



Grilled Lemongrass Shrimp with Sweet Chili Dipping Sauce

Lemongrass is used in this recipe as both a flavor component and a presentation tool. The stalks, when used as skewers, delicately flavor the shrimp from the inside, while the sweet, spicy marinade opens the palate. Because the shrimp are so flavorful, the dipping sauce should be treated more as a garnish, rather than a sauce. The trick is of course not to overcook your shrimp. We use Vietnamese spotted prawns for this plating -- the large, luscious crustaceans provide a meaty platform for the fusion of ingredients. Your first taste is the succulent meat of the shrimp and then the explosion of flavor components arrive on the palate.

Serves 8

Ingredients

For the shrimp:

24 large shrimp
9 stalks lemongrass
1 ½ teaspoon Sambal Oelek (a curry paste of chilies, brown sugar and salt, available in Asian markets)
1 clove garlic, minced
1 1-inch x 1-inch piece of fresh ginger, through a garlic press with juices
1 tablespoon lemongrass essence (see instructions below)
1 tablespoon mirin
2 teaspoons fish sauce
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
2 tablespoons mild olive oil
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

For the dipping sauce:

2 tablespoons butter
2 tablespoons sweet chili sauce
1 tablespoon aged sherry vinegar
1 teaspoon ground coriander
1 ½ teaspoons mirin
1 teaspoon soy sauce
2 ripe plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded and diced (substitute 2 whole peeled plum tomatoes from a can if your tomatoes are not fully ripened)
½ lemon, peel and pith removed, and segmented
1 tablespoon Thai basil (or 2 tablespoons flat leaf parsley), finely chopped
Sea salt, to taste
Thai basil leaves, for garnish

Preparation

Prepare the shrimp:

Peel and devein the shrimp and place in a large mixing bowl. Trim and mince 1 lemongrass stalk. Toss the shrimp in a bowl with the lemongrass. Add the remaining ingredients and toss well to combine and coat the shrimp.

Remove the outer leaves from the remaining lemongrass stalks and trim the green tops. The stalk should be at least ¼" thick. With a chef's knife, using the opposite side from the blade, gently pound each stalk a few times to release the lemongrass essence (oils). Trim the bulb end to form a skewer tip. Skewer 3 shrimp onto each lemongrass stalk and place in a shallow container. Pour the marinade from the bowl

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over the shrimp skewers and marinate for at least 20 minutes or up to 1 hour. A longer marinade increases the intensity of the flavors in the shrimp.

[Chef's Note: If your stalks are thick, cut them in half or quarters and follow the procedure above. The stalks may be a bit more difficult to work with as skewers this way since the leaves will tend to separate.]

Preheat the broiler, with a rack placed about 4 inches from the heat. Prepare the dipping sauce.

Broil the shrimp about 2 minutes per side, until lightly browned and just cooked through.

Prepare the dipping sauce:

Place the butter in a small heavy-bottomed saucepan and place over medium-high heat and cook until the butter is just beginning to brown. Turn the heat to low, and add the sweet chili sauce, whisking to combine. Add the vinegar and stir. Allow the mixture to cook over the low heat for 2 minutes. Add the coriander, mirin, soy and tomatoes. Cook until the tomatoes are soft, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat and add the lemon segments.

Place the mixture in a blender and process until smooth. Taste and adjust flavors if needed. For a smooth sauce, pass the sauce through a fine sieve into a bowl. Add the chopped basil.

Service

Place a shrimp skewer on a warmed plate. Dot the dipping sauce around the plate. Garnish with basil sprigs. Serve immediately.

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