fresh noodles: 1kg
- Lemon: to taste
- Chilli: to taste
- Spring onions: to taste
- Fried purple onions
- Cashew oil colour
- Side vegetables/herbs: white cabbage, bean sprouts, lettuces, herbs
- Spices: Salt, seasoning powder, pepper
- Ground soy sauce
- Tamarind juice
- Sugar

Trà Vinh province

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Clean and cut the pig trotters into round pieces. Wash the pork bones, pork belly, and pork rind, then blanch them in boiling water with a pinch of salt to remove impurities. Rinse them again.
- Shred the white cabbage and soak it in diluted salt water, then wash and drain. Wash the bean sprouts and herbs, and drain. Peel and cut the white radish into pieces. Grill the onion to enhance the broth's flavour.
- Wash and grill the dried squids, then crush them.

Making the dipping sauce:

- Place tamarind in a bowl, add a little boiling water, and grind to extract tamarind juice. Mix ground soy sauce with tamarind juice and a bit of ground chilli in fish sauce.

Cooking:

- Boil the pork bones, pig trotters, pork belly, and pork rind in a pot of water with a pinch of salt. Skim off any foam to keep the broth clear. After 20 minutes, soak them in ice water to make them crispy white.
- Add grilled onions, shredded white radish, dried squids, and shrimp patties to the pot. Simmer over low heat without covering the pot to maintain the sweetness of the broth. Add cashew oil for colour and remove the radish and onion once the broth tastes sweet. Season with salt, sugar, seasoning powder, ground soy sauce, and tamarind juice.
- Slice the pork belly and pork rind into bite-sized pieces.

Plating the dish:

- Place blanched noodles in a bowl, add pork bones, pig trotters, pork belly, and shrimp patties. Sprinkle with chopped spring onions, fried onions, and ground soy sauce. Pour in the broth.
- Serve the noodles with the dipping sauce mixed with soy and tamarind, or sliced chilli, or dark soy sauce and herbs for a delightful culinary experience.

Indulge in the rich flavours and aromatic broth of bún suông, a beloved dish that encapsulates the essence of Trà Vinh's culinary heritage.



Cơm lam

Bamboo-tube rice

SERVES

4

Bamboo-tube rice stands as more than just a culinary delight; it embodies a cherished tradition deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of the Tày ethnic group. Reflecting the principles of yin and yang and the five elements, this dish is a reflection of the Tày people's way of life and their spiritual beliefs. Crafted with meticulous care, bamboo-tube rice exudes a rich forest flavour that captivates the senses and nourishes the soul.

Tuyên Quang province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Glutinous rice: 300 gm
- Ginger: 1 to squeeze for ginger juice or you can use coconut milk: 15 ml
- Minced roasted peanuts with ground sesame and salt: 150 gm

Tip:

The rice for this dish is made from sticky rice, ginger juice or coconut milk. You will need upland glutinous rice which is very fragrant and sticky.

Recipe

Preparing the rice:

- Begin by soaking the glutinous rice and washing it thoroughly until the water runs clear. Sprinkle a pinch of salt and ginger juice or coconut milk over the rice, mixing well to infuse it with flavour.
- Carefully pack the seasoned rice into a bamboo tube filled with water. It is essential to select bamboo tubes from mature, evergreen bamboo trees, ensuring they are neither too old nor too young.

Cooking the rice:

- Seal the bamboo tube with a banana leaf, leaving some space for the rice to expand during cooking. Place the tube over a fire, using straw or charcoal to generate heat.
- Allow the rice to cook over the fire for approximately one hour, periodically adjusting the heat to ensure even cooking. As the rice boils, its enticing aroma will permeate the air, signalling that it is nearing perfection.

Plating the dish:

- Once the rice is cooked, remove it from the fire and allow it to cool slightly. Peel away the outer layer of the fired bamboo, leaving a thin membrane covering the rice.
- Before indulging in this delectable dish, peel off the remaining bamboo membrane and dip it into minced roasted peanuts with ground sesame and salt, known as "muối vừng." This adds a delightful crunch and savoury flavour that complements the aromatic bamboo-tube rice perfectly.

With each bite, bamboo-tube rice offers a tantalizing journey into the heart of Tày culture, celebrating tradition, community, and the bountiful gifts of nature.





Handwritten text on a wooden sign, likely a menu or list of items, with columns of text and some numbers.

Desserts



Bánh gio

Lime-water dumpling

SERVES
5

It may not look like much but the bánh gio is no ordinary dumpling. One of the specialties of the Tày people in Bắc Kạn, this dish requires its maker to be extremely skilful and eagle-eyed in order to execute it successfully. The ingredients are unusual but come together in a surprisingly harmonious way, making it one of the most well-known and well-loved dishes in the region. Bánh gio is served with sweet and fragrant dark yellow cane molasses. The texture is smooth, flexible, chewy, and tastes cool and fresh.

Bắc Kạn province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Glutinous rice (yellow flower glutinous rice, mua lech glutinous rice): 500 gm
- Clear lime water: 250 ml
- Ash water (made from banana peel ash, sesame tree ash, banana leaf ash): 250 ml
- Cane molasses: to taste
- Chit leaves
- Dong leaf
- Bamboo strings

Tips:

- Select the right plant to create smooth and white ash for the recipe.
- Ensure the ash is mixed with the correct concentration of lime water. Test the density and lightness of the lime water before soaking the rice. Care must be taken to avoid making the lime water too strong, which can result in an acrid taste, or too light, causing the cake to become doughy and lose its flavour.
- Prepare the ash by crushing the leaves and filtering them, similar to making filtered coffee. It takes approximately 10 hours to filter the ash to produce enough ash water for one batch of dumplings. Boil the clear ash water and let it cool before soaking the rice for about 7 hours.
- Use chit leaves to wrap the dumplings, resulting in a bright yellow colour, unique aroma, and easy peeling.

