

Thai-Style Kebabs with Dipping Sauce

Adapted by Our Young Chefs from "Real Cooking for Kids," Rob Seideman
Makes 20 snack-size servings



These kebabs can be oven-baked, as described below, or cooked on an outdoor grill - charcoal or gas. The Thai-inspired flavor profile of the meat combined with the coolness of lettuce wraps with a tart and spicy sauce makes these a perfect choice for refreshing warm-weather dining. Serve with grilled vegetables or brown rice tossed with diced fresh cilantro and/or mint and a hint of grated lime zest.



Lemongrass stalks

INGREDIENTS

MEATBALLS

- 3 stalks lemongrass
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (4.2 ounces) onion, coarsely chopped
- 4 to 6 large garlic cloves, sliced crosswise $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick
- 24 fresh mint leaves
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup fresh cilantro leaves and fine stems, coarsely chopped
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons fresh ginger root, coarsely grated
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ pounds ground beef (90% lean)
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (2.5 ounce) dry bread crumbs
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (3 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 3 eggs
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (2.3 ounces) granulated sugar
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons Thai fish sauce
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- $2\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons salt
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons freshly ground black pepper
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons chili-garlic paste
(optional)

DIRECTIONS

Pre-recipe preparation: Preheat the oven to 350°F. Place 20 short bamboo skewers into slightly-warm water to soak. Line one (1) OR two (2) baking sheet pan(s) with a Silpat, foil OR parchment paper; set aside.

Prepare the flavoring ingredients: Cut off and discard the top two-thirds ($\frac{2}{3}$) plus the bottom $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of the lemongrass stalk. Remove and discard the outer layer of the lemongrass stalk. Coarsely chop the interior stalk; place it into a food processor work bowl fit with the metal knife blade. Using several long on/off pulses, chop the lemongrass until quite fine; stopping at least once to scrape the sides of the processor work bowl with a stiff or flexible plastic spatula.

Blend all of the meatball ingredients: Add the coarsely chopped onion and sliced garlic to the lemongrass in the food processor work bowl; process using several long on/off pulses. Stop, scrape down the mixture from the sides of the bowl; add the fresh mint and cilantro. Process using 3 long on/off pulses, just enough to begin to chop the herbs finer. Add all of the remaining meatball ingredients. Pulse a few times until everything is well mixed. Stop to scrape the sides of the food processor bowl; pulse again.

Shape and skewer the meatballs: Remove the food processor blade; shape the meat mixture into meatballs the size of a walnut. All of the meatballs should be the same size, so that they will all be finished cooking at the same time. (If available, use the assistance of a medium ice-cream scoop OR a #30/black-handled disher to portion the meat mixture, making uniform-size meatballs.) Shape each meatball by rolling it between the palms of both hands. Run a soaked bamboo skewer through the middle of two (2) meatballs; place the meatball skewer on the prepared baking sheet pan. Repeat, placing all of the meatballs on skewers. ➔

Bake the meatballs: Place the baking pan of **meatballs** in the oven; bake at 350°F until browned and cooked through, about 20 minutes. The **meatballs'** internal temperature will be 165°F* when they are done. Halfway through baking, rotate/reverse the **baking sheet pans'** position. Remove and set the **baking sheet pans** on a cooling rack.

DIPPING SAUCE

4 limes, juiced
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (2.15 ounces) Thai fish sauce
 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 fresh green or red jalapeño pepper, seeds removed, sliced crosswise $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick OR $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch dice
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (2.15 ounces) rice vinegar
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (5.3 ounces) water
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup fresh cilantro leaves and fine stems, finely chopped
 $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup (5.25 to 7 ounces) granulated sugar

Prepare the dipping sauce: While the **meatballs** are cooking, in a medium saucepan, combine **all of the sauce ingredients**; begin with a $\frac{3}{4}$ -cup amount for the **sugar** measurement. Bring the **sauce mixture** to a boil over high heat. When the **mixture** boils, reduce the heat to medium; cook, stirring continuously, until the **sugar** is dissolved (about 5 minutes).

Taste; adjust flavor: Taste the **sauce**, add additional **sugar** if desired. (If additional **sugar** is added, continue to cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until the **sugar** is dissolved.)

Cool and serve: Remove from the heat; pour the **sauce** into a chilled (stainless steel or Pyrex) bowl OR room temperature bowl to quickly cool the sauce. If available, ladle the **dipping sauce** into small/individual bowls so each diner has their own bowl of **dipping sauce**.

KEBAB WRAPS

1 head romaine lettuce

Assembly for serving: Wrap two warm **meatballs** in one (1) or a half ($\frac{1}{2}$) of a **romaine lettuce leaf**; serve the **lettuce wraps** with **dipping sauce** on the side. Serve immediately.

* Use an instant-read thermometer to check the temperature. For the probe of the thermometer to be inserted deeply enough to register the temperature correctly in a meatball, the thermometer must be inserted all the way through to get the meat to the area (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches from the tip of the probe) where the temperature registers on the thermometer probe. The tip of the probe may extend out on the other side depending on the size of the meatball. Wash and wipe the thermometer clean immediately after each use checking the meatball's internal temperature.
