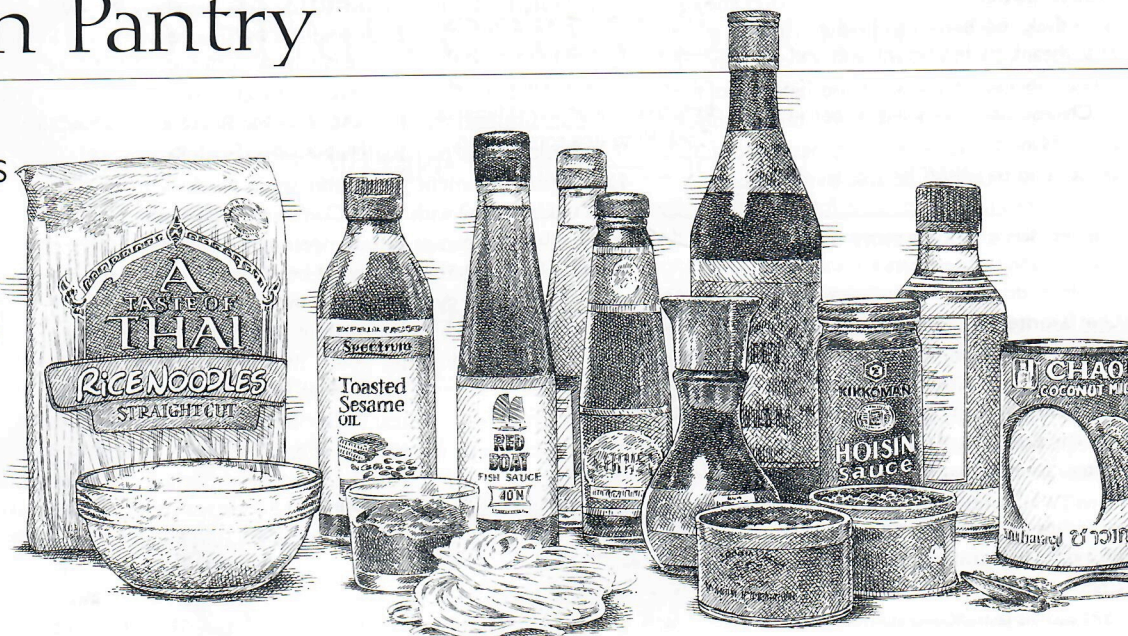


Our Asian Pantry

While the universe of Asian ingredients is vast, we turn to these staple ingredients to bring authentic flavor to Asian recipes. And in some cases, the right product can be critical.

BY ELIZABETH BOMZE



Chili-Garlic Sauce

➤ A puree of chiles, garlic, vinegar, and salt, this complex, spicy sauce adds brightness and heat to countless stir-fries, sauces, and glazes. The popular Huy Fong, or “Rooster” brand, is available in many supermarkets.

Can't find it? Substitute Sriracha: Sriracha sauce, which contains similar ingredients, makes a spicier, less acidic stand-in. For 1 tablespoon of chili-garlic sauce, use 2 teaspoons of Sriracha.

Chinese Egg Noodles

➤ There are countless varieties of egg noodles, both dried and fresh. Wavy fresh ones (sometimes labeled “lo mein noodles”) offer just the right springy chew for stir-fries. Many supermarkets stock them alongside tofu. Avoid vacuum-packed “Chinese-style” fresh noodles, which can be gummy.

Can't find them? Use dried linguine: Though not authentic, we've found that linguine offers a similar firm chew.

Chinese Rice Wine (Shaoxing)

➤ Like Japanese mirin, Shaoxing is made from fermented rice, but its flavor is deeper, more aromatic, and not as sweet. It's a staple in stir-fries, sauces, and glazes.

Can't find it? Use dry sherry: For cooking, Taylor Dry Sherry (\$5.99 for 750 milliliters) will do just fine.

Coconut Milk

➤ The sweet, rich liquid strained from shredded raw coconut meat that's been steeped in water, coconut milk is used extensively in Thai and Vietnamese cooking.

Good to know: We found that products with relatively low amounts of sugar (less than 1 gram per ½ cup) boasted more coconutty flavor; those with at least twice as much sugar tasted saccharine.

What about light coconut milk? This style is far less creamy, and we

found that it can ruin the texture of desserts. But it's acceptable in soups and curries.

Our favorite: Chaokoh Coconut Milk (\$1.79 for 13.5 ounces)

Didn't use the whole can? Stored in an airtight container, coconut milk will last up to a week in the fridge and a month in the freezer. The milk will break when defrosted; to re-emulsify it, blend it with an immersion blender for about 30 seconds.

Dried Rice Noodles

➤ Made from ground rice and water, rice noodles are cut into myriad shapes and thicknesses, but when cooked, all should taste like fresh rice with a tender but pleasantly resilient bite.

Good to know: Unlike other dried noodles, which must be boiled to soften them, dried rice noodles are usually just soaked in hot water until tender before being added to stir-fries or salads.

