

FEAST FOR THE SENSES

Ever fancied trying your hand at Thai cooking? Impress your friends by following these fantastic recipes.



ABOVE: The restaurant at The Parade in Headingley; Juree Barrett and Gary Chappell

Thai food is renowned for its flavours and freshness and although many dishes would appear relatively simple to replicate at home, this is often far from the case.

The magical layering of fresh, distinctive flavours within Thai food, which is created with the enthusiastic use of a combination of fresh herbs and spices, is surprisingly difficult to copy in your own kitchen.

Northside went in search of some answers to this quandary facing willing, everyday cooks in the region and visited Juree Barrett, the head chef at Thai Sabai restaurant at 2 The Parade, North Lane, Headingley, Leeds.

Juree, who originates from Songkla in Southern Thailand, is a highly experienced Thai chef and has worked at a number of Thai restaurants in the Leeds region.

She said: "Thai food is very regionally influenced and the Southern-style food that I cook is very rustic and authentic: it uses less sugar and has stronger flavours than the Northern and Eastern styles."

"My curries, for example, tend to contain coconut milk and turmeric, which is distinctive for Southern curries."

She added: "I insist on all my ingredients coming direct from Thailand – even down to the flowers that I use to garnish the plates."

Juree's food is certainly proving a hit with visitors to Thai Sabai. Her partner Gary Chappell opened the restaurant in October 2006 at a location previously occupied by the well-established and much-loved Ferret Hall Bistro. The bistro, run by Ron and Jane Murray, was a hard act to follow, but Gary and Juree are proving worthy successors. A number of rave reviews have helped Thai Sabai establish itself as a quality Thai restaurant serving exquisitely flavoured, authentic Thai cuisine.

"The words 'Thai Sabai' mean a place to relax and this sums up what we are trying to achieve here, with simple décor, friendly service and great Thai food," said Gary.

Gary himself is a trained chef and was

head chef at Linton Springs for many years. He is a long-time friend of Ron and Jane Murray and when they were looking to retire from Ferret Hall Bistro they contacted Gary to see if he would like to take it on.

"It was the perfect opportunity to give Juree somewhere to showcase her superb cooking talents," said Gary.

The menu at Thai Sabai is extensive, including two full pages of vegetarian options and catering for gluten-free and other special diets.

"One of the best things about Thai food is that it is extremely healthy and offers a wonderful combination of flavours that each remains distinctive within every dish," said Juree.

"You may have a mixture of chillies, mint, lemongrass, lime and fish sauce, but you can taste each one individually."

Some of the favourite dishes with diners at Thai Sabai are Weeping Tiger: marinated rump steak chargrilled and served with specially prepared chilli sauce (Juree's own recipe – as are all the sauces and pastes); Gang ped phed yang: roast duck cooked with red curry paste, coconut milk, tomato, pineapple and grapes, and whole sea bass, which can be cooked any one of five different ways: steamed with lemon and chilli sauce; deep fried with sweet and sour spicy sauce; deep fried with sweet and sour vegetable sauce; deep fried with garlic and pepper, or deep fried served with a sweet chilli sauce.

Juree also makes all her own authentic Thai desserts, which include baked Thai custard; Gloey Bwaat chee (bananas cooked in coconut milk), and banana fritter with syrup. Gary supplements these with a selection of his glorious homemade ice creams.

If you want to have a go at recreating the tastes of Thailand at home and impress family and friends with a few recipes, Juree has very kindly shared some of her recipes with Northside readers here. Enjoy. >>>



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Tom Yum Kung, Baked Thai Custard, Gang Dang Gai

Tom Yum Kung Hot and sour soup with prawns

Ingredients

200g raw prawn or shrimp tail (size 26/30 per kilo) - shelled and prepared
600ml fish stock or vegetable stock
100g small button mushrooms - peeled or washed and trimmed
2 small Thai chillies left whole (only chop them if you want very hot soup)
1 lemon grass bruised with a rolling pin
2 kaffir lime leaves
3 slices of galangal
2 table spoons fish sauce
2 table spoons lemon juice
1 tea spoon sugar
2 spring onion chopped
1 table spoon coriander torn
2 small tomato cut into wedges

Method

1. Place the stock, chilli, lemon grass, lime leaf, galangal and sugar in a saucepan, bring to the boil and simmer for two minutes.
2. Bring back to the boil and add the fish sauce, lemon juice, spring onion, tomato and prawns, cook for no more than one minute and serve garnished with the coriander.

Gang Dang Gai Red curry with chicken

Ingredients

300g thinly sliced chicken breast
1 tea spoon cooking oil
1 table spoon red curry paste
400ml (1 can) coconut milk
1 tea spoon sugar
1 table spoon fish sauce
Half tea spoon salt
300g bamboo shoots
200g sliced green and red peppers
10 leaves sweet basil



Method

1. Put the oil in a pan over a high heat add the curry paste and fry for a few seconds stirring constantly.
2. Stir in the coconut milk and bring to the boil, add all the other ingredients, cook for three to four minutes and serve with rice or noodles.

Baked Thai Custard

Ingredients

4 eggs
400ml (1 can) coconut milk
150g palm sugar
50g mung beans
Pinch of salt

Method

1. Place the mung beans in cold water, bring to the boil and simmer for around 20 minutes until completely cooked, pour into a sieve to drain.
2. Break the eggs into a large bowl and whisk.
3. Place the coconut milk, salt and palm sugar in a pan on a low heat stirring constantly to dissolve the sugar, remove from heat, add the mung beans and stir well.
4. Slowly pour the contents of the pan into the bowl with the eggs whisking all the time till everything is combined.
5. Pour into heated ramekins and place in a deep tray filled with around half an inch of warm water. Cook in the centre of a pre heated oven for around 20 minutes gas mark 5 or 190C.

If you would rather let Juree do the hard work for you, you can always visit Thai Sabai. It is open seven days a week 5.30pm until 10.30pm; Thursday to Sunday for lunch from 12 noon until 2.30pm, and Monday to Wednesday lunch times for bookings only.

Try out the restaurant's Early Bird Set Menu, which offers tremendous value for money at £7.95 for two courses and £9.95 for three courses. This is available lunchtime from 12 noon until 2.30pm; early evening Sunday to Thursday from 6pm until 7pm, and early evening Friday and Saturday from 5.30pm until 6.30pm.

The Sunday lunch menu offers a selection of English/European and Thai dishes and is served from 12 noon: two courses £7.95 and three courses £9.95.

Thai Sabai also offers a takeaway and delivery service. ■

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