

Vietnamese Spring Rolls with Peanut Sauce

From Geoff Bragg, chef-instructor, Community Culinary School of Charlotte

Spring rolls are more of a technique than a recipe and I want to share a couple of points to focus on in order to rock out perfect spring rolls every time. There are really only two main mistakes that people make when forming these delectable mouthfuls. The first, and most common, mistake is to over soak the rice paper wrappers. Some people think you need super hot water – you don't. And some people think you need to soak it for a long time – you don't. Simply dip the wrapper in lukewarm water and drop it on your work surface as you fill it. The second mistake is to overstuff it. Usually people only do this once, but don't fall prey to your own hungry eyes. A little stuffing goes a long way towards building beautiful spring rolls. One prep note on these: They can be made ahead of time – up to an hour – but put a damp towel on top to keep them from drying out and do not put them in the fridge. Good luck!

1 package rice paper wrappers
1 package rice vermicelli, cooked and cooled
½ c sweet mint, chiffonade
½ c thai basil, chiffonade
½ c cilantro chiffonade
4 c green leaf lettuce, chiffonade or 4 c of microgreens
1 carrot, peeled, julienne
2 red bell pepper, ribs removed, julienne
1 English cucumber, julienne
3 c lemon grass pork or chicken or shrimp or tofu (marinade recipe follows), cooked and cooled

2 c peanut sauce (recipe follows)

Lemongrass Rub:

2 bundles of lemongrass, sliced as thinly as possible
1 c fresh garlic cloves
1/3 c fish sauce (I like Squid brand)
3 Tbs Sugar
½ c vegetable oil

Put the lemongrass, sugar, fish sauce and oil into a food processor. Spin it for several minutes, scraping the sides down often and getting the lemongrass as fine as possible. This is the most important step. If the lemongrass is too large or long it will make eating

the meat unpleasant. Take your time here. Once you have turn the lemongrass into a paste, add the garlic and continue to puree. This will make a fair amount of lemongrass rub so don' use it all at once. If you store it, pack it with some extra oil in order to seal it while you store it. With an anaerobic oil layer and all of the salt from the fish sauce, this rub can have a tremendous shelf life in your fridge. For 1 lb of pork loin I'll use 2 Tbs of rub. I slice the pork loin into very thin strips (lightly freeze the pork before cutting to assist with very thin cuts) then rub the lemongrass into it. After its marinade time I stir fry it in oil over a very high heat. It cooks quickly and can be done right before you start building your rolls.

To build the rolls, dip your rice paper into your lukewarm water and lay it on your work surface. Add a pinch of rice noodles, herbs, lettuce and a few slivers each of your vegetables. Lay three or four strips of your cooked pork on the top. You should have a couple of inches of space showing on all sides of your wrapper. Pull the wrapper in on the sides to cover the filling. Then pull the wrapper up from the bottom and over the filling almost folding it in half. After pulling the bottom flap over the filling, tuck it under the filling and pull back slightly on it to create a pack and tighten up the filling. Roll it up and set it aside. As you get better at it you can build several simultaneously. I usually prep 3 or 4 at a time depending on my prep space.

Peanut Sauce:

½ c natural peanut butter

½ c hoisin

2 Tbs Sriracha

hot water, as needed

In a small food processor combine the peanut butter, hoisin, Sriracha and ¼ c of hot water. Spin it until all of the ingredients are combined. Adjust the consistency with water to your liking. Keep in mind, when the sauce is cooled completely, it will thicken up just a bit.