Sauces / Thailand

Nam Jim Seafood Sauce

Thailand's electrifying raw dipping sauce for grilled seafood — pounded garlic, fresh chili, and coriander root let loose in a sharply sour, intensely herbaceous fish-sauce-and-lime mix.

Time 10 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 2 parts Garlic cloves, peeled
- ☐ 3 parts Bird's eye chilies (prik kii nuu), stems removed
- ☐ 1 parts Coriander roots, scraped clean (or stems)
- ☐ 4 parts Fresh lime juice
- ☐ 2 parts Fish sauce
- ☐ 1 parts Palm sugar or white sugar

Let's make it.

01 In a granite mortar, combine the garlic cloves, bird's eye chilies, and coriander roots. Begin by pounding the garlic first — it takes the most force. Once the garlic is a rough, juicy smear, add the coriander roots and pound again. Finally add the chilies. Work them all together with a circular grinding motion, alternating between pounding down and scraping the sides inward with a spoon. The goal is a coarse, wet paste — not a smooth puree. You want visible threads of coriander root, small flecks of chili skin, and a slightly chunky garlic base. The oils released by pounding are fundamentally different from those released by cutting: they are brighter, more volatile, and more intensely fragrant.

02 Add the palm sugar directly to the mortar and pound briefly to break it into the paste — it needs to fully dissolve, not just sit as lumps. Then pour in the lime juice and fish sauce. Stir with a spoon to combine everything, tasting as you go. The sequence of flavors in a properly balanced nam jim seafood should be: sour first and loudest, then salty, then sweet as a background that keeps the acid from being harsh, then a building heat that arrives last and lingers. Adjust lime for more sour, fish sauce for more salt, sugar to soften harshness. This sauce should be bold to the point of almost-too-much — it is meeting grilled seafood that can take it.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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