Sauces / Thailand

Thai Nam Jim Jaew

A sticky, dark, intensely flavored Thai dipping sauce for grilled meats — fish sauce and lime juice threaded with tamarind, dried chili, and the decisive crunch of toasted rice powder that thickens it into something between a sauce and a condiment.

Time 15 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 45 ml Fish sauce (Tiparos or Megachef)
- ☐ 45 ml Fresh lime juice
- ☐ 15 ml Tamarind concentrate
- ☐ 20 g Palm sugar or light brown sugar
- ☐ 8 g Dried Thai chili flakes (prik bon)
- ☐ 20 g Raw white rice (for toasting)
- ☐ 30 g Shallots, finely sliced
- ☐ 10 g Fresh cilantro leaves and tender stems

Let's make it.

01 Place the raw white rice in a dry skillet or wok over medium-low heat. Toast, shaking the pan constantly, for 5–8 minutes until the rice turns an even golden-tan, like light caramel — every grain should be colored. The kitchen will smell of toasted popcorn and nutty warmth. Transfer to a mortar and pound to a coarse powder — not as fine as flour, but without whole grains. This khao khua is the signature element of Isaan cooking: it adds nuttiness, subtle crunch, and acts as a light thickener for the sauce.

02 Dissolve the palm sugar in the fish sauce and lime juice by stirring — if the sugar is in a hard block, grate or shave it first. Add the tamarind concentrate and stir to combine. Add the dried chili flakes, shallot slices, and toasted rice powder. Stir well. Add the cilantro last. Taste and adjust: the sauce should hit salty first, then sour, then sweet, then heat — the four pillars of Isaan seasoning. It should be just thick enough to cling to meat when drizzled, aided by the rice powder. Let it rest 5 minutes before serving so the rice powder absorbs the liquid and the shallots slightly pickle.

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