TRADITIONAL KARENNI FOOD COOKBOOK

CREATED BY THE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS OF THE KARENNI SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER





Page History of the Karenni people told through culinary traditions Dee Sah (Pounded Rice) Mote Hee Kha (Traditional Burmese Soup) Ee Mya Hta (Stuffed and Roasted Bamboo Shoot) Bamboo Shoot Salad & Cucumber Salad Papaya Salad Fried Yellow Bean (for Mote Hee Kha or for a snack)

KARENNI SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER COOKBOOK: HISTORY OF KARENNI CUISINE

In Karenni culture, food is a way to bring the community together and pass down traditions to future generations. Karenni people rely on the surrounding jungle for food, often venturing into the forest to collect bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and other naturally growing fruits and vegetables while also hunting for frogs, fish, prawns, and crabs from small streams.

Karenni people have faced many struggles throughout history including human rights abuses, land confiscation, and exploitation of natural resources by the military troops. Due to these issues, the Karenni people have been forcibly displaced to neighboring Thailand where many live in refugee camps to this day. Some have been resettled around the world and often separated from their families. Karenni recipes are a result of depending on immediate resources and finding ways to make dishes connect the Karenni people to their homeland and preserve tradition no matter where they are in the world.

The recipes in this cookbook are authentic traditional Karenni dishes that have been passed down for centuries. For the first time, these recipes have been documented and brought together for the purpose of sharing the wonderful culture of the Karenni people with the rest of the world.

For instructional recipe videos, please visit our website: http://karennisdc.org/training-human-rights-advocates/karenni-culture/

Special thanks to:
Refugees International Japan
Principal Khu Myar Reh
Teacher Khu Neh Reh
Teacher Aung Jack
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Ingredients

6 cups of uncooked rice

- 1 Kilo of meat (choice of fish, pork, or chicken)
- 1.5 cups of crushed garlic
- 1 cup chopped tomato
- 3 pounded red chilies (adjust for ideal spiciness)

Salt (for boiling the meat and for taste)

MSG (adjust for taste)

- 1 tbsp turmeric powder
- 2 sticks of lemongrass (pounded but uncut for flavor)
- 1-2 cups of chopped cilantro
- ½ cup chopped ginger (adjust for flavor preference)
- 1 cup oil for frying garlic

Materials/Tools for Preparation

- 1 Rice cooker
- 1 Pan for frying garlic, chilies, and onions in oil
- 1 Pot for boiling soup with meat, ginger, turmeric, salt, MSG, chilies and lemongrass
- 1 large spoon/spatula for stirring/frying
- 1 very large pot or wok for pounding the cooked rice with the rest of the cooked ingredients
- 2-3 3-foot long poles for pounding the rice (Karenni people use bamboo sticks but empty bottles can also be used or any cylindrical object that one can hold to pound and twist the rice)

DEE SAH

Instructions for Cooking

- 1. Boil 6 cups of rice in 12 cups of water in rice cooker then set aside once cooked
- 2. Boil meat (1 kilo of chicken, fish, or pork) in enough water to cover the meat. Add vegetables of choice and lemongrass, ginger, tomatoes, turmeric, salt, MSG, and chilies. Boil until meat is fully cooked.
- 3. Remove meat (if cooking fish) with a spoon and debone the fish
- 4. Pour boiled meat along with all its contents into a container and begin to separate the meat into small parts (traditionally with your hands)
- 5. In a pan, fry garlic and onion in oil. Once crispy, remove from oil, then fry chilies In same oil until crispy.
- 6. In your large pot/wok, add the cooked rice and begin to twist and pound rice with your pounding tool of choice until the rice is sticky.
- 7. Slowly begin to mix in the soup with meat into the sticky rice (only a little bit of the soup at a time). Mix the rice and soup together with your pounding tool. Continue to slowly add the soup with meat and add salt for taste.
- 8. Finally, add the fried garlic and onions while mixing and twisting the pounded rice

Instructions for Serving

- 1. Put the pounded rice in bowls for serving
- 2. Place chopped cilantro and extra fried garlic and chilies in bowls for added toppings to the pounded rice