Recipe

Preparing the rice:

- Wash sticky rice several times and soak for 10 minutes.
- After soaking, leave the rice to dry.

Making ash water:

- Burn the banana peels and sesame seeds to make a pile of ash.
- Use a sieve to filter the ash and remove impurities.
- Pour purified water into the ashes.
- Then pour the ash water mixture through a thin layer of cloth. Filter out the residue to get clear ash water.

Soaking the rice:

- Pour the sticky rice that is now dry into the ash water mixture and soak it for 22 hours.



- Gently squeeze the rice to check if the rice crumbles and turns to mash in your hands. If yes, this means it can be used to make cakes.

Wrapping the cake:

- Using a knife, cut off the petiole of the chit leaves.
- Boil water and quickly drop the leaves into the pot to remove the chlorophyll and impurities.
- Rinse the leaves under clean water. Drain and let the leaves dry.
- Put 2 chit leaves together on a flat surface, and roll to create an opening in the middle of the leaves.
- Scoop 2 spoons of sticky rice and place it into the hole of the dong leaf.
- Roll up the chit leaves, folding the excess leaves inwards so that they can be tied up. Roll tightly to ensure that the rice does not leak out.
- Use bamboo strings to tie the dumpling from top to bottom.

Boiling the cake:

- After wrapping the dumplings, put them in a pot of water. Make sure that the bánh gio is submerged.
- Boil the dumplings on a medium flame for 5 hours. If the water evaporates, add water to continue the boiling process.
- Once the dumplings are boiled for a sufficient amount of time, transfer

it into a pot of clean water.

- Wash the dumplings to remove the slime from the crust. Drain and dry.

Plating the dish:

- When the leaves are peeled off the lime-water rice dumpling it looks like a block of clear amber jade; each small grain of sparkling sticky rice is visible.
- Cut bánh gio into small pieces and put into a bowl.
- Slowly pour cane molasses into the bowl, mix the dumpling cake well and enjoy

Mastering the art of crafting Tày bánh gio dumplings requires meticulous attention to detail and a deep understanding of traditional techniques. From selecting the right ingredients to wrapping and boiling the dumplings with care, each step contributes to the creation of this beloved dish. The result is a culinary masterpiece that delights the senses with its smooth texture, harmonious flavours, and rich cultural significance.

SERVES
5

Bánh trôi, also known as Pèng phạ in the Tày language, a precious cake of the ethnic people in Bắc Kạn. It is an indispensable part of the offerings made to welcome the New Year and the harvest season. Each of these tiny cakes, round like the longan fruit, bring together many ingredients, typical flavours of the countryside, and the affection, enthusiasm, and creativity of the Tày community.



Bánh trôi

Heaven cake

Bắc Kạn province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Glutinous rice flour: 500 gm
- Black pig's lard: 300 gm
- Cane sugar: 250 gm
- Green tea: 25 gm
- Rice liquor: to taste

Recipe

This delicacy boasts a unique double coating: a first layer of boiled and browned cane sugar followed by a second layer of roasted and ground glutinous rice flour.

Cooking:

- Grind sticky rice to make rice flour.
- Infuse green tea into the flour for colour and flavour.
- Add fragrant rice liquor and knead until the flour forms a smooth, thick dough.
- Shape the dough into small balls and fry them in lard until golden yellow.

Plating the dish:

- Boil cane sugar until viscous, then dip the cakes before rolling them in the coating flour.
- The resulting rustic appearance belies the delicate interplay of flavors—truly a treat for the senses!

These small, round cakes symbolize not only the arrival of the New Year and the bountiful harvest season but also the unity, warmth, and creativity of the Tày people. With its unique double coating and distinctive flavours, bánh trôi embodies the rich culinary heritage and cherished traditions of the region, inviting all to savour its rustic charm and heartfelt symbolism.



Cultivating Tradition: The story of Tai glutinous rice in the Bắc Kạn province

Bắc Kạn province



Tai glutinous rice is a traditional rice seedling of the Dao ethnic minority community Phieng Phang and Na Pai villages, Yen Duong commune, Ba Be district, Bắc Kạn province.

If you visit Phieng Phang in the early days of November, you will see people were busy harvesting the Tai glutinous rice by hand, using a small but sharp iron blade called hep. Laughter and chatter rings through the village. Looking at the fields laden with seeds, Mrs. Man and the villagers now no longer doubt the efficiency of organic rice growing practices. This crop produced good quality rice with a high yield, and many families have been able to increase their income.

Ms. Trieu Thi Tam was also busy cutting each rice flower with a hep.

Just finishing harvesting, Ms. Tam excitedly said that this year the rice had no pests and diseases, the grains were beautiful and firm, so the people were very happy. From just worrying about having enough for living, the Dao people in Phieng Phang have thought of ways to escape poverty and making wealth right in their homeland with this special rice seedling.

