Sauces / Thailand

Nam Prik Pao

Thai roasted chili paste — each ingredient char-roasted individually before being ground together into a dark, smoky, sweet-savoury jam that smells of campfire and caramelised shallot. The backbone of tom yum, the secret in pad thai, and remarkable on plain rice by itself.

Time 50 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- [ ] 2 parts Dried long red chilies, stemmed and seeded
- [ ] 2 parts Shallots, unpeeled
- [ ] 1 parts Garlic cloves, unpeeled
- [ ] 0.5 parts Dried shrimp
- [ ] 0.5 parts Fish sauce
- [ ] 0.5 parts Palm sugar or brown sugar
- [ ] 1 parts Neutral oil

Let's make it.

01 Roast each ingredient separately in a dry wok or skillet over medium-high heat, turning occasionally. Chilies: 3–4 minutes until fragrant and slightly puffed, not burnt. Shallots (unpeeled): 8–10 minutes until the outer skins are charred black and the interior is soft. Garlic (unpeeled): 6–8 minutes until the skins are blackened and the cloves soft. Cool, then peel shallots and garlic — the charred outer skins are discarded but their flavour has penetrated the flesh.

02 Peel the roasted shallots and garlic. Place in a mortar with the roasted chilies and dried shrimp. Pound firmly, working the dried shrimp in first (they take the longest), then the garlic, then shallots, then chilies. Pound until a rough, fragrant paste forms — some texture is correct for this style. Alternatively pulse in a food processor to a chunky consistency.

03 Heat oil in a wok or saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the paste and fry, stirring constantly, for 8–10 minutes until the paste darkens, the moisture evaporates, and the oil begins to visibly separate from the solids. Add fish sauce and palm sugar. Stir and continue frying for 3–4 more minutes until the sugar caramelises and the paste smells complex, sweet, and deeply smoky. Cool and store in a jar — the flavour improves over 24 hours.

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