DEE SAH

The History of Karenni Dee Sah

Dee Sah (pounded rice) is a traditional Karenni dish that is enjoyed during celebrations such as weddings, funerals, birthday parties, and festivals of Khae Htoe Bo and Ehdou Phon Mee. Dee Sah has been enjoyed for hundreds of years and connects Karenni people to their forefathers and ancestors. Dee Sah is a dish that is used to bring the community together and spread happiness. While it is one of the oldest and most traditional Karenni dishes, it is still one of the most popular and enjoyed dish by Karenni people young and old! Dee Sah is meant to be shared with others at parties and festivals as well as for leftovers to be brought home to children and families.

Principal Khu Myar Reh's Memories of Dee Sah

My earliest memories of eating Dee Sah were at funerals where Dee Sah was made to bring the community together and celebrate the lives of those who have passed. The community would come together to prepare Dee Sah. When I was young, I would help pound the sticky rice with my friends. At funerals, we have a traditional way of celebrating the life of the deceased, through dancing, playing gongs, cymbals, and flutes, and then eating Dee Sah together. I really enjoyed eating Dee Sah and bringing it back to share with my family. Dee Sah is a traditional way to share happiness and love in our community.

If we did not have access to meat or fish, we could use mushrooms instead. During the rainy season, we could collect natural mushrooms from the forest for only a few months out of the year. My family would enjoy Dee Sah only a few times a year as it was difficult to collect all the ingredients. Our forefathers did not have access to oil or garlic as they were very poor, so having Dee Sah has always been a special dish.

I wish I could have Dee Sah every day if possible! We hope that when you eat Dee Sah you feel connected to Karenni culture and the Karenni people.



Serving Size: 10 people

Ingredients

Dried rice noodles (buy desired amount from any shop-enough to fill two

bowls per person so there is extra)

- 10 liters of water
- 1 kilo fish (traditionally Karenni use catfish -- alternatively can use chicken)
- 1 kilo sliced tomatoes
- 1.5 cups of oil
- 1/2 cup of garlic
- 1/2 cup chopped onion
- 1-2 kilos of chopped heart of banana

Spices:

- 5 ground chilies (adjust for desired heat)
- 34 cup of salt
- ½ pounded ginger
- 4-5 chopped lemongrass stems
- 1 tbsp of turmeric
- 1 tbsp of MSG

Ingredients for toppings when served

- 10 cut limes
- 2 cups chopped cilantro
- 1 cup dry pounded chili
- 1 cup fried garlic
- Fried yellow bean (See page 14 for recipe):
- 1 kilo of yellow bean
- ½ kilo rice flour
- ½ kilo sticky rice flour
- 1 tbsp baking soda
- 1 small bottle of soy sauce
- 1 small bottle of fish sauce

Tools for Preparation and Cooking

- 1 large pan for frying yellow bean
- 1 large pot for boiling fish and soup
- 1 large pot for boiling rice noodles
- 1 large spoon or spatula for frying
- 1 large spoon for stirring soup



MOTE HEE KHA

Directions

- 1. First, cook the rice noodles in boiling water until soft then drain noodles and set aside for serving
- 2. In a large pot, bring water to a boil and add the fish
- 3. After the fish is cooked, remove the fish to debone and break into smaller pieces
- 4. In the same water used to cook the fish, add salt, tomatoes, onions, ginger, banana tree stems, and spices (MSG, turmeric, lemongrass, chilies to taste)
- 5. Once vegetables and spices are cooked, add the deboned fish to the soup

Directions for fried yellow bean

- 1. First, boil yellow beans until soft
- 2. Mix cooked yellow beans with rice flour and sticky rice flour
- 3. Add baking soda
- 4. Mix in a pinch of salt
- 5. Take a medium sized spoon to scoop out the mixture and place in frying oil
- 6. Fry until golden
- 7. Remove from oil and place on a plate for serving later
- 8. These fried yellow beans can be broken into smaller pieces and put into the soup

Directions for Serving

- 1. Add rice noodles to a dry bowl
- 2. Pour soup over the noodles for each individual
- 3. On your serving table, have cilantro, limes, chilies, fried garlic, fried yellow bean, soy sauce, and onion for your guests to add to their liking

MOTE HEE KHA

History

Mote Hee Kha is a blend of Burmese and Karenni cultures and is one of the most loved and delicious foods from Myanmar. During special festivals and birthday parties relatives and friends are invited to come together and enjoy Mote Hee Kha. Karenni ancestors would only cook Mote Hee Kha for special events, but today around Myanmar you can buy Mote Hee Kha in shops every day!