Production and consumption linkage: A good economic development model for ethnic minority people

Bắc Kạn province



Fragrant zucchini (courgette/squash) is a local specialty of Ba Bể district, Bắc Kạn province, planted mainly in Yen Duong and Dia Linh communes, and sporadically in some other localities. The cultivation area of the fragrant zucchini in the entire district is estimated to be nearly 200 hectares, with a yield of about 6,500 tons of fruit.

Fragrant zucchini is a clean vegetable, sweet and nutritious, easily grown in home gardens, and you may have it every day. It can be steamed, boiled, made a broth out of, stewed with bones, and even turned into a smoothie! Fragrant zucchini is different from other popular squashes in the market: it is very big and covered with a thick layer of white powder, its flesh is dense, especially the stem. Its leaves, flowers, and fruit are all aromatic and has a rich and fatty texture when cooked.

During the 2023 crop season, with the support of the Commercial Smallholder Support Project, Ms. Hoang Thi Do, the Head of the Women's Union in Vang village (Dia Linh commune, Ba Bể district, Bắc Kạn province), along with her family, embarked on a venture into cultivating fragrant zucchini. Covering an area of 3,500 m², their efforts bore fruit, yielding an impressive 3 tons of fragrant zucchini per 1,000 m². Demonstrating the



success of their endeavour, all of the fragrant zucchini cultivated by Ms. Do's family found a market through the Nhung Luy Cooperative.

Ms. Do enthusiastically shared, "The income generated from growing fragrant zucchini averages VND 50-60 million annually, which is significantly higher compared to traditional rice cultivation." She further emphasized that the fragrant zucchini plants thrive remarkably well during dry weather conditions. In fact, she noted, "The drier the weather, the greener and more fragrant the zucchini becomes, showcasing its resilience and adaptability."

Not only Ms. Do's family, but the Tày ethnic community in Vang village have had their lives vastly improved thanks to the fragrant zucchini plant and the cooperation with the Nhung Luy Cooperative in plating, maintaining and consuming products. "The lives of the people in Vang village have changed a lot. They are better off, have built houses, are able to buy motorbikes, and the village roads were concreted for ease of travel," said Ms. Do.

Candied coconut ribbons

SERVES

6

These candied coconut ribbons are a favourite lunar New Year treat. While some of the traditional foods demand a lot of time, energy and labour, Mứt dừa comes with a lighter recipe, and is quick to make. The reward is a crunch to remember!

Bến Tre province

Ingredients

- Young coconut meat: 700 gm
- Sugar: 350 gm
- Lemon: ½
- Vanilla: 1 tube or 1 sachet
- Salt: ½ teaspoon

Recipe

Preparing the coconut:

- Scrape off the brown outer layer of the young coconut, wash it, and slice the coconut lengthwise to about 0.6 cm thick. Then, rinse it with water a few times.
- Next, squeeze ½ lemon into the coconut and wash the fruit with water. This will help remove some of the coconut oil and make the coconut flesh whiter.
- Put the coconut into a pot of boiling water and soak for about 3 minutes to completely remove the coconut oil. Transfer it into a basket and let it drain.

Immersing the coconut:

- After the coconut is dry, put it in a small bowl and add ½ teaspoon of salt and 350 grams of sugar.
- Mix well and leave it for about 2-3 hours until the sugar dissolves and is evenly absorbed into the coconut. Sugar water will accumulate at the bottom of the bowl.

Simmering and cooking:

- Pour the coconut and its liquid in a non-stick pan on high heat. When the sugar water starts to boil, lower the heat to medium and let it simmer.
- When the liquid has almost dried, lower the heat again, and add the vanilla.
- Continue to cook the coconut until the sugar water dries up completely and turns into a powdery sugar.

Tip:

While cooking on a low simmer, stir the coconut frequently to evenly coat it with the sugar; watch out for any signs of burning. If you want to store the candied coconut for longer, dry it in the sun for about 30 minutes.



Thạch mác púp

Mác púp jelly

SERVES

4

Mác púp is a sturdy, rough, woody climbing plant that often clings to rice, fig, and stays in the limestone outcrops to grow. The Mác púp trees grow for two or three years before bearing fruit. Every year, at the end of the spring season, Mác púp blooms and produces its fruit around March-April of the lunar calendar. During the months of July-August of the lunar calendar, the harvest begins. At this stage, the fruit has a stretched shell, is plump like a chicken egg with bright green, firm seeds, and hangs from the tree branches.

Harvesters use a knife to quarter and peel the shell to remove the beans, and place them in the sun to gradually dry out.

The Mác púp jelly is a wonderful summer refreshment that cannot be found anywhere else and there is nothing better than to sit with a cool, sweet and aromatic cup of jelly - provided you are game enough to make it!

Cao Bằng province

Ingredients

- Mác púp jelly beans: 50 gm
- Water: 1 litre
- Pure raw cane sugar: 300-400 gm
- Lemon: 1

Recipe

- Sift the jelly beans to remove small pieces to ensure that the cooked jelly will be clear.
- Put the jelly beans in a cloth bag and toss them with filtered water at a ratio of 50 gm of seeds to 1 litre of water for about 10 minutes.
- Pour the crushed jelly into a box/cup, cover tightly and store in the refrigerator for about 45 minutes until the jelly solidifies.
- Make sugar water and decide how sweet you want it. Cane sugar or apricot sugar is recommended and you can add jasmine, grapefruit flowers and sugar liquid to enhance the taste.

