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ALL ABOUT ASIAN NOODLES



The history of Asian noodles extends over 4,000 years and finds its roots in ancient China during the Han dynasty. Early records mention a dish called "bing," likely an early precursor to noodles. By the Tang dynasty (618-907 CE), noodles had become a staple in numerous cuisines thanks to Chinese immigrants settling into different regions. After the dissemination of immigrants, noodles spread across Asia, adapting to local cuisines in Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, and beyond.

The Silk Road played a crucial role in the exchange of noodle-making techniques, influencing Central Asia, the Middle East, and eventually Europe. In Italy, the stories Marco Polo told about Chinese noodles probably influenced the creation of pasta, connecting the food traditions of East and West.

In the modern era, the popularity of Asian noodles soared globally. Instant noodles, invented in Japan by Momofuku Ando in 1958, revolutionized the food industry, offering a quick and convenient meal option. Today, Asian noodles continue to evolve, with a focus on health-conscious alternatives and a resurgence of interest in traditional, artisanal noodle-making methods.

Making Asian noodles today is a mix of tradition and efficiency. Ingredients like wheat and rice flours, eggs, and other ingredients are carefully combined by skilled artisans who use techniques like hand-pulling or cutting for a rustic feel. Modern machines make sure the noodles are the same for big batches, and drying methods, like traditional sun-drying or modern air-drying, give the noodles unique textures and flavors. This detailed process creates a variety of Asian noodles enjoyed worldwide, showing a blend of old and new cooking methods. Whether you're having them stir-fried, in soups, salads, or other dishes, Asian noodles bring people together, offering a taste of different cultures with their versatility and long history.

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HEALTHY INGREDIENT CONTRIBUTION



Asian noodles offer chefs a wide range of forms, each with its own unique texture, flavor, and cultural background. Whether it's the silky strands of Chinese egg noodles, the hearty appeal of Japanese udon, the delicate Vietnamese glass noodles, or the lightness of Thai rice noodles, the diversity is truly exciting for chefs and those cooking at home. These culinary essentials are made from different ingredients, contributing to their diverse textures, flavors, and nutritional profiles. By incorporating Asian noodles into a well-balanced diet, you can enjoy their nutritional benefits while exploring a world of possibilities.

- **Whole Wheat Noodles:** Made from whole wheat flour. Rich in fiber which can contribute to better digestion and help regulate blood sugar levels.
- **Soba Noodles:** Made primarily from buckwheat flour and sometimes the addition of whole wheat flour. Rich in protein and fiber which has potential to improve heart health, support weight management, and regulate blood sugar levels.
- **Rice Noodles:** Made from rice flour or rice starch. A gluten-free option for individuals with gluten sensitivity or celiac disease. Rice noodles are low in fat and help provide energy for the body.
- **Egg Noodles:** Made from wheat flour and eggs. Higher in calories but the additional protein the egg provides can support bone health in the body.
- **Seaweed Noodles:** Made from seaweed extract, a good source of iodine which is known to contribute to thyroid health.
- **Lentil/Bean Thread Noodles:** Made from mung beans, green lentils, and other legumes. High in protein and fiber, making them a good choice for vegetarian and vegan diets.
- **Shirataki Noodles:** Made from konjac yam flour. Low in calories and carbohydrates for those looking to reduce their intake. Also contains glucomannan, a soluble fiber that can aid in weight loss and improved gut health.
- **Japchae Noodles:** Made from sweet potato starch. Rich in antioxidants that help contribute to overall health and well-being.

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TYPES AND VARIETIES

Asian noodles can be grouped into three main types: wheat, rice, and glass noodles. Despite this broad classification, their diversity in preparation, ingredients, and shapes is vast due to a surplus of cultural subcategories. China boasts an impressive array of native noodles, yet the admiration for noodles extends across Asia. From Thailand and Singapore to Korea and Japan, here are some of the most common and popular varieties.



- **Ramen (Wheat Flour, Salt, Water, Kansui)**
 - Salty, mild flavor
 - Firm without being crunchy
 - Can be thick, thin, flat, straight or curly
- **Udon (Wheat Flour, Water)**
 - Neutral flavor
 - Chewy and soft
 - Thick, long noodles that can be round (fresh) or flat (dried)
- **Rice (Rice Flour, Water)**
 - Neutral flavor, very absorbent of recipe flavors
 - Springy, chewy, and slippery
 - Flat and long
- **Soba (Buckwheat Flour, Water, Whole Wheat Flour)**
 - Nutty, earthy flavor
 - Chewy and grainy
 - Round or square with varying thickness
- **Glass (Vegetable Starch, Water)**
 - Mild flavor, slightly sweet
 - Gelatinous and chewy
 - Long and thin
- **Mein (Wheat Flour, Egg, Water)**
 - Mild flavor, takes on recipe flavors
 - Ranges from stiff to crunchy depending on cooking style
 - Can be round or flat
- **Vermicelli (Rice, Wheat, Mung Bean, & Potato Starch Varieties)**
 - Flavor mostly mild but can vary by type
 - Soft and tender
 - Round, long, and extremely thin
- **Somen (Wheat Flour, Salt, Water)**
 - Very mild flavor
 - Light and slippery
 - Cylindrical with a diameter of less than .05mm
- **Chinese Egg (Wheat Flour, Egg, Water)**
 - Neutral, light flavor
 - Springy and chewy
 - Long strands that are thin like spaghetti or flat like linguine
- **Kal Gukwon (Wheat Flour, Egg, Water)**
 - Mild and creamy
 - Doughy, bouncy consistency
 - Long and flat

