



INGREDIENT

First of a six part series on cooking with exotic foods



FOOD NETWORK

This cucumber lychee salad is so good you may be left speechless after eating it.

WHY I LOVE ME SOME LYCHEE

Eat it fresh,
cook it up or
drink it down

By ROGER MOOKING

"Let's go to Chinatown." I knew it was coming because it was the weekend, but it didn't make it any less exciting every time my father would call me to go on this trip with him. I have the most wonderful memories of picking up fresh lychee from the markets in Chinatown and tasting them to make sure they were sweet and delicious. Lychee juice would run the length of my arms and face until it dried and turned sticky — and not much has changed.

Lychee is a fantastically sweet and juicy fruit from China. Fresh lychee has a rough red or brown shell that you score and peel

away to reveal a white fleshed fruit that has a similar texture to a peeled grape. It bursts with juice and has a black seed at the core that is inedible. It is best fresh, but has a short season and can be found in spring and throughout summer at your local Chinese grocer or market. If you can't find it fresh, it can be found in most supermarkets canned in syrup or dried. The dried versions are usually found prepackaged, deseeded and skinless much the same way a package of raisins would be sold and enjoyed, and they make a great snack.

Combining sweet and savoury flavours in the same dish is the foundation of my cooking style. The sweetness pulls the palate one way and the savoury tugs in the opposite direction; this is when food dances in the mouth. I think of it like the perfect tension and release in a well-composed

piece of music: Build it and then let it fall. I take this approach in the recording studio as much as in the kitchen.

I love lychee because it is incredibly versatile. It can be cut and tossed into a salad, eaten whole as a refreshing snack, sautéed with stir-fried vegetables or incorporated into a chutney. Lychee is also a fantastic addition to a cocktail or smoothie for a tasty drink.

Cucumber lychee salad is quick and easy, but it packs a burst of flavour and will satisfy your palate. As a refreshing light accompaniment to any meal, this dish will leave you energized.

CUCUMBER LYCHEE SALAD (serves 4)

Ingredients

- 1 English cucumber
- 1 cup lychees, peeled, pitted and halved
- 3 stems cilantro, finely chopped and leaves picked
- 2 red Thai chilies, pith and seeds removed and finely diced
- zest and juice of 2 limes
- 1 tsp (5 mL) sugar
- salt
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) seasoned rice wine vinegar

1. Cut cucumber in half lengthwise, remove seeds with a spoon, quarter and dice ¼-inch thick.
 2. In a bowl, mix cucumber, lychees, cilantro stems and chili.
 3. Add lime zest and juice, sugar, salt and vinegar and toss.
 4. Before serving, garnish with cilantro leaves.
- Tips and recipe courtesy of *Everyday Exotic* starring Roger Mooking, airing Thursdays at 12:30 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. ET on Food Network.

National Post

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