Plating the dish:

Use a spoon to scoop each piece of jelly or cut into bite-sized squares, add sugar/honey, and a few slices of lemon.

Tip:

Good quality jelly has a clear yellow colour like crystal, is fragrant, moderately firm, and tastes better when eaten cold.



Thạch đen

Black jelly

SERVES

4

Cao Bằng province



Black jelly (also known as grass jelly) is a familiar rustic dish originating from Thạch An district, Cao Bằng province - an area known for fields covered with black jelly for as far as the eye can see. Since the 1970s, people have grown black jelly plants. Earlier, the fields were spread over an area of about 200 hectares in Thạch An district. Currently, there are about 350 hectares planted with black jelly, concentrated mainly in the communes of Trùng Con, Đúc Thông, Quang Trùng, Minh Khai and Canh Tân. Black jelly is an herbaceous plant, about 40-60cm high; it has a four-sided stem with many branches, spreading out like a mint plant. It is considered to be a kind of herbal medicine as it contains polyphenol, tannin, and over 50 per cent of pectin. These substances significantly increase blood vessel dilation, prevent oxidation of blood, and reduce blood cholesterol. Additionally, grass jelly leaves cool the body in a way that benefits the liver; it is also used as a laxative, to treat colds, and is said to have anti-aging properties.

Black jelly is planted in April and May of the lunar calendar, then harvested four-five months later. Harvesters are required to cut close to the roots, collect the stems and leaves and spread them evenly to dry them under the sun once; then pile them up for one-two days before drying them under the sun again for another two-three days. Once the stems and leaves are completely dry people bundle them up and store them for later use.





Ingredients

- Dried black jelly: 50 gm
- Tapioca starch: 30 gm
- Plain water: 2 litres
- Sugar: 50 gm

Recipe

Preparing the black jelly:

- Begin by soaking the dried black jelly in water for approximately 5 minutes. Afterward, thoroughly rinse it multiple times with clean water to eliminate any dirt or sand.
- Next, cut the jelly into small pieces to facilitate the process of turning it into pulp.

Stewing the black jelly:

- Fill a pot with 1 litre of water and bring it to a boil for approximately 2 hours. Extended boiling enhances the texture, so replenish water if needed. This process accelerates the pulpification of the plant, easing the rubbing process.
- Stir the leaves intermittently while boiling to ensure they absorb enough water, achieve a pulpy consistency, and emit a delightful aroma.

Filtering the black jelly

- Add ample water and vigorously rub the black jelly until all the slime dissipates and the water turns clear.
- Use a sieve followed by a cloth to filter the water. Continue boiling until approximately 1 litre of liquid remains.

Preparing the black jelly flour

- In a separate bowl, blend 30 grams of tapioca flour with a small amount of water until dissolved. Pour this mixture into the pot of black jelly water and stir thoroughly until smooth.
- After filtering and boiling, incorporate sugar and tapioca flour into the black jelly water to enhance sweetness and viscosity.

Freezing the jelly mixture

- Transfer the jelly mixture into a bowl or container, allow it to cool, then refrigerate for approximately 2 hours.

Plating the dish:

- Enjoy the finished black jelly on its own or pair it with sweet soups, bean milk, or bean curd for a delightful treat.

The process of making the black jelly is quite elaborate, taking about three hours. But it is truly rewarding – 1 kg of the dried black jelly plant can produce up to 20 kg of jelly.

Bánh trứng kiến

Ant-egg cake

SERVES

6

Ant-egg cake stands out as a distinctive culinary delight of the Tày community, evoking the essence of mountainous landscapes and rural life. Typically crafted during the lunar months of April to May, coinciding with the peak reproduction season of wild black ants, these cakes encapsulate a unique cultural tradition. The elusive nests of these ants, often found on tree branches such as bambusa nutans, schizostachyum aciculare, chinaberry, or randia, require ventures deep into the forest to procure.

The eggs of these wild black ants, milky white in colour and about the size of a grain of rice, boast a remarkable nutritional profile. Scientifically validated as a clean and protein-rich food source, these eggs contain an impressive 42-47 per cent protein content along with over 31 essential micronutrients, including vitamins A, E, D, and B1.

Cao Bằng province

Ingredients

- Glutinous rice flour (Ong/ Pì Pát/ Xuân Trường variety): 1 kg
- Ant's eggs: 400 gm
- Minced pork: 400 gm
- Fig leaves (ngõa mật leaves): 30-40
- Dried onions: 500 gm
- Fish sauce: to taste
- Butter (for lamination)
- Spices: Salt, pepper

Recipe

Preparing the ingredients:

- Gently wash the ant's eggs to preserve their integrity and nutritional value, allowing them to drain.
- Wash and drain the fig leaves.
- Knead the glutinous rice flour with warm water until it forms a soft, smooth dough.
- Mince the dried onions.

Making the cake filling:

- Heat oil in a pan and fry the dried onions until fragrant.
- Add the ant's eggs and minced pork, stirring gently to prevent egg breakage. Season to taste.
- Cook over low heat until the eggs and meat are thoroughly cooked. Remove from heat once ready.

Making the cake:

- Take a portion of the kneaded dough, roll it into a ball, and laminate it with butter.
- Place the laminated dough onto a fig leaf, spread the egg filling evenly, and wrap the leaf securely. Opt for young fig leaves for their tenderness.
- Steam the cakes for approximately 45 minutes until they puff up and emit a tantalizing aroma. Once done, remove from heat.