Personal Memories of Mote Hee Kha from Basic Course Student Htyah Ru Moe

When I was studying in grade 10 in Loikaw township, Karenni State, for lunch we needed to bring 200 kyat to buy Mote Hee Kha because our teachers would not allow us to go home to eat lunch. During our break time, I would eat Mote Hee Kha with my friends so eating it is one of my happiest memories from living in Karenni State. I am very grateful for our forefathers who created this special dish as well as to all the cooks and shopkeepers who continue to share this dish with my community. We learn from those who cook Mote Hee Kha so we can cook for future generations, its important to share this recipe because it's a sustainable dish that does not require very much money and brings friends and families to gether to enjoy. Mote Hee Kha is not meant to be eaten alone! I believe Mote Hee Kha is very good for my health because the ingredients come from the garden and are free from chemicals. When I eat Mote Hee Kha I can focus in school because it is very nutritious and also delicious!





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EE MYA HTA (STUFFED AND ROASTED BAMBOO SHOOT)

Ingredients*

- 1 hollowed 1 foot bamboo shoot (medium thickness)
- 1 ½ cups choice of meat (traditionally small fish or frogs, also can use chicken, beef, pork)
- 3 ½ cups of chopped leafy greens
- ½ cup chopped ginger
- ½ cup chopped lemongrass
- 1/4 cup chopped onions
- 1/4 cup chopped tomatoes
- 1/4 cup of oil
- 2 tbsp chopped garlic
- 1 tbsp turmeric
- 1 tbsp pepper
- 2 tbsp salt
- ½ tbsp MSG
- *adjust to fill the bamboo shoot

Directions

- 1. First, in a mixing bowl, mix your chopped meat with chopped leafy greens, spices, onion, tomatoes, garlic while slowing adding oil
- 2. Once all ingredients are mixed thoroughly, begin to stuff the hollowed bamboo shoot until the entire bamboo shoot is filled with the mixture
- 3. Make sure to tap the bamboo shoot occasionally to make sure there are no air pockets and the shoot is stuffed completely
- 4. Once you have filled the bamboo to the top, you may place a large leaf cover the top of the bamboo and tie the leaf securely on with twine or any other small rope or dried bamboo
- 5. On an open charcoal or wood fire, lean the bamboo shoot against a rock so it hovers over the burning fire and leave to toast for at least two hours
- 6. Occasionally rotate the bamboo shoot so all sides are evenly toasted
- 7. Remove from fire after all sides are blackened
- 8. Pour onto on a plate and it's ready to serve with dinner alone with rice and other sides!









History of Ee Mya Hta

Ee Mya Hta is a traditional and resourceful Karenni dish that consists of foraged ingredients from the forest. Karenni people will fish in the local streams to find small fish, frogs, prawns, or crabs and mix with leafy greens, spices, tomatoes, and garlic. Most of the contents of Ee Mya Hta vary depending on the family, what is available in the forest, and what other available resources can be found.

Special Memories of Ee Mya Hta with Computer Teacher Neh Reh

This dish has been passed down from our ancestors where they hunted small animals such as frogs, small birds, squirrels, mice, and any other small animal they could find in the forest. They would then mix with available spices, garlic, and leafy greens and then would fill hollowed bamboo shoots to be toasted so they could feed their families. This is very delicious for the Karenni people and also very sustainable for our community because it does not require going to the shop or spending any money, we can make this dish from scratch using materials only found in the jungle. We don't even need pots or pans for cooking! There is no waste produced from this dish, when we finish using the bamboo, we return it to the forest so we reduce our environmental impact. Most Karenni people enjoy this method of cooking over methods that require pots and pans because we believe the bamboo preserves and enhances the flavors. My father taught me to make Ee Mya Hta when I was very young. He took me out to the forest where he taught me to hunt and collect plants and herbs. When my two daughters are old enough, I can't wait to pass down this tradition to them and show them how to make Ee Mya Hta.