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SELECTING AND STORING

Selecting Asian Noodles:

- **Locating:** If purchasing onsite, most Asian supermarkets group noodles by nationality. Once you know the origin of the recipe you are preparing, find the corresponding country/aisle.
- **Check Ingredients:** Noodles can be made from a wide range of ingredients. Check the ingredients to ensure the noodle is appropriate for your dish, diet, and any other restrictions.
- **Fresh Noodles:** Fresh noodles can be found in the refrigerated or frozen section. Be sure to check the expiration date to ensure proper freshness.
- **Dried Noodles:** While expiration/best-by dates are important, making sure packaging is free of any damage, clumping, insects, or foreign particles is most important.
- **Brands:** If you find a certain brand to have a less-than-desired taste or texture, try a different brand. Some brands specialize in specific noodle types while other brands can run the gamut of noodle production.



Storing Asian Noodles:

- **Dry Noodles:** These noodles should be stored in a cool, dry place away from any sunlight and should be stored in their original packaging or in an airtight container to prevent moisture absorption.
- **Fresh Noodles:** Any noodle purchased fresh should be stored in the refrigerator or according to package directions and should be consumed within the recommended timeframe to maintain freshness.
- **Cooked Noodles:** Any leftover noodle that has been cooked should be promptly refrigerated and consumed within 1-3 days. Optionally, cooked noodles can be tossed with a small amount of oil before storing to prevent sticking.
- **Glass or Mung Bean Noodles:** This variety of noodle should be stored in a cool, dry place. Upon cooking, they can be stored in the refrigerator but note they can become mushy upon reheating.
- **Freezer Burn:** If storing noodles in the freezer, they should be well-packaged as they are prone to texture-altering freezer burn.
- **Fragile:** Most dried noodles are very fragile, and you should avoid storing heavy objects on top of the packaging or containers. Store noodles in an upright position to maintain shape and texture.

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CULINARY USES

Asian noodles are incredibly versatile and are featured prominently in a wide range of culinary dishes across Asia and beyond. With the world of Asian noodles now extended beyond Asia, here are some ways to incorporate them into your restaurant menus or dining room tables at home.



- **Stir-Fry:** Noodles like chow mein or lo mein can be fried with a variety of proteins, vegetables, and sauces.
- **Soup:** Noodles like ramen or rice absorb rich flavors from flavorful broths.
- **Rolls:** Rice papers and wheat-based wrappers can be filled and rolled with noodles, vegetables, and proteins.
- **Hot Pot:** Thick noodles like udon and soba are perfect for longer cooking and soaking up flavorful hot pot broths.
- **Curry:** Noodles can be served alongside or incorporated into rich, aromatic curry dishes.
- **Cold Dishes:** Noodles like soba and glass noodles make great salads and cold dishes served with flavorful dipping sauces and dressings.
- **Fried Noodles:** Noodles like chow mein can be fried and then used as a topping for salads or simply as a tasty snack.
- **Noodle Bowls:** Allow guests to customize their dish by choosing preferred noodles, proteins, and vegetables and then top with a selected sauce or broth.
- **Noodle Bakes:** A great way to utilize cooked noodles while allowing adaptations of local cuisines and taste preferences.
- **Other Ideas:** Thanks to their versatility, noodles can be incorporated into a wide range of dishes more popular in Western cuisine such as omelets, sandwiches, savory pancakes, quiche, pizza, and even tacos.
- **Dessert:** Noodles can even be used in some sweet preparations such as sweet potato noodles in Korean desserts, or a sweet soup made with mung bean vermicelli.

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FUN FACTS



- The first documented noodle was made over 4000 years ago with millet grass grain.
- Before they became a budget-friendly option, noodles were once considered a luxury item. Today, it is estimated that eating instant noodles for every meal, every day, would cost less than \$300 per year in the US.
- In Japan, it is not considered bad manners to slurp loudly while eating noodles. In fact, it signifies the food is delicious and shows a sign of appreciation of the meal.
- In 2005, Japanese astronaut Soichi Noguchi was the first to enjoy instant noodles in outer space.
- For the biggest of fans, there is an Asian noodle museum in Osaka, Japan that proudly displays almost 4,560 different varieties of instant noodles.
- Vegetarians beware! It has been revealed that many Asian noodles use eggs and/or animal oils as a preservative. It is suggested to read the ingredient info carefully before purchasing.
- Before selling electronics, Samsung was conceptualized as a store for trading goods like flour, vegetables, and dried fish, as well as their own noodles for export.
- Noodles are said to have originated in Asia, but it is thought that "noodle" comes from the German word "nudle" (originally knödel), meaning dumpling.
- In some Asian cultures, noodles are a symbol of long life. Longevity noodles, longer than normal noodles, are often eaten at Chinese New Year celebrations and is considered unlucky to cut a noodle strand.
- According to Guinness World Records, the longest noodle was produced by a Chinese food company. Staff spent 17 hours rolling out a noodle nearly 10,000 (= 3km) feet long.