Tip:

Ant-egg cake offers a delectable and unique culinary experience. However, individuals allergic to protein should exercise caution, trying a small portion first to gauge any adverse reactions.



Bánh tam giác mạch

Buckwheat cake

SERVES

4

Buckwheat cake, derived from the seeds of buckwheat flowers, holds a revered status in the culinary landscape of northeast Viet Nam, particularly during the transition from late autumn to early winter.

Hà Giang province

Ingredients

- Flour: 200 gm
- Buckwheat powder: 100 gm
- Water: 400 ml

Recipe

- Harvest fresh buckwheat seeds and dry them under the sun for approximately one week until they achieve the desired level of dryness. Subsequently, meticulously grind the seeds into a fine flour. The grinding process is crucial, aiming for a smooth consistency to prevent the cake from becoming lumpy.
- Combine the buckwheat flour with water in the appropriate ratio to attain a pliable dough, neither overly moist nor excessively dry. Knead the mixture thoroughly to ensure even hydration and texture.
- With adept hands, shape the dough into flat, round cakes, each boasting a diameter larger than that of a standard pan and measuring approximately 2-3 centimetres in thickness. Pay attention to consistency and uniformity to guarantee optimal cooking results.
- Prepare a steamer and place the formed buckwheat cakes inside. Steam them for about 10 minutes, allowing the heat to penetrate and cook the cakes evenly. For an authentic touch, consider utilizing a charcoal stove, as it imparts a distinct flavour profile to the cakes, elevating their taste and aroma.
- Once steamed to perfection, remove the buckwheat cakes from the steamer and allow them to cool slightly before serving.

This seasonal delicacy not only showcases the unique processing techniques but also embodies the cultural significance intertwined with the blossoming of buckwheat flowers across the rocky plateaus.



Thắng dền

Stuffed sticky rice balls

SERVES

6

Stuffed sticky rice balls, known as Thắng dền, are a specialty hailing from Hà Giang province, crafted with meticulous care by the ethnic minorities of the region. This unique dish revolves around a single star ingredient: upland glutinous rice sourced from Yên Minh, Hà Giang. Renowned for its large, white, and impeccably firm grains, Yên Minh rice boasts a delightful, fatty, and chewy texture that forms the cornerstone of this culinary creation.

Hà Giang province
(Ethnic minority)

Ingredients

- Glutinous rice: 500 gm
- Green or red bean: 350 gm
- Coconut milk: 30 ml
- Sugar water: 50 ml
- Ginger: 1 root
- Condiments: roasted sesame (15 gm) and peanuts (50 gm)

Recipe

- Begin by soaking the sticky rice overnight to enhance its softness and fragrance. Alternatively, soak for 5-6 hours until the rice, when rubbed on a flat surface, dissolves into a powdery consistency, indicating readiness.
- Place the rice dough in a cloth bag and suspend it to drain. Once the dough achieves a smooth, non-sticky texture, shape it into small cakes.
- Thắng dền can be filled with green or red beans, with each cake resembling the size of a thumb's tip. These cakes come in various colours, including white, purple, yellow, and red.
- Preparing the broth is crucial for enhancing the delightful taste of Thắng dền. Common ingredients for the broth include sugar water, coconut milk, fresh ginger, and a dash of roasted sesame and peanuts to impart a warm, sweet flavour.
- Boil the dough balls in water until they begin to float, then transfer them to a bowl. Add the prepared broth and serve piping hot.

Thắng dền stands as a testament to the cultural heritage of Hà Giang province and its ethnic minorities and holds a special place in the hearts of those who savour its delights.









IFAD in Viet Nam



The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is a specialized agency of the United Nations dedicated to eradicating rural poverty and hunger in developing countries. Established in 1977, IFAD works with rural communities to provide financial and technical assistance, as well as policy advice, to help them improve their agricultural productivity, increase their incomes, and build resilience to climate change.

Since 1993, IFAD has been working in Viet Nam, focusing on reducing poverty and improving food security in rural areas. IFAD's projects in Viet Nam aim to empower smallholder farmers, ethnic minorities, and other vulnerable groups to boost their agricultural productivity, increase incomes, and prepare the most vulnerable communities to adapt to climate change.

IFAD's work in Viet Nam includes providing financial and technical assistance to rural communities, promoting sustainable farming practices, and enhancing access to markets and agricultural services. The

organization also prioritizes gender equality and social inclusion, ensuring that women and youth have equal opportunities and access to resources. IFAD collaborates with the Vietnamese government, local organizations, and the private sector to implement projects that contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to ending poverty and hunger, as well as promoting sustainable agriculture.

Overall, IFAD's efforts in Viet Nam have made significant contributions to improving the lives of rural communities by empowering them to achieve sustainable development and food security. Through its ongoing work, IFAD continues to play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced by smallholder farmers and marginalized groups in Viet Nam.



Spotlight on the Climate Smart Agricultural Value Chain Development

Project Summary



The IFAD-supported Climate Smart Agricultural Value Chain Development (CSAT) project seeks to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities arising from Viet Nam's economic growth, which has been accompanied by increased inequality and environmental degradation. The project aims to achieve sustainable and climate-resilient rural transformation in Bến Tre and Trà Vinh provinces, where unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and the impact of climate change have taken a toll on agriculture.

