



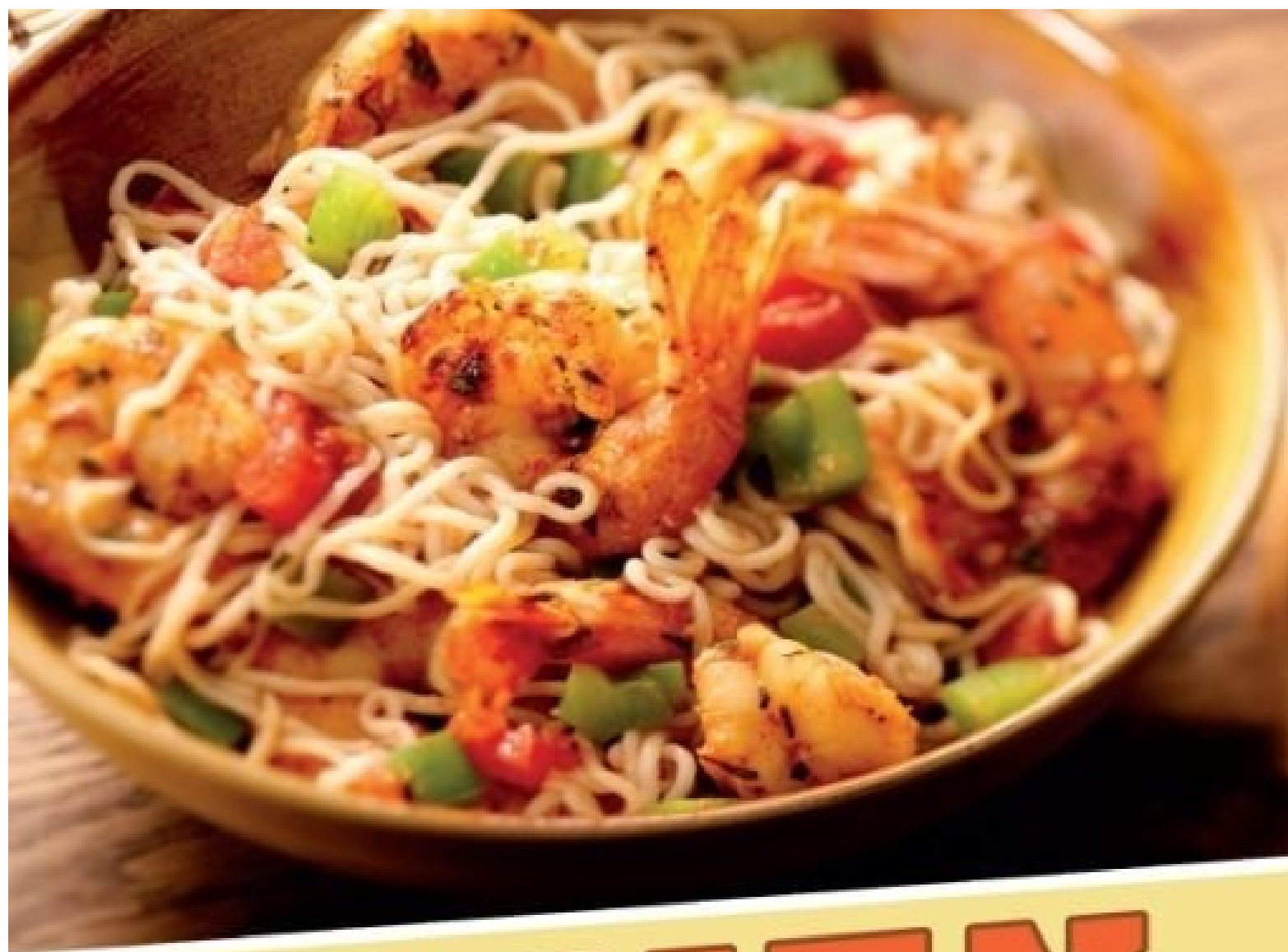
RAMEN

TO THE RESCUE COOKBOOK

*Jessica
Harlan*



Over 100 Creative
Recipes for Easy
Meals Using
Everyone's Favorite
Pack of Noodles



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Jessica Harlan



Ulysses Press

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To Chip, the sous chef in my kitchen and in my life,
and
to Sadie and Gillian, the best taste testers a cook could ever hope for.

