



Pho Ga (Vietnamese Chicken Soup)

SERVES 6-8

Pho is a Vietnamese noodles soup originating in the north of Vietnam, most likely during the French colonization in the 1880's. The origin of the word "pho" is somewhat of a mystery, but many think it comes from the French word "feu" which is fire. The French soup, pot au feu is a broth that simmers in a pot over fire for several hours, the same as Pho. In northern Vietnam, Pho Bac (beef pho) is most common, but other variations have evolved, including the use of chicken, which is popular in the south.

Pho Ga (chicken pho) is made from chicken bones, noodles, and shredded chicken meat. During my visit to the city of Saigon (also called Ho Chi Mihn), I spent a day learning how to make Pho Ga perfectly with charred shallots, ginger, and toasted spices. My young teacher taught me the importance of rinsing the chicken after boiling it for a few minutes, which aids in a cleaner broth. While the chicken simmered, we toasted star anise, cinnamon bark, and black cardamom over a flame until they were just fragrant. After nearly three hours, my teacher deemed the broth was ready. We added a spoonful of sugar and fish sauce, then strained the broth, saving the meat from the bones. After a quick boiling of the noodles, our Pho was completed.

The process of making Pho commands plenty of time and patience. The end result is a comforting soup that requires both a spoon and a set of chopsticks to scoop up all the noodles and garnishes. When I eat Pho, I tend to splash it all over my face, so I have plenty of extra napkins on hand. It's not a graceful dish to eat but rewarding to say the least!

INGREDIENTS

Pho:

1 whole chicken
3" piece of ginger, peeled
4 shallots, peeled
2 tablespoons kosher salt (plus more for seasoning soup)
1 cinnamon stick
3 whole star anise
3 black cardamom pods
1 tablespoon sugar

3 tablespoons fish sauce

1-pound package pho rice noodles

Garnishes:

3 cups bean sprouts
¾ cup Thai basil leaves
¾ cup mint leaves
2 scallions, sliced
½ red onion, peeled and thinly sliced
2 red chiles, sliced
2 limes, cut into wedges

PROCESS:

Place chicken in a large stockpot and cover with water. Bring to a simmer over medium high heat. After it



simmers for 10 minutes, remove from heat and pour out water. Rinse chicken and place back in stockpot and cover again with water. Meanwhile, light the flame of a gas burner and set the ginger and scallions over flame, either directly on the burner or on a wire rack set on the burner.

Let ginger and scallions char well, turning so all sides are charred. Let cool and scrape blackened skins off before placing in water with chicken. Add salt and bring to a simmer for 1 ½ hours, skimming off any scum that rises to the top.

Remove chicken (leaving water in pot) and allow to cool for 30 minutes. Tear chicken meat off the bones and put into a bowl. Set aside and place bones back into the pot with water. Bring to a simmer and cook for another hour. Meanwhile, heat a skillet over medium high heat. Add the cinnamon stick, star anise, and cardamom pods. Toast each side, careful not to burn them.

Add to the pot with chicken bones. Stir in sugar and fish sauce and cook 30 more minutes. Remove from heat and cool for 20 minutes. Remove chicken bones and discard. Pour broth through a sieve into another large pot, discarding spices. Add salt to taste. Bring to a simmer and add noodles, cooking according to package instructions.

When noodles are tender, ladle into bowls with broth and top with shredded chicken and garnishes.