

Red Curry Chicken with Asian Basil and Fragrant Kaffir Lime Leaves

Gaeng Kai

Leaves of Asian basil punctuate this dish with anise-like flavor. Glistening oils float on its surface, revealing the essential technique of “frying” the curry paste in separated (“cracked”) coconut milk (pg. 60), the only way to truly unlock the flavors hidden in the paste. For a one-dish (plus rice) meal, add vegetables to the simmering curry, such as bamboo shoots, peppers, or tender snow peas. The sauce can be made ahead, and served with roast duck or seared beef in place of chicken.

Makes 4 to 6 servings as part of a multi-dish meal

- 1 can (about 14 oz.) Coconut milk, stirred well (divided use)
- 1/4 cup Red curry paste (pg. 159) (add 1 more tablespoon if paste was made in blender) or store bought
- 1 cup Water or light stock
- 1 Tbsp. Fish sauce (*nam pla*)
- 1 Tbsp. Light brown palm sugar (pg. 58)
- 1 lb. (454 g.) Boneless chicken thighs, cut into bite size strips, about 1/2 inch (1.3 cm.) thick
- 6 Kaffir lime leaves, bruised lightly
- 1/4 cup Asian basil leaves

1. Heat 1 cup of coconut milk in a wok or 4 qt. (4 L.) saucepan over medium heat. Boil, stirring often until it thickens and oil begins to separate out of the milk, about 5 minutes. Add curry paste; cook, stirring constantly for 2 minutes to develop the flavors.
2. Add remaining coconut milk, water, fish sauce, palm sugar, chicken, and kaffir lime leaves and cook; stirring often until chicken is cooked through and tender, about 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in basil and cook for 5 seconds.
3. Taste and adjust seasoning with additional palm sugar, fish sauce and/or salt.

How and Why

1. Fry the curry paste in the reduced coconut milk to avoid any raw flavor. Since this sauce does not simmer for long, it's necessary to fry the spice paste to soften the raw flavor.

2. Add the basil toward the end, but still make sure to cook it for a few seconds. The maximum flavor is released into sauce, and the leaves turn a dark green. If the basil is undercooked, it turns black.



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