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INTRODUCTION

The mere mention of ramen noodles is sure to elicit nostalgia. Many people have memories of living on those little packages of noodles and powdered soup seasoning when they were in college or as they tried to make ends meet on an entry-level paycheck.

And indeed, for the budget-conscious, packaged ramen noodles are the perfect food: They're cheap (my local supermarket sells six for \$1), fast (the noodles cook in 3 minutes), and filling.

Admittedly, ramen soup, with its salty broth and freeze-dried vegetables, can get a little boring after a while. And certainly the sodium-laden seasoning packets aren't really that great for you . . . but that's where this book comes in. You can take advantage of the convenience, low price, and speedy cooking time of instant ramen noodles but use your own fresh ingredients, sauces, and seasonings to create a multitude of different dishes. Veggie-laden stir fries, delicious soups, innovative appetizers, crisp salads, casseroles big enough to feed a crowd—these and more can be made with those cheap little packages of ramen noodles.

Instant ramen noodles—dubbed Space Ram—have been enjoyed even in outer space, brought on board the space shuttle Discovery by Japanese astronaut Soichi Noguchi in 1995. Nissin Foods and JAXA, the Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency, developed the Space Ram together in four flavors: shoyu, miso, curry, and tonkotsu.

And because the long curly noodles are part of our collective culinary experience, a dish made with ramen noodles—especially when they're used in an unconventional way—is sure to be quite a conversation starter.

So stock up on those little packages, because with *Ramen to the Rescue* in your hands, you're sure to find many more delicious uses for instant ramen noodles than you ever dreamed you would!

Ramen: A Brief Background

Although ramen noodles are typically thought of as a Japanese food, they actually have China to credit for their origin. After all, noodles and pasta originated in China thousands of years ago. According to one theory, in the early 1900s, Chinese cooks in a Tokyo restaurant created a brothy noodle soup called *shin soba*. Soba is a type of Asian noodle made with buckwheat, rather than the wheat flour that ramen noodles are made of.

RAMEN SOUP MINI RECIPES: 10 EASY WAYS TO JAZZ UP RAMEN

When you just feel like keeping it simple but still want to add some dimension to a bowl of ramen noodle soup, use one of these mini recipes to add just one or two ingredients to your dish.

1. Stir a handful of chopped scallions into the soup just before serving.
2. Sprinkle the soup with fresh cilantro or Thai basil leaves just before serving.
3. Stir in a squirt of Sriracha or other Asian hot sauce along with the ramen noodle seasoning packet.
4. Add about 1/2 teaspoon toasted sesame oil to the broth and sprinkle with toasted sesame seeds.
5. Stir in a handful of chopped firm tofu or cooked chicken before serving.
6. Add about 1/2 cup frozen edamame or frozen chopped spinach to the boiling water along with the noodles.
7. After adding the seasoning packet to the cooked noodles and broth, stir in 1 lightly beaten egg until the egg cooks, and add a dash of soy sauce. Or top with a chopped hard-boiled egg, or a fried or poached egg.
8. Garnish the soup with a handful of mung beans or shredded cabbage and a squeeze of lime.
9. Sprinkle the soup with nori furikake (seaweed seasoning), to taste.
10. As the noodles cook, add sliced cremini mushrooms or reconstituted dried mushrooms, such as shiitake or oyster mushrooms, to the pan.

Shina soba became Japan's most popular Chinese dish and was served all over the country, with different regions incorporating local ingredients to make the recipe their own. Later, the name "ramen" was coined; it's the Japanese pronunciation of "lo mein," the Chinese noodles.

