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Rice Soup with Chicken, Cilantro and Crispy Garlic

kao tome gai

Simply delicious and simple to make, this is Thai-style comfort food. Thais eat kao tome for breakfast, supper, or as a midnight meal at a café after a night on the town. It's the first choice when Thais cook for someone who's under the weather, but I make it whenever we need a quick and hearty one-dish supper that satisfies us all. In Thailand, coarsely ground pork is most popular, but other meats work well, including ground turkey or chicken, leftover roast duck, or roast chicken. Shrimp is also divine, but take care to remove the soup from the heat as soon as it is cooked through.

3 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 tablespoons coarsely chopped garlic
4 cups chicken stock
2 cups cooked rice
1/4 pound ground pork, chicken, or turkey
1 tablespoon fish sauce
1 teaspoon freshly ground pepper
1 tablespoon minced fresh ginger (optional)
3 green onions, thinly sliced crosswise
A handful of fresh cilantro leaves, coarsely chopped

Place a small heatproof bowl by the stove. Heat the oil in a small frying pan over medium heat until a bit of garlic sizzles at once. Add the garlic and cook, stirring often, until it is fragrant and golden, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from heat, pour hot garlic and oil into the heatproof bowl, and set aside to cool.

Bring the chicken stock to a boil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, and then stir in the cooked rice. When the soup returns to a boil, add the ground pork in generous pinches, by hand or by teaspoons, making free-form meatballs. Stir well, and add the fish sauce. Simmer 3 to 4 minutes, until meat is cooked.

Transfer the hot soup to a serving bowl and top with the crispy garlic in oil, pepper, ginger (if using), green onions, and cilantro. Just before serving, stir well and serve hot.

Serves 4 to 6