Our favorite: A Taste of Thai Straight Cut Rice Noodles (\$6.59 for 16 ounces)

Fish Sauce

➤ This liquid product of fermented anchovies, which is used as both an ingredient and a condiment, boasts a rich and savory saltiness that adds depth to countless Thai and Vietnamese dishes. It's strong stuff with an intense aroma.

Good to know: We use this sauce not just in Asian dishes but also to season marinades. Used judiciously, it adds savoriness, not fishy flavor.

Our favorite: Red Boat 40°N Fish Sauce (\$7.99 for 8.45 ounces)

Our vegan alternative: Simmer 3 cups water, ¼ ounce dried sliced shiitake mushrooms, 3 tablespoons salt, and 2 tablespoons soy sauce over medium heat until reduced by half. Strain, cool, and refrigerate for up to 3 weeks. Makes 1 ½ cups.

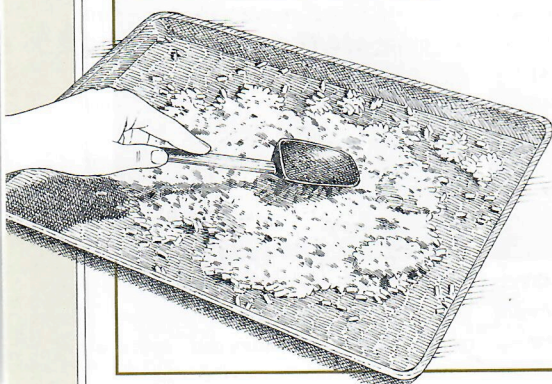
Gochujang

➤ This moderately spicy, salty, savory paste made from chiles, glutinous rice, fermented soybeans, and salt makes a powerful base for Korean sauces and marinades (such as the chile sauce for our Korean Rice Bowl, page 13).

Good to know: This paste is our new favorite flavor booster. Stir it into soup, barbecue sauce, ketchup, mayonnaise, or butter, or thin it with water to a drizzling consistency and use it as a condiment for eggs, vegetables, rice, noodles, or dumplings.

Making Fried Rice Without Leftovers

Chilled, hardened leftover rice is crucial in fried rice since fresh rice turns mushy. But we don't always have leftovers on hand. Here's our work-around: Heat 2 tablespoons vegetable oil in large saucepan over medium heat until shimmering. Add 2 cups jasmine or long-grain white rice; stir to coat. Add 2 ⅔ cups water and bring to boil. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until liquid is absorbed, about 18 minutes. Off heat, remove lid and place dish towel over saucepan. Let stand, covered, until rice is just tender, about 8 minutes. Spread cooked rice onto rimmed baking sheet. Let cool for 10 minutes, then refrigerate for 20 minutes. Makes 6 cups.



Hoisin Sauce

➤ A thick, reddish-brown mixture of soybeans, sugar, vinegar, garlic, and chiles, hoisin is used in many classic Chinese dishes, including barbecued pork, Peking duck, and *mu shu* pork.

Good to know: Hoisin should pack a punch, but some products taste flat. The best sauces balance sweet, salty, pungent, and spicy elements so that no one flavor dominates.

Our favorite: Kikkoman Hoisin Sauce (\$2.89 for 9.3 ounces)

Jasmine Rice

➤ This rice variety's delicate floral, buttery scent, prized in Southeast Asian cuisines, isn't a byproduct of jasmine plants. It's the result of a flavor compound common to all rice varieties, which occurs in high levels in aromatic rices such as jasmine and basmati.

Good to know: Look for packages stamped with a green seal from Thailand's Department of Foreign Trade, an indication that at least 92 percent of the rice is the purest form called Hom Mali ("good smelling").

Our favorite: Dynasty Jasmine Rice (\$4.59 for 2 pounds)

Mirin

➤ This Japanese rice wine adds sweetness and acidity to sauces and glazes like teriyaki. Hard-to-find traditional mirin contains no added ingredients; supermarket brands usually contain sweeteners and salt.

Our favorite: Mitoku Organic Mikawa Mirin Sweet Rice Seasoning (\$8.83 for 10 fluid ounces, plus shipping)

Our best buy: Eden Mirin Rice Cooking Wine (\$7.16 for 10.5 fluid ounces)

Can't find it? Use this: For 1 tablespoon of mirin, use an equal amount of white wine plus 1 teaspoon of sugar.

Oyster Sauce

➤ Made from a reduction of boiled oysters, this condiment adds salty-sweetness (not fishiness) and body to stir-fries.

Good to know: Though it may look like hoisin sauce, oyster sauce lacks hoisin's fruity, spicy, pungent profile. Oyster sauce should taste deeply savory with a hint of sweetness. Lesser brands can taste like little more than gloppy soy sauce.

Our favorite: Lee Kum Kee Premium Oyster Flavored Sauce (\$4.69 for 9 ounces)

Try These Classics

With a well-stocked Asian pantry, you can make many of our best Asian recipes. Find these at CookIllustrated.com/june16.