In Thailand, sales of instant ramen noodles have been used as an economic indicator, dubbed the Mama Noodles Index. Skyrocketing sales of the country's best-selling instant ramen brand, Mama Noodles, accurately predicted a weakening economy.

In 1958, Momofuku Ando of Nissin Foods developed a chicken-flavored instant ramen noodle product in an effort to provide an easy-to-produce, convenient food option for citizens in postwar Japan, where food was scarce and finances were strained. At first, Ando's ramen was considered a luxury, since it was still more expensive for consumers than fresh Japanese udon noodles. But eventually people grew to appreciate the convenience, and soon other manufacturers of instant ramen noodles came on board with their own versions and flavors.

In the early 1970s, Ando developed another ramen innovation: packing the noodles in a polystyrene cup so they could cook in boiling water right in the package. The concept of instant ramen noodles spread worldwide, and several manufacturers opened factories in the United States, an ideal marketplace for

product of this kind, since Americans have such a need and appreciation for cheap, convenient food. Nissin's ramen, sold under the names Top Ramen and Cup Noodles, is today one of the best-selling ramen brands in America, along with Maruchan, a brand started in California in 1977.

True ramen fans can visit the Momofuku Ando Instant Ramen Museum in Osaka, Japan. The museum includes a reproduction of the "research shack" where Ando perfected his recipe, as well as an exhibit of production methods, a display of ramen noodle products from around the world, a video of the manufacturing process, and a tasting room. There's also a hands-on workshop where you can try making your own instant ramen noodles, from stirring up the noodle dough to drying the noodles in the flash-fryer, and another interactive exhibit where you can make your own instant noodle cup.

How Instant Ramen Is Made

Have you ever wondered how those little rectangular bricks of dry noodles are produced? A look at the manufacturing process is fascinating indeed, which might explain why the Maruchan factory was once featured on an episode of the Food Network show *Unwrapped*, and the ramen manufacturer Nongshim hosts official factory tours.

Maruchan Ramen was the official soup of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles.

At the beginning of the process, ramen is made similarly to any other noodle or pasta: Flour, water, and other ingredients are mixed and kneaded in giant mixers, and then the dough is stretched into a thin sheet between two enormous rollers. As the dough is cut into thin noodle strands, it becomes curly because of the slow speed at which the noodles exit the cutters. The curly noodles, in 100-foot lengths, travel on a moving bed through a hot steam chamber where they cook for a minute. The steam-cooked noodles are cut into portions called pillows, then dipped into a deep-fryer where they cook briefly at 400°F. When the fryer finishes the cooking process, it removes the moisture from the noodles so they're dry and shelf-stable. Then the noodle pillows are paired with a seasoning packet and packaged in their plastic wrapper.

Your Ramen to the Rescue Pantry

There are a number of pantry staples that you'll find yourself reaching for again and again to make these recipes. Here's a little explanation about some of the ingredients you'll find in this book.

Coconut Milk: Rich canned coconut milk is delicious in sweet and savory recipes. It comes in regular and light versions; as you can imagine, the regular version, which contains much more fat, has a creamier mouthfeel and a slightly deeper flavor. But you can substitute the light version if you are trying to be healthier.

Curry Paste: Jarred curry paste and a can of coconut milk is all you need to make Thai-style curries. Thai curry paste typically comes in red or green. One is not spicier than the other; instead, the red curry paste has a deeper, more roasted flavor, and the green curry paste has an earthier flavor. Try both to see which one you prefer.

Edamame: You can find frozen edamame (soy) beans in almost any supermarket these days. These nutty-tasting beans, which look like lima beans but have a firmer texture and a slightly sweeter flavor, are delicious additions to stir-fries, soups, salads, and other dishes. Choose the shelled variety to save yourself some work, and keep a bag on hand in the freezer.