Building on the successes of previous initiatives, this project focuses on generating sustainable income opportunities and improving rural livelihoods for 60,000 smallholder farmers' households, with a specific emphasis on women, youth, and ethnic minorities. A pivotal aspect of the project involves the formulation of a comprehensive investment plan, developed in tandem with climate change adaptation planning. This holistic approach encompasses the preparation of action plans and the

implementation of awareness-raising campaigns aimed at enhancing resilience within rural communities.

By addressing these critical areas, the Climate Smart Agricultural Value Chain Development project aspires to not only enhance the economic prospects of rural communities but also to fortify their resilience in the face of climate change. Through these concerted efforts, the project endeavours to create a more equitable and sustainable future for smallholder farmers and rural entrepreneurs across Bến Tre and Trà Vinh provinces.



Interview with the Project Directors

**Mr. Nguyen Khac Han:
Project Director,
CSAT Bến Tre province**

1. Could you tell us why the CSAT project is needed for the Bến Tre province?

The Mekong Delta is one of the regions in the world that are most impacted by climate change. Among them, Bến Tre is one of the provinces that have been the most affected by saline intrusion and drought. The implementation of CSAT Bến Tre has contributed to a number of crucial goals in the region:

- Supporting climate resilient and sustainable agricultural development in the Mekong Delta.
- Providing support to the people to adopt climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable technologies and practices.
- Increasing the income of vulnerable and poor people, especially sustainable incomes.
- Improving resilience to climate, environmental and economic shocks, and especially boosting women empowerment, while also supporting men and the youth.
- Creating new jobs and supporting rural producers' organizations that enter in partnerships/agreements or contracts with public or private entities.

2. What are some of the primary initiatives undertaken by the CSAT project?

The CSAT undertakes a range of key activities aimed at fostering sustainable agricultural development and poverty reduction within the province and its localities. These activities include:

- Crafting comprehensive action plans tailored to five pivotal value chain groups, along with four specific value chain groups, aligning closely with the province and locality's development objectives.
- Facilitating the establishment of climate-resilient agricultural livelihoods that are intricately linked with the identified value chains.
- Promoting the adoption and integration of digital platforms and smart agriculture practices to enhance productivity and efficiency across value chains.
- Identifying and developing strategic products that showcase the unique and specific offerings of local products, contributing to their promotion and marketability.

Moreover, the CSAT oversees the implementation of the Public-Private-Producer Partnership (4P) platform, which serves as a crucial mechanism for:

- Executing the Chain Action Plan effectively, fostering collaboration among stakeholders.
- Providing capacity-building initiatives and facilitating Business Development Services for entities involved in the value chain.
- Mobilising financial resources to support investment in value chain development.
- Contributing to the finalisation and institutionalisation of policies governing value chain development.

The CSAT also organises capacity-building training programmes targeted at public and private sector actors, as well as relevant partners engaged in the

value chain. These programmes encompass a wide range of areas, including value chain development, market expansion, innovative finance access, and investment diversification.

Furthermore, the CSAT prioritises the construction and enhancement of public infrastructure to bolster the resilience and sustainability of value chains, thereby fostering long-term economic growth and prosperity within the region.

3. Can you summarize the lessons learned so far in its implementation?

Throughout the implementation of IFAD-funded projects spanning from 2008 to the present, we have gleaned valuable insights. Here are some key takeaways:

- Adopt a community-based approach to ensure that the business needs of local communities are integrated into programmes and projects. Aligning targets within the same areas enables us to optimize technical interventions and financial support effectively.
- Invest in a comprehensive range of activities, spanning from research and assessment to planning, piloting, evaluation, and dissemination. Emphasize scaling up support to establish the Public-Private-Producer Partnership (4P) platform.
- Promote livelihood development through value chains, involving various stakeholders in a connected network, rather than supporting them separately. Fostering sustainable income by promoting businesses and cooperatives to provide linked activities and services facilitates the adaptation of the poor to climate change more efficiently.
- Have a community-based approach so that their business needs are integrated into programmes and projects. By having the same targets in the same areas, we can try to optimize technical interventions and financial support.
- Livelihood development should be promoted by the value chain, not supported separately, but linked between actors to connect and create closer relationships. By creating sustainable income which focuses on promoting businesses/cooperatives to provide linked activities and services, we can help the poor to adapt to climate change in a more efficient manner.

4. What are some of your favourite foods or dishes from Viet Nam?

Sour broth, fermented fish hotpot.

5. Do you personally enjoy traditional recipes made by ethnic minority communities?

I really like the traditional recipes of the Mekong Delta's indigenous community in general; Bến Tre in particular. For example, the sour broth is considered as the distinctive dish of the Mekong Delta people. The dish is made from rustic ingredients such as sesbania sesban (also known as river hemp), pineapple, eggplant, mint, and river fish from the Mekong Delta. The sour, sweet taste combined with the crunch of vegetables and the fatty sweetness of the river fish creates the unique flavour of the dish. Every family in the Mekong Delta knows and often makes sour broth for their family meals.

6. Is there any final takeaway that you would like to share with our readers?

Bến Tre, with its 65 km-long coastline, lush mangrove forests teeming with diverse flora and fauna, and intricate network of canals, enjoys a temperate climate throughout all four seasons. The fertile land is conducive to cultivating a variety of fruits, with coconut being the most renowned. Our region boasts numerous dishes crafted from coconut trees, and I encourage everyone to visit Bến Tre to experience these delicacies.



