

is another popular ingredient used in Southeast Asian dipping sauces, often serving to strike the perfect balance between sour ingredients (vinegar, lime, or tamarind), savory ingredients (primarily fish sauce), hot ingredients (chiles), and aromatic ingredients (herbs, garlic, and ginger).

VIETNAMESE SPICY FISH SAUCE (NUOC CHAM)

This basic sauce has the same essential flavors that are included in most Southeast Asian dipping sauces. Americans who are unfamiliar with Thai food may prefer a sauce with less fish sauce or a sauce made with Thai fish sauce, which is milder. In fact this sauce is very similar to one of the most popular Thai dipping sauces, *nam prik*. In Vietnam, *nuoc cham* might be served with a bowl of rice to constitute a simple meal, but it is also an almost universal sauce for salads—it's perfect with cucumbers—and grilled and fried seafood or meats. It will keep for up to 2 weeks, well-covered, in the refrigerator.

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| Yield: $\frac{3}{4}$ CUP (175 MILLI-LITERS) | garlic cloves peeled, finely chopped, crushed to a paste | 2 | |
| | 4 fresh red or green Thai or 2 serrano chiles, finely chopped | | |
| | sugar | 3 tablespoons | 45 grams |
| | lime juice | 6 tablespoons | 75 milliliters |
| | Vietnamese or Thai fish sauce | 4 tablespoons | 60 milliliters |

Combine all the ingredients in a small bowl. Stir until the sugar is dissolved.

Variations. The amounts of each of the ingredients can be increased or decreased to produce spicier, hotter, more sour, or sweeter versions. The lime juice can be replaced with vinegar (distilled white vinegar is typically used, but white-wine vinegar or cider vinegar will give the sauce more finesse), or with tamarind extract (see Note). Water can also be added to the sauce for a lighter version and chopped cilantro will give the sauce a refreshing bite. A finely chopped 1-inch slice of peeled fresh ginger can be stirred into the sauce to make the classic Vietnamese *nuoc mam gung*—a sauce sometimes served with plain rice and also with seafood.