Fish Sauce: This Thai condiment is made from fish (usually anchovies) that is fermented with salt and water. It is a clear, thin, salty liquid that is used to season soups and sauces. You can find vegetarian versions made from soy. The sauce will keep indefinitely in a cool, dry place. I prefer to keep mine in the refrigerator, although it isn't necessary.

Instant ramen noodles are truly a part of American pop culture. A 2011 memoir, *The Ramen King and I* by journalist Andy Raskin, poses instant ramen inventor Momofuku Ando as Raskin's idol whilst the author self-analyzes his failed love life. A 2008 film called *The Ramen Girl* stars Brittan Murphy as an American stranded in Japan who decides her purpose in life to become a ramen chef.

Ginger: Many of the Asian-influenced recipes in this book, particularly those in the Asian-Inspired Classics chapter (page 109), rely on a hint of ginger to give them an authentic flavor. You can find fresh ginger root in the produce aisle at the grocery store. To use it, peel the brown skin with a paring knife or a vegetable peeler, then chop or finely grate the yellowish interior (a Microplane-type grater is perfect for this). Ginger that's grated, rather than chopped, will integrate better into the recipe, but even easier is to buy a jar of minced ginger, which you can find in the Asian foods section of the supermarket. It keeps for months in the refrigerator, so it's always on hand, and it saves you lots of work. The Ginger People (www.gingerpeople.com) have a version I like. Make sure to buy plain minced ginger, not pickled ginger. Jarred minced ginger can be used in any recipe in this book that calls for fresh grated or minced ginger.

Nissin Foods sells an average of 87.5 billion servings of ramen noodles worldwide each year.

Hoisin Sauce: Made with soybean paste and seasoned with sugar, garlic, and

other spices, this thick, sticky glaze has a sweet taste and is great to add flavor and body to sauces, or to use as a glaze, marinade, or dipping sauce. It comes in a jar and will keep for months in the refrigerator.

Oil: Most of the recipes in this book call for either vegetable or canola oil (you can use the two interchangeably). Both of these oils have a neutral flavor and a high smoke point, which means that they won't burn when you're cooking at high temperatures, as you do for frying, sautéing, and stir-frying.

Plum Sauce: A tangy-sweet sauce made of plums, rice vinegar, ginger, and other ingredients, this sauce is excellent used as a condiment or a dipping sauce, particularly for egg rolls or spring rolls.

Ponzu Sauce: This is like a tangier version of soy sauce; in fact, it is really just soy sauce with a citrus flavor. It makes a fantastic dipping sauce and can also add a salty tang to many dishes. You can even just use it on its own to flavor a stir-fry or plain noodles.

Rice Cooking Wine: This fermented, rice-based liquid has a slightly sweet flavor that adds a nice dimension to certain sauces and dishes. There are Chinese and Japanese versions; the Japanese rice wine is called mirin. It typically has a low alcohol content (around 8 to 13 percent). If you don't have any rice wine on hand, you can use dry sherry with similar results. If you prefer not to use alcohol, then use an equal amount of vegetable or chicken stock with a splash of rice vinegar.

Rice Vinegar: If you don't have a bottle of rice vinegar in your pantry, you're missing out. This clear vinegar is more subtly flavored than white wine vinegar and more complex than plain old distilled or cider vinegar. It makes a fantastic vinaigrette, and it's also nice splashed over steamed vegetables. In the Asian foods aisle, you'll see both plain or natural rice vinegar, and seasoned rice vinegar. The seasoned version has added sugar and salt. I prefer the plain; you can always add a little sugar and salt to the recipe if needed. Just make sure not to confuse rice vinegar with rice cooking wine, which contains alcohol and doesn't have the same tartness.

Seaweed Seasoning (nori furikake): This sprinkle, which comes in a glass or plastic shaker, is a ubiquitous condiment on the table in Asian households and restaurants. It comes in several varieties but usually includes shredded dried seaweed, sesame seeds, salt, and sugar, as well as other flavorings like powdered wasabi or dried fish.