**Mr. Huynh Nghia Tho:
Project Director,
CSAT Trà Vinh province**

1. Could you tell us why the CSAT project is needed for the Trà Vinh province?

Trà Vinh, situated in the Mekong Delta, has faced significant challenges due to saltwater intrusion and drought. The CSAT project aims to address these issues by facilitating poverty reduction, fostering sustainable income growth, and enhancing resilience to climate, environmental, and economic adversities. Furthermore, it seeks to empower individuals across diverse demographics, including women, men, ethnic minorities, and youth, thereby promoting inclusive development and community resilience.

2. What are some of the primary initiatives undertaken by the CSAT project?

The CSAT project focuses on fostering the growth of robust and promising industries within the province, thereby contributing to the restructuring of the agricultural sector towards value addition and sustainable development. This is achieved through the formulation of Value Chain Action Plans (VCAP) aligned with the provincial Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) framework and integrated with sectoral and district plans, notably within the Mekong Regional Plan.

Key activities include identifying businesses and stakeholders involved in these value chains, establishing the 4P platform, and providing capacity-building training for both public and private sector participants. Additionally, the project emphasizes the enhancement of rural infrastructure, facilitation of private investment, provision of business development services, and intermediary funds for value chain development.

Furthermore, the project mobilizes and integrates local resources, government policies, and programs to bolster public and private investment in sustainable value chain development. Lastly, efforts are underway to enhance climate change adaptation for priority groups such as poor/near-poor households, ethnic minorities, youth, women, and other vulnerable demographics.

3. Can you summarize the lessons learned so far in its implementation?

Some key insights gleaned from the implementation of IFAD-funded projects are:

- Effective project implementation necessitates extensive coordination among various stakeholders, including provincial management, professional agencies, project districts, communes, and beneficiary communities. Active involvement of research institutions, independent specialists, and enterprises is crucial for devising breakthrough solutions that are both innovative and practical.
- When developing adaptation models and solutions, it is essential to consider agricultural ecological zones comprehensively. This entails

addressing criteria for climate change adaptation and enhancing agricultural productivity, while also evaluating the market potential of products and aligning them with the financial capacities of different beneficiaries.

- Adopting a “poverty reduction by value chain” approach requires targeted investments in key products that demonstrate both market potential and poverty reduction prospects. For impoverished communes lacking viable value chains, the project should prioritize extending support to poor households and promoting livelihood diversification initiatives.

4. What are some of your favourite foods or dishes from Viet Nam?

Noodles with fish broth, sim lo broth.

5. Do you personally enjoy traditional recipes made by ethnic minority communities?

I like the traditional recipes of the ethnic minority community in Trà Vinh. One such dish that captivates my palate is the noodles with fish broth, renowned for its bold Khmer flavours.

6. Is there any final takeaway that you would like to share with our readers?

Please come to Trà Vinh to feel the natural landscape and “green lifestyle”. You can experience innovative and attractive tourist destinations, especially community tourism, and enjoy the culinary culture of Trà Vinh province, which is very diverse and rich with the long-standing cuisine of Kinh, Chinese, and Khmer ethnic groups with many famous specialties.



Spotlight on the Commercial Smallholder Support Project

Project Summary

The Commercial Smallholder Support Project, funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), seeks to address the multifaceted challenges and opportunities arising from Viet Nam's economic growth. On the one hand, it has led to improved living standards in rural areas but, on the other, it has been accompanied by increased inequality and environmental degradation. Building on the successes of previous IFAD-supported initiatives, this particular project aims to bolster rural businesses and promote sustainable agroforestry practices.

Large parts of Viet Nam are likely to be impacted by climate change. Therefore, a crucial aspect of this project involves the formulation of a comprehensive investment plan, which will be developed in tandem with climate change adaptation planning. By adopting a holistic approach, the project encompasses the preparation of action plans and the implementation of awareness-raising campaigns aimed at enhancing resilience within vulnerable rural communities. Furthermore, market-oriented socio-economic development plans will be meticulously crafted to address the specific challenges posed by climate change. Special care will be taken to ensure that they are reflective of these pressing environmental concerns.

In addition to these efforts, the project will prioritize the equitable ownership and efficient utilization of forest resources. To this end, nearly 2,000 common interest groups will be either established or reinforced, with a focus on implementing profitable climate change-adaptation technologies and practices. The project will also extend support to the newly established women's development funds, thus recognizing the pivotal role of women in sustainable agricultural development. Moreover, an agribusiness promotion investment fund will be instrumental in catalysing approximately 25 private sector agro-enterprise investments, thereby fostering a thriving ecosystem for sustainable agricultural entrepreneurship.

By addressing these critical areas, the Commercial Smallholder Support Project aspires to not only enhance the economic prospects of rural communities but also to fortify their resilience in the face of climate change. Through these concerted efforts, the project endeavours to create a more equitable and sustainable future for smallholder farmers and rural entrepreneurs across Viet Nam.



Interview with the Project Directors

Mr. Hoang Van Giap:
Project Director,
CSSP Bắc Kạn province

1. Could you tell us why CSSP is needed for the Bắc Kạn province?

The Bắc Kạn province is located in the Northeast region of Viet Nam, with eight districts and cities with 108 communes, wards and towns. Its demographic landscape is predominantly shaped by ethnic minority groups like Tày, Nùng, Mường, and Dao. Since 1997, Bắc Kạn has persistently ranked among the nation's ten most challenging provinces, characterized by a significant prevalence of impoverished households and meagre per capita income. Agricultural activities remain fragmented and small-scale, with limited establishment of commodity production zones. Furthermore, the province faces scarcity in agricultural product processing and purchasing facilities, coupled with considerable challenges in market connectivity. The existing infrastructure lacks consistency and integration with value chain development initiatives.