➤ GRILLED BEEF SATAY

Key flavors: coconut milk, fish sauce, and lemon grass

➤ THAI-STYLE CHICKEN WITH BASIL

Key flavors: fish sauce and oyster sauce

➤ SICHUAN STIR-FRIED GREEN BEANS

Key flavors: soy sauce, toasted sesame oil, and white peppercorns

➤ PORK STIR-FRY WITH NOODLES (LO MEIN)

Key flavors: chili-garlic sauce, Chinese rice wine, hoisin sauce, oyster sauce soy sauce, and toasted sesame oil

➤ STIR-FRIED SICHUAN-STYLE SHRIMP WITH ZUCCHINI, RED BELL PEPPER, AND PEANUTS

Key flavors: chili-garlic sauce, Chinese rice wine, Sichuan peppercorns, and toasted sesame oil

Rice Vinegar

➤ Not to be confused with rice wine, rice vinegar (sometimes incorrectly called rice wine vinegar) has malty sweetness and mild acidity. It's primarily used to season sushi rice and stir-fries and makes a less-sharp alternative to other vinegars in dressings.

Good to know: It's sold seasoned or unseasoned. The latter contains no added salt or sugar, so it can be used in a variety of dressings and sauces.

Use the seasoned kind for applications like quick pickles where you want both acidity and sweetness.

Sichuan Peppercorns

➤ Not actually peppercorns but dried fruit rinds from a Chinese citrus tree, these contribute a unique tingling sensation and a piney, citrusy aroma. We bloom them in oil or grind them and sprinkle them over Chinese dishes like *ma pao* tofu and salt and pepper shrimp.

Good to know: Since Sichuan peppercorns don't actually contribute any heat, they shouldn't be subbed in for black or red pepper.

Our favorite: Dean & DeLuca Szechuan Peppercorns (\$6.25 for 1 ounce)

Soy Sauce

➤ Made from soybeans fermented in a brine with roasted wheat, this savory condiment is used globally in Asian cuisines to season and add depth.

Good to know: Different types serve different purposes: We use a more robust-tasting brand in cooked applications and reserve pricier long-aged soy sauce for dipping.

Our favorite for cooking: Lee Kum Kee Tabletop Premium Soy Sauce (\$1.99 for 5.1 ounces)

Our favorite for dipping: Ohsawa Nama Shoyu Organic Unpasteurized Soy Sauce (\$6.49 for 10 ounces)

What about tamari? A byproduct of miso production, tamari has a similarly salty-savory flavor to soy sauce; the two can be used interchangeably. Many tamaris are also gluten-free.

Toasted Sesame Oil

➤ While plain sesame oil has very little color, smell, or flavor, toasted (or roasted) sesame oil boasts deeper color and much stronger, richer flavor. We've found that a little goes a long way in dressings, dipping sauces, and stir-fries in Chinese, Korean, and Japanese recipes.

Good to know: Due to its potent flavor and relatively low smoke point, it shouldn't be used as a primary cooking oil. But try adding a few drops to neutral vegetable or peanut oil when stir-frying to give food a mildly nutty flavor boost.

To keep flavor fresh: Store it in the refrigerator.

White Peppercorns

➤ These are simply skinned black peppercorns, which taste less spicy and more floral than black pepper since skinning removes much of the spicy compound piperine. They're a common seasoning in Chinese and Thai dishes; we also use them in non-Asian applications like spaetzle, mayonnaise, and spice rubs.

What about subbing in black?

Only substitute black pepper if the amount called for is less than 1 teaspoon—otherwise, the pepper may mask other flavors.

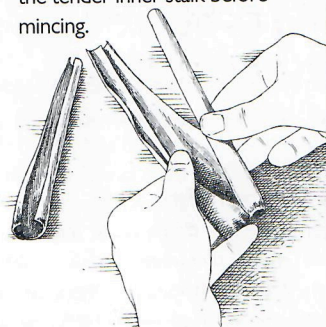
Staple Fresh Flavors

In addition to everyday aromatics and herbs like garlic, shallots, scallions, and cilantro, lemon grass and ginger are also worth keeping on hand.

Lemon Grass

➤ Native to India and tropical Asia, this grassy herb imparts citrusy, floral flavors to South Asian soups, curries, and stir-fries. Look for stalks that are green, firm, and fragrant.

Strip to the core: Remove the dry outer layers to expose the tender inner stalk before mincing.



Sub dried for fresh? Dried lemon grass works in soups and curry paste but not in stir-fries, where there isn't enough liquid to rehydrate the pieces.

Ginger

➤ A rhizome grown largely in Jamaica, China, and India, ginger is bright and floral but also packs heat thanks to its pungent gingerol, a relative of the spicy compounds in chiles.

Old is OK: Ginger dries out and loses pungency as it ages. So if your ginger is older, use more of it than a recipe calls for and add it toward the end of cooking (heat also dulls its pungency).

Scrape; don't peel: Scraping off the knotty skin with a spoon is easier than peeling with a knife or vegetable peeler.