Sesame Oil: Another classic Asian ingredient, sesame oil adds a delicious nuttiness to stir-fry sauces, soups, and other dishes. Toasted sesame oil has a more intense flavor. Buy the smallest bottle possible; you only need a teaspoon or so for most

recipes (it's added more for flavor than for cooking), and this oil can go rancid quickly. For that reason, store it in a cool, dark cabinet, but not in the refrigerator.

In one year, Maruchan sells 81 million miles of noodles—enough noodles to extend from Earth to Mars and back again.

Sesame Seeds: These are one of my favorite ways to add flavor, texture, and authenticity to Asian-style dishes, and you'll find them used in recipes throughout this book. Try to find sesame seeds that are already toasted, as they'll have the best flavor and a pretty, golden color. It's also wise to look for a source that sells them in bulk, such as a health food store, as they will be fresher and less expensive than if you buy the ones that come in little spice jars.

Soy Sauce: I use low-sodium soy sauce because I find that it's intensely flavorful without being overly salty. Choose an authentic Japanese brand if possible. Nearly universally, the low-sodium version is the one with the green label.

Sriracha Sauce: This Thai chili sauce is a fantastic condiment for adding a little spice to many of the dishes in this book, as well as just in your day-to-day cooking. It's made with ground chiles, vinegar, garlic, and salt. Use it sparingly until you get a sense of how spicy it is; you can always add more to up the spice quotient of your dish. Keep the bottle in the refrigerator.

Teriyaki Sauce: A sweet, thick, soy-based sauce, this sauce is delicious on noodles or it can be used as a glaze for meats, tofu, or vegetables.

Thai Chili Sauce: This flavorful Thai sauce is not superhot, but adds a nice dimension of flavor. There's also a sweet version that has even less heat and adds a nice sweet note to a dish. The dishes in this book call for the regular Thai chili sauce, but you can use the sweet one if you prefer.

Tofu: You'll find a wide variety of tofu textures, from silken, which is good for smoothies, to extra-firm, which can be cubed and used in stir-fries. There's also baked tofu, which has a superfirm, meaty texture and is usually flavored. I prefer the fresh tofu that is sold in the refrigerated section, but you can also find shelf-stable cartons of tofu that will keep longer in a pantry. To make extra-firm tofu even firmer for sautéing in a stir-fry, you can press the block of tofu under a weighted plate for 10 to 20 minutes to squeeze out some of its liquid.

Must-Have Kitchenware

To get the best results when making the recipes in this book, you'll need a few

basic pieces of cooking equipment. Here are some of the cookware and tools that I reach for again and again when I'm making ramen recipes.

Casserole Dish: Seek out a small covered casserole dish that is around 6 inches in diameter or holds 2 quarts of food. This is the ideal size for the smaller baked dishes. For the dishes in the Feeding a Crowd chapter (page 184), you will need a larger casserole dish, 9 x 13 inches. I like glass or Pyrex casseroles because they heat the food evenly, and they're usually attractive enough to bring to the table.

Cutting Board: A cutting board that is at least 12 inches square will be sufficient for chopping ingredients. I like wood or bamboo, because they will not damage or dull your knife. If you cook with a lot of meat, you might want to consider investing in a set of plastic, color-coded cutting boards or mats so you are using a specific cutting board for each type of food (poultry, meat, fish, and vegetables). This will help avoid cross-contamination and will help prevent bacteria from spreading.

Food Processor or Chopper: Several of these recipes call for crushed ramen to use as a crust or in place of bread crumbs. A food processor can crush ramen quickly and easily. You can also use a smaller food chopper, but you might have to work in batches if the entire package of ramen doesn't fit.

Knives: A good-quality chef's knife and paring or utility knife are really all you need to make pretty much all of these recipes. Be sure to keep them sharp either with a home sharpener or by taking them regularly to a sharpening service—a dull knife can be dangerous.

