

note *from* the editor

This is a public service announcement:

Give your ovens and stoves some time off this summer.

Now I'm not suggesting that you don't cook. Just take the cooking—and entertaining—outside. We've packed this issue full of backyard-friendly fare meant for celebrating with friends and family: the saucy, sticky, smoky recipes best filed under the category of Eat with Your Hands. Pass the napkins—forks and knives deserve summer Fridays off, too.

From June to August, my wife and I turn our brick patio in Birmingham, Alabama, into an outdoor kitchen and dining room, where we keep pots of herbs and the grills work overtime. My morning coffee routine includes dinner prep like washing lettuces or topping and tailing green beans. After work, I'll crack open a cold beer and start dinner, which more often than not is an excuse to anoint grilled vegetables or fish with Nuoc Cham, a five-minute flavor bomb that pairs amazingly well with anything charred. Cookbook authors Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid call it “Vietnamese Must-Have Table Sauce” for a reason.

Try it. And give your summer cooking a vacation state of mind.

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Nuoc Cham *AKA AWESOME SAUCE

Warning: This versatile Vietnamese condiment has addictive sweet, salty, sour, and spicy properties. Mix it in a jar, fine-tuning the flavors to your liking by adding more or less of any ingredient. Spoon it on anything grilled, use it to dress shredded cabbage for slaw, toss it with soba noodles, marinate chicken or seafood with it, or use it as a dipping sauce for spring rolls, dumplings, or kebabs.

- ¼ cup water
- 5 teaspoons sugar
- ¼ cup matchstick-cut carrots (optional)
- 3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 4 teaspoons fish sauce
- 2 small garlic cloves, minced
- 1 Thai chile, thinly sliced

1. Combine water and sugar in a jelly jar or small container with tight-fitting lid. Shake vigorously for 30 seconds or until sugar dissolves. Add remaining ingredients; shake to combine. Refrigerate for up to 3 days.

SERVES 8 (serving size: 2 tablespoons)

CALORIES 17; FAT 0g; PROTEIN 0g; CARB 4g; FIBER 0g; CHOL 0mg; IRON 0mg; SODIUM 239mg; CALC 5mg

—Recipe by Katie Barreira

PHOTOGRAPHY: GREG DUPREE; FOOD STYLING: ERIN MERHAR; PROP STYLING: LINDSEY LOWER