

Dipping into Seasonal Sauces

By Carol Harvie Yamaguchi

When the days are long and lazy, and the weather is warm, our eating habits lean towards appetizers and easily assembled or hastily thrown together meals. In the summer it doesn't matter so much about following any strict rules or complicated recipes. As long as there are fresh seasonal ingredients available, a variety of interesting and impromptu dishes can be created by using dipping sauces.

Sauces can intensify, enliven, and invigorate: they can enhance meals with added flavour, contrast, texture, and colour. Dipping sauces are also extremely versatile because they can easily be adapted to suit the dietary preferences, culture, or theme of the meal. A platter of lightly steamed veggies is energized with a multilayered Thai dipping sauce aromatic with chili, lemon grass, and fish sauce. All a sudden carrot sticks and celery are invigorated with a spicy, salty, tangy flavour! In Italy, a colorful array of fresh vegetables is served with sea salt and the greenest of virgin olive oils: simple yet tantalizing. In Japan, a sweetened miso sauce enhanced with toasted ground sesame is used for dipping steamed vegetables like asparagus, artichoke and string beans. In the Mediterranean, there is an assortment of healthy dips to choose from including pesto, aioli, tapanade, anchoiade, tsatsiki, homous, and baba ganoosh.

Grilled, fried or boiled meats, chicken and seafood are also tasty with dipping sauces. Italian Salsa Verde, basically a piquant vinaigrette flavoured with herbs, garlic, and anchovies, is served with grilled meat, tuna or 'bolito misto', a selection of boiled sausage, beef, chicken, potatoes and vegetables. Mexican Salsa, with its many exciting variations using brightly coloured chopped vegetables and herbs is excellent with grilled foods. Try a spicy Gazpacho dressing with poached salmon or trout. Chutneys, relishes, and fruit coulis can all be adapted as summer sauces to accompany a barbecued meal. Nuoc Cham, a spicy fish sauce containing fermented anchovy type fish, chiles, garlic, and lime juice is used to enhance a number of fried or grilled meat and seafood dishes in Vietnamese cooking. Spicy Indonesian peanut sauce is delicious with salad rolls as well as chicken, lamb, pork or beef satay. Japanese dipping sauces, generally flavoured with dashi (broth), sake, soy sauce, rice vinegar, bonito flakes, and ginger, are used with many different foods with slight variations of recipe. Tempura is dipped in a subtle version of this sauce, while a beef dish like Shabu Shabu offers a choice of two sauces: ponzu (citrus) or goma dare (sesame). Another popular Japanese summer dish is cold buckwheat noodles served with a dipping sauce; variations of this dish can include cold wheat noodles served with different toppings of sliced omelette, seaweed, pickled ginger, and sliced chicken. Korean cuisine also relies heavily on dipping sauces which usually have a base of soy sauce, rice vinegar, sugar, sesame, ginger and kochujang (chile) paste; any kind of grilled or fried food can be dipped in this spicy sauce. One very popular dish in Korea is pajeon which are mouth watering scallion and shrimp pancakes dipped in a sauce

with a vinegary flavour. Crispy fried spring rolls and pot stickers are popular throughout South East Asian and Chinese cuisines and these are served with variations of a tangy, tasty dipping sauce.

The selection of foods that are delicious when dipped is endless: all that is necessary is a creative imagination and fresh global ingredients.

Chinese Dumpling Sauce (good with pot stickers)

½ c soy sauce

¼ c rice vinegar

2 tsp sugar

1 clove garlic, finely minced

2 tsp fresh ginger, finely minced

1 green onion, finely chopped

a few drops hot pepper oil

These ingredients can be adjusted to taste.