Skillet: A medium (10-inch) nonstick skillet is ideal for making most of the 1- or 2-serving meals in this book. A small (8-inch) skillet is sometimes called for, as well as a large (12-inch) skillet. Try to find skillets that are ovenproof, as some of these recipes require finishing in the oven.

Small Saucepan: I found that a deep, 1-quart saucepan is the ideal size for boiling a single package of ramen noodles. A 2-quart saucepan is more versatile for cooking double batches or cooking the noodles and other ingredients all in one dish.

China, including Hong Kong, consumes the most instant noodles, slurping up a whopping 42.3 billion packages or cups in 2010. The United States ranks fifth, with 3.9 billion packages of ramen noodles eaten in 2010, according to the World Instant Noodles Association.

Strainer: A strainer is essential for rinsing ingredients and draining noodles. I like a small metal mesh strainer with raised feet so you can rest it on the bottom of the sink.

Tongs: A set of tongs will be helpful for cooking meat, stir-frying, tossing salad, mixing noodles with sauces, or lifting noodles out of the boiling water. Try to find a set that has silicone-covered tips so that it won't damage the surface of a nonstick pan.

Whisk: A small whisk can be useful for mixing sauces and beating eggs.

Ramen Techniques

These are some of the techniques you'll see used in the recipes in this book.

How to Cook Ramen Noodles: Fill a small (about 1 quart) saucepan about two-thirds full with water over high heat. When the water comes to a boil, add the ramen cake (break the cake into smaller pieces if you want shorter noodles) and set the timer for 3 minutes, or according to the package directions. Use a spoon to submerge the noodles until they begin to soften and break apart. After 3 minutes, immediately drain the noodles. It's best to cook the noodles just before you will be using them, as they will stick together the longer they sit out. You can cook the noodles for a shorter amount of time if you want slightly firmer noodles.

Instant ramen noodles have proven to be the perfect food for disaster zones. They were distributed to survivors of the 2004 Asian tsunami and again during the 2011 earthquake in Japan.

Crushing Ramen Noodles: When dry ramen noodles are being used as a topping or a mix-in, you can crush them by hand into small pieces. Place the cake of ramen in a bowl and break it apart into chunks. Working with one chunk at a time, use your fingers to break and crumble the dry noodles into the desired-size pieces.

Grinding Ramen Noodles: Finely ground ramen noodles can be used in place of bread crumbs as a topping or in dishes. To grind ramen noodles, break the cake of dry noodles into about eight pieces into the bowl of a food processor. Pulse the processor 8 to 10 times, until the noodles are evenly ground into small particles that resemble oats, coarse cornmeal, or fine bread crumbs, depending on the recipe. If you don't have a food processor, you can place the broken cake of ramen noodles into a zip-top bag, seal the bag (pressing all the air out first), and press a rolling pin over the noodles until they're crushed to a desired consistency.



SNACKS and STARTERS

When the urge to munch strikes, just reach for a package of ramen. You can really get creative with how you use the noodles to create a wide variety of tasty snacks and appetizers: Pan-fry them into a pancake, roll them up in an edible wrapper, or bake them until they're satisfyingly crunchy.

The snacks on the following pages can be noshed in the middle of the afternoon, passed around at a party, or served as an appetizer at a dinner party. So think outside the bowl and whip up some ramen-based snacks.

THAI BASIL SPRING ROLLS

Noodles tossed with tangy rice vinegar and the fresh flavors of basil, lettuce, and cucumber fill these delicate rolls. If you'd like, tuck a few slices of cooked shrimp or seasoned tofu into each one. You can find the rice paper spring roll wrappers in the Asian section of your supermarket. Makes 8 spring rolls

2 packages ramen noodles,
any flavor
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
1 head butter lettuce, such
as Bibb or Boston, torn into
large pieces
16 fresh basil leaves
1/2 cucumber, peeled, seeded,
and cut into 2-inch strips, about
1/2-inch wide
8 cooked shrimp, sliced, or
8 slices seasoned baked tofu
(optional)
8 (8 1/2-inch) sheets rice paper
spring roll wrappers
1/2 cup hoisin sauce
1 tablespoon chopped roasted
peanuts

1. Cook the ramen noodles in boiling water for 3 minutes, or according to the package directions (discard the ramen seasoning). Drain the noodles, rinse with cold water, and place in a medium bowl. Sprinkle the noodles with the rice

vinegar and toss to coat evenly.