Teacher New Reh preparing Ee Mya Hta



Teacher New Reh is our computer teacher at the SDC

BAMBOO SHOOT SALAD

Serving Size: 4 people

Ingredients

1 kilo boiled bamboo shoot

2-3 chopped tomatoes

3/4 cup crushed peanuts

1/2 cup fried garlic

1-4 ground fresh chilies (depends on spicy preference)

2 tbsp oil

1/2 tbsp salt (adjust for taste)

1 tsp MSG

Directions

- 1. Boil bamboo shoots for two hours in water until soft texture
- 2. Drain bamboo and set aside to cool
- 3. Crush peanuts and grind chilies with a mortar and pestle
- 4. Fry garlic in oil until crispy
- 5. Then, mix bamboo, peanuts and chilies, oil, salt, and MSG until all ingredients are evenly distributed
- 6. Enjoy as a salad or mix with rice!



CUCUMBER AND PEANUT SALAD

Serving Size: 4 people

Ingredients

1/2 kilo sliced cucumber

3/4 crushed peanuts

2 tbsp water

1 tbsp oil

1/2 crushed chilies

1/2 tbsp salt

1 tsp MSG

Directions

- 1. Slice cucumbers into thin circular pieces
- 2. Crush peanuts and chilies with mortar and pestle
- 3. Mix cucumbers with peanuts and oil, salt, and MSG
- 4. Enjoy!



PAPAYA SALAD

Serving Size: 2 people

Ingredients

2 cups shredded unripe green papaya

1 cup shredded cabbage

½ cup meat or fish of choice (traditionally small crab)

1 sliced tomato

1 sliced lime

1-3 chilies (depending on desired spiciness)

2 tbsp garlic

2 tbsp peanuts

2 tbsp palm sugar

1 tbsp fish sauce

1 tbsp salt

½ tbsp soy sauce

1 tsp MSG

Tools for Preparation

Mortar and pestle

Sharp knife for shredding cabbage and papaya

Directions

- 1. Pound chilies and garlic in mortar
- 2. Mix in slices of lime and tomato and continue to pound
- 3. Add peanuts, palm sugar, fish sauce, and soy sauce
- 4. Add meat/fish of choice
- 5. Add shredded papaya and continue to pound and mix
- 6. Add salt and MSG and continue to pound and mix
- 7. Mix until ingredients are evenly distributed
- 8. Serve on bed of shredded cabbage and enjoy!







FRIED YELLOW BEAN

Ingredients

1 kilo of yellow bean
½ kilo rice flour
½ kilo sticky rice flour
1 tbsp baking soda

Directions

salt for taste

- 1. First, boil yellow beans until soft
- 2. Mix cooked yellow beans with rice flour and sticky rice flour
- 3. Add baking soda
- 4. Mix in a pinch of salt
- 5. Take a medium sized spoon to scoop out the mixture and place in frying oil
- 6. Fry until golden
- 7. Remove from oil and place on a plate for serving later
- 8. These fried yellow beans can be broken into smaller pieces and put into the Mote Hee Kha soup or eaten as a snack with your preferred dipping sauce



mix boiled beans, rice and sticky rice flours, salt, and baking soda



Pour mixture into a frying pan with enough oil to cover the mixture



enjoy these crunchy tasty snacks!

We hope you enjoy cooking these recipes with your friends and family. Thank you for supporting our community and taking an interest in our culture and traditions.

Te bui! (Thank you!)



The Karenni Social Development Center is a small community-based organization located on the Thai-Myanmar border. We run successful training programs for Karenni youth in Human Rights, Democracy, Law, Environment, Community Management, IT, and English.

Our goal is to improve the lives of Karenni refugees who have suffered human rights abuses by enabling young refugees to become advocates in non-violent social change, and equipping them with the tools they need to help build a peaceful, democratic society, based on the rule of law.



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