

Nam Khao (Crispy Rice Salad)

BY ANN AHMED | @CHEFANNAHMED

To me, Nam Khao is the ultimate comfort food when I'm with my family. It's crispy and tangy, yes—but more than anything, it's a dish that brings us closer together. It's meant to be eaten with your hands, scooped into lettuce wraps and layered with fresh herbs, lime, and sour pork. That means everyone has to gather around the same platter—hands busy, laughter flowing, stories being told between bites.

Growing up, I'd get so excited when my mom and aunties made Nam Khao. It wasn't just about the dish itself—it was about that sense of joy and belonging that came with it. Hours would pass, and we'd lose track of how many wraps we made, or how many we'd eaten. What we could count on: full bellies, and even fuller hearts.

Today, I serve a version of Nam Khao at my restaurant, Lat14, and I'm proud to include this dish in my upcoming cookbook. It's evolved over time, just like my own identity as a Lao American. But the heart of it—the togetherness, the warmth, the flavors that feel like home—has never changed.

This holiday season, I'm honored to share this dish with the AAPI community as part of the A+A Holiday Cookbook. Nam Khao is more than a recipe. It's a reminder that food has the power to hold memories, tell stories, and make space for all the parts of who we are.

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SERVES: Serves 4 guests family style

INGREDIENTS

Crispy Rice Patties

2 cups cooked jasmine rice (about 400 g)
1½ cups frozen grated coconut, thawed (210 g)
1 tbsp red curry paste (20 g)
1 g (about 4 whole leaves) makrut lime leaves, very thinly julienned
1 tsp sea salt (5 g)
1 tsp MSG (5 g)
2 whole eggs

Nam Khao Salad

Crumbled crispy rice patties (from above)
11 oz Nam sausage, shredded or pulled into small pieces (315 g)
½ cup crushed roasted peanuts, or whole if preferred (65 g)
4 cups green onions, thinly sliced (650 g)
1½ cups fresh cilantro, chopped (35 g)
2 tbsp fish sauce (30 g)
Juice of 2 whole limes (about 60 mL)

INSTRUCTIONS

01 Make Crispy Rice Patties

1. In a large mixing bowl, gently combine all ingredients. Take care not to mash the rice—keep the grains whole for the best texture.
2. Form the mixture into flat patties, about 2 inches in diameter.
3. Deep-fry the patties at 325°F (160°C) until golden brown and crispy. Drain on paper towels and let cool slightly.

02 In a large bowl, crumble the fried rice patties into bite-sized pieces

03 Add the shredded Nam sausage and mix gently

04 Stir in the peanuts, green onions, cilantro, fish sauce, and lime juice

05 Toss everything together until well combined & adjust seasoning to taste

Add fried Thai chilies on the side or crumble them directly into the salad for extra spice.

06 To serve (as wraps)

Serve the salad with a platter of fresh herbs and greens, including:
Lettuce leaves (baby gem or butter lettuce work well)
Purple shiso
Mint
Cilantro