2. Set out all the lettuce, basil, cucumber, and shrimp or tofu, if using, on the countertop, and have a clean work surface in front of you on which to assemble the spring rolls. Fill a shallow dish or a pie pan with warm water.

3. Immerse one spring roll wrapper in the warm water, holding it underneath the water with your fingertips until it is soft and flexible, 30 to 45 seconds. Lift the wrapper out of the water and hold it over the pan of water for a few minutes to let the water drip off. Lay the wrapper on the plate or cutting board.

4. Place about 1/4 cup noodles, a piece of lettuce, 2 basil leaves, 3 to 4 strips of cucumber, and a few slices of shrimp or tofu, if using, in the middle of the wrapper. Fold about 1 inch of two opposite sides over the filling. Then fold the bottom of the wrapper over the filling to form a rectangular pouch, almost like a business envelope. Tightly pull the top section of the wrapper toward you and roll it over the filling to overlap the other side, pressing slightly to seal the edges.

5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 with the remaining wrappers and ingredients. Place the hoisin sauce in a small serving dish and sprinkle with peanuts. Serve the spring rolls with the hoisin sauce for dipping.



PAN-FRIED SCALLION PANCAKE

This quick snack has an appealingly chewy-crunchy texture, and it's best eaten hot, as soon as possible after it comes out of the pan. Makes 1 (8 to 10-inch) pancake, 1 to 4 servings

1 package ramen noodles,
Oriental flavor
3 scallions, light green part only,
thinly sliced, divided
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
soy sauce, for dipping

1. Cook the ramen noodles in boiling water for 3 minutes, or according to the package directions (reserve the ramen seasoning). Drain and return to the pot. Sprinkle the noodles with 1 teaspoon of the ramen seasoning (discard the

remainder) and most of the scallions, reserving about 1 teaspoon of the scallion for garnish. Toss to coat evenly.

2. Spray a plate with cooking spray. Use clean hands or a spatula to spread the noodles out on the plate and form a flat pancake, about 3/4 inch thick, pressing down to compress the noodles.

3. Heat the vegetable oil in a medium nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. When the oil is very hot, slide the pancake into the pan. Cook until the noodles are lightly browned on the underside, 3 to 4 minutes. Carefully flip the pancake over and cook until the second side is browned, about 3 minutes longer. Transfer the pancake to a plate, cut into wedges with a knife or a pizza cutter, and serve immediately with a small dish of soy sauce sprinkled with the reserved scallions.



SHRIMP AND EGG PANCAKE

This pancake is denser than the Pan-Fried Scallion Pancake (page 29), almost like a frittata. It makes a substantial snack, or a nice appetizer for a dinner or a party. You can substitute diced seasoned tofu for the shrimp if you prefer. Makes 1 (8 inch) pancake, 2 to 4 servings

1 package ramen noodles,
any flavor
1 large egg
1 teaspoon soy sauce, plus more
for dipping
1/4 cup chopped cooked shrimp,
canned or thawed frozen
2 tablespoons minced chives
1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1. Cook the ramen noodles in boiling water for 3 minutes, or according to the package directions (discard the ramen seasoning). While the noodles are cooking, whisk the egg and soy sauce together in a small bowl.

2. When the noodles are cooked, drain and place in a medium bowl. Let cool to room temperature. Pour the egg-soy mixture over the noodles, add the shrimp and the chives, and stir to combine.

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