

# THE FREE PRESS CUISINE

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If you thought good noodle dishes consisted of only Japanese "udon" — those hearty buckwheat pastalike strands — or Chinese "lo mein," think again.

The protocol for consuming these megabowls of noodles seems to be, "if it feels good, do it." Some diners use a fork and spoon for twirling the noodles, not unlike the Italian technique for spaghetti. The truly skilled use chopsticks and a spoon. As a rule the broth is consumed first, then the noodles and meat.

Actually, the rule seems to be that there are no rules.

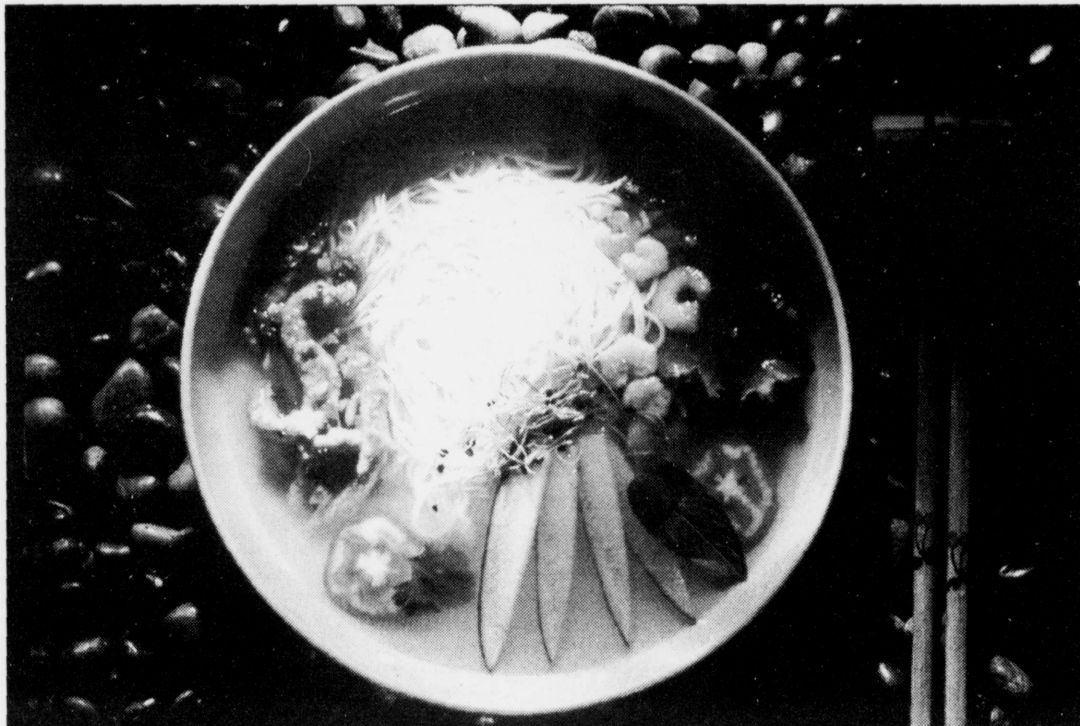
Author Jennifer Brennan notes in "The Cuisines of Asia" that noodle shops have existed since the Han Dynasty (202 B.C. to A.D. 220).

Traditionally regarded as laborers' shops serving peasant food, they ranked below taverns because they didn't serve alcohol.

## Taking Noodle Breaks

Anyway, as Ms. Brennan notes, the noodle shops of old didn't provide full meals. Instead, they offered customers a choice of noodles with vegetable or noodles with meat, which the people ate as snacks during breaks in the workday. In addition to China, noodle dishes are now prevalent throughout Japan, Korea and Southeast Asia.

As those who are fans of Cantonese, Mandarin or Sichuan dishes already know, however, you don't have to travel 1,000 miles to get good Chinese food. And you don't have to visit New York City of the noodle shop experience. You can slurp noodle dishes in many Japanese, Thai and Vietnamese restaurants around the country.



## Preparing Your Own

Work wonders with prepackaged "ramen soups" by adding a couple of drops of sesame oil, a few sliced mushrooms, a chopped scallion, a little thinly sliced carrot and/or celery and a few sprigs of cilantro. If there's a roast chicken languishing in the refrigerator, a few

meat, thinly sliced into 1/4-inch strips

- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon hoisin sauce
- 3 tablespoons water
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 4 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 green onions, cut into 2-inch lengths, then

Place the pork strips in a bowl with soy sauce, hoisin sauce, water and cornstarch. Mix until pork is thoroughly coated. Set aside to marinate for 20 minutes.

Heat oil in a wok or large skillet over high heat and stir-fry the pork for 3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, drain pork and remove to paper-towel-lined plate.

Bring oil back up to high heat and stir-fry the mushrooms and onions for 2 minutes. Add the shredded cabbage and shrimp and fry until the shrimp becomes pink and the cabbage turns limp.

Add stock and bring to a boil. Add the rice noodles and boil for 1 minute. Return pork to wok just to heat through and season with salt and pepper. Makes 6 servings.

Vietnamese variation (pictured above): Omit the mushrooms. Stir-fry the onions with the pork. Substitute 3 large tomatoes, each cut into 6 segments, for the cabbage. Serve the soup in individual bowls, first placing a lettuce leaf torn into a few pieces, a few bean sprouts, 4 or 5 narrow strips of cucumber, 3 mint leaves and a scattering of chopped cilantro leaves in the bottom of each bowl before pouring the soup in. Garnish with a sprinkling of crushed peanuts.

# bowled over by noodles

Many restaurants, ranging from neighbourhood eateries to more upscale locations, offer bowls of noodles as part of the regular menu.

Or you can have a little fun creating your own in-home noodle shop. Many grocery stores carry several kinds of noodles in their specialty Oriental food sections, and fresh noodles can also be purchased at ethnic food stores.

The thing to remember is that a big bowl of noodles can be inexpensive, nourishing and filling. And, in these hurried, harried days of working parents, noodles have another endearing quality: They're relatively quick.

slivers add even more flavor.

For a more gussied-up version, bring the soup to a boil, add a sliced scallion and slices of different kinds of mushrooms, then break an egg atop the concoction and let it all poach in the broth.

## Chinese Pork And Shrimp Rice Noodles in Broth

4 dried Oriental Mushrooms, or 6 fresh mushrooms

6 leave of napa cabbage

1/2 pound (after boning) of pork-chop

into slivers

- 1 cup small shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 8 cups chicken stock
- 1/2 pound rice-stick noodles (you may substitute egg noodles or vermicelli)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Soak dried mushrooms in hot water for 10 minutes. Remove stems and slice caps into strips. (Slice fresh mushrooms, if using.) Set aside

Stack cabbage leaves; cut across into strips 2 inches wide. Cut each strip across width into slivers 2 inches in length. Set aside.

Oktoberfest

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