In response to these challenges, the project prioritizes the formulation of local socio-economic development plans through a participatory approach that integrates market-oriented strategies and climate change adaptation measures. This holistic approach aims to facilitate effective resource coordination and integration, leverage the unique strengths of each province, establish robust linkages between production and consumption, and foster awareness and adoption of climate change adaptation technologies and practices. Ultimately, the project endeavours to ensure sustainable income growth, thereby enhancing socio-economic resilience.

2. What are some of the primary initiatives undertaken by the CSSP Project?

The Commercial Smallholder Support Project (CSSP) has been implemented with the objective of fostering sustainable income growth and enhancing resilience to climate change among impoverished and near-impoverished households. This is achieved through a series of key activities, including:

- Institutionalizing province-wide participatory planning processes: In the Bắc Kạn province, the socio-economic development planning process, incorporating market-oriented participation in climate change adaptation, has been adopted by 100 percent of communes and wards. This initiative involves the development of action plans to enhance and fortify local value chains.
- Facilitating land allocation and issuance of forestry land use rights certificates to individuals.
- Supporting cooperative groups.
- Investing in community infrastructure projects aligned with value chains.
- Establishing saving and loan borrowing groups facilitated by the Bắc Kạn Women's Development Fund.
- Providing financial support to businesses and cooperatives.

These initiatives collectively contribute to the overarching goal of promoting sustainable livelihoods and reducing vulnerability to climate change in targeted communities.

3. What are your favourite dishes?

I particularly enjoy stir-fried bồ khai vegetables with egg and steamed pork belly.

4. Do you personally like traditional recipes made by ethnic minority communities?

I have a deep appreciation for traditional dishes and take pride in the rich and distinctive cuisine that the people of Bắc Kạn offer. Similar to other highland regions in the Northeast, the locals here skilfully prepare wild vegetables, such as dớn (fiddlehead fern), bồ khai (erythralium scandens), and ngót (katuk), which always leave a lasting impression on visitors.

5. Would you like to share anything else with our readers?

Come to Bắc Kạn, where you will enjoy not only the beautiful natural scenery but also various types of specialties imbued with ethnic minority people's identity. After a long journey to visit monuments, landscapes, meaningful destinations, learning about historical and cultural traditions, and listening to the Then singing melodies of highland ethnic minority groups, you will also understand more about the special dishes and drinks of Bắc Kạn. Each dish contains unique cultural features, customs and practices, personality, flavour, and is the result of a creative production process and valuable folk knowledge that has been kept, preserved and maintained by the people of Bắc Kạn for many generations.



**Ms. Vu Thi Hong Thuy:
Project Director,
CSSP Cao Bằng province**

1. Could you tell us why CSSP is needed for the Cao Bằng province?

Cao Bằng is one of the poor Northern mountainous provinces, where ethnic minority groups account for 90 per cent of the population. Cao Bằng has natural conditions and land fit for agroforestry and clean agriculture development. However, due to lack of human resources, financial resources and an insufficient and poor traffic road system, the potential has not been promoted, and people's lives and incomes are in dire straits. Achieving socio-economic development goals in general, and agricultural development in rural areas in particular, is a big challenge.

So, having an investment project like the CSSP is extremely meaningful to Cao Bằng province. CSSP has had a direct impact on ethnic minority people, women and youth - helping them to access market information, change production and farming thoughts, increase livelihoods and income.

2. Can you summarize the lessons learned so far in the project's implementation?

During the CSSP implementation, we have gleaned several important lessons. Specifically:

When attracting businesses and cooperatives to invest in the agricultural sector, especially in remote mountainous regions like Cao Bằng, it is crucial to meticulously select and survey these entities before extending investment support. Enterprises that have established physical presence in communes, districts, and provinces tend to forge more sustainable connections with local groups.

3. What are some of your favourite foods or dishes from Viet Nam?

I have a fondness for smoked sausages and ant-egg cake.

4. Do you personally enjoy traditional recipes made by indigenous communities?

Absolutely. Traditional dishes from indigenous communities evoke a sense of nostalgia and cultural richness. Among the Tày and Nùng ethnic minority groups in Cao Bằng, sausages hung over the stove or smoked with sugarcane bagasse hold a special place. These delicacies are not only part of daily meals but are also essential during Tết celebrations.

5. Is there a final takeaway that you would like to share with our readers?

With its favourable geographical location and natural assets, Cao Bằng province boasts competitive advantages in trade, tourism, and international goods transportation, particularly with China. Furthermore, the province's tourism potential is underscored by its rich landscapes, historical and cultural relics, temperate climate, and natural scenery, offering visitors an opportunity to savour delicious cuisine, experience warm hospitality, and immerse themselves in the unique customs, traditions, and cultures of Cao Bằng's diverse communities.







IFAD invests in rural people, empowering them to reduce poverty, increase food security, improve nutrition and strengthen resilience. Since 1978, we have provided US\$23.2 billion in grants and low interest loans to projects that have reached an estimated 518 million people. IFAD is an international financial institution and a United Nations specialized agency based in Rome - the United Nations food and agriculture hub.



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