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RECIPE

Zhu Jiang Mian
Yield: 4-6 Servings

Ingredients:

- 2 T. Peanut Oil
- 3 Scallions, Sliced
- 1 Medium Chili Pepper, Seeded, Minced
- 1 Small Shallot, Minced
- 1 lb. Ground Pork
- 12 Oz. Extra-Firm Tofu, Squeezed Dry, Finely Chopped
- 2 T. Sweet Bean Sauce
- 3 T. Chili Bean Sauce
- 1 C. Edamame Beans, Shelled
- 1 Medium Carrot, Peeled, Julienneed
- 2 C. Bean Sprouts
- 1/2 Water, Divided
- 2 T. Soy Sauce
- 1.5 T. Dark Soy Sauce
- 2 T. Sugar
- 2 T. Corn Flour
- 1 lb. Wheat Noodles
- 1 T. Sesame Oil


Directions:

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. While water is coming to temperature, heat the peanut oil in a wok or large skillet over high heat. Add the scallions, chili pepper, and shallot. Stir-fry until softened, about 4 minutes.
2. Add the ground pork and fry until cooked through, breaking the meat into small pieces as it cooks. Add the chopped tofu and continue stir-frying until well combined, about 2 minutes.
3. Add the sweet bean sauce, chili bean sauce, edamame, carrots, bean sprouts, 2 tablespoons water, soy sauce, and sugar. Cook for an additional 2 minutes until well combined.
4. In a small bowl, mix the corn flour with 2 tablespoons of water until combined. Add the mixture to the wok and cook for 2 minutes. The sauce will thicken and look almost dry. Remove from heat and keep warm.
5. Cook the wheat noodles in boiling water according to package directions or until al dente. Drain the noodles and toss with sesame oil.
6. Divide the noodles evenly between bowls and top with the pork-tofu mixture. Garnish with additional julienneed carrots and bean sprouts, if desired. Serve immediately.

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QUIZ



After you read through this month's Ingredient of the Month, take this quiz to test your knowledge. In order to earn continuing education hours (CEHs) from the American Culinary Federation (ACF), the test must be completed through the ACF's Online Learning Center. Seventy-five percent accuracy is required to earn one hour of continuing education credits toward professional certification.

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QUIZ

Question #1



During the ____ dynasty, noodles became a staple in various cuisines due to Chinese immigrants settling in different regions.


- A. Han
- B. Qin
- C. Tang
- D. Ming

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QUIZ

Question #2



Rice noodles are a gluten-free option suitable for individuals with gluten sensitivity or celiac disease.


- A. True
- B. False

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QUIZ

Question #3



Which Asian noodle variety is said to have ingredients that have potential to improve heart health, support weight management, and regulate blood sugar levels?

- A. Soba Noodles
- B. Japchae Noodles
- C. Shirataki Noodles
- D. Ramen Noodles

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QUIZ

Question #4

The primary ingredients in glass noodle production are _____ and water.

A. wheat flour
B. buckwheat flour
C. rice flour
D. vegetable starch



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QUIZ

Question #5

Which variety of Asian noodle has a salty, mild flavor and can be thick, thin, flat, straight or curly?

A. Udon
B. Ramen
C. Vermicelli
D. Glass



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QUIZ

Question #6

When purchasing noodles at the Asian supermarket, they are usually grouped by _____.

A. color
B. nationality
C. texture
D. length




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QUIZ

Question #7



Glass and mung bean noodles can be stored in the refrigerator after cooking without any change to their texture.


A. True
B. False

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QUIZ

Question #8



What is a key advantage of using noodles like udon in Asian hot pot dishes?


A. They become crispy
B. They cook quickly
C. They soften very fast
D. They remain firm

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QUIZ

Question #9



Rice paper and wheat-based wrappers are commonly used in stir-fry dishes to add a crunchy texture.

A. True
B. False

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QUIZ

Question #10

In Japan, what does slurping loudly while eating noodles signify to the chef who prepared the dish?

- A. Bad manners
- B. A desire for more noodles
- C. Appreciation of the delicious food
- D. Disinterest in the meal



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JOIN US NEXT MONTH!

Stay tuned for the next ACF Ingredient of the Month! Be sure to visit the Online Learning Center (OLC) to download a copy of each month's ingredient presentation. Don't forget to take the official IOTM quiz through the OLC to earn one hour of continuing education credits toward professional certification.

For more information:

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