



Asian Noodle Guide

1. Rice noodles

Rice noodles are flat, have a neutral flavor, white when uncooked, and semi-transparent when cooked. You can find rice noodles in rectangular sheets or cut in long, flat, thin strips.

They are generally made with rice flour and water, have a neutral taste and are perfect for so many dishes including pad thai and stir fries.

They are sold dried and will usually need to be soaked, covered in boiling water before using for about 5 minutes and re-boiled or pat dry, depending on your noodle. Some only need to be boiled for a minute.

I usually set rice noodles to soak while I get everything else ready until they are al dente or almost cooked. They can and will finish cooking in your stir fry or whatever dish you are serving them in.

Rice vermicelli is a type of rice noodle that looks like a white spaghetti and is common in Vietnamese dishes.

Rice sticks or thread are thinner, finer rice noodle commonly used in Vietnamese pho soup.

2. Egg noodles

The two most popular kinds of Chinese wheat noodles are lo mein and chow mein, made from wheat flour and egg, a golden to bright yellow color. Make to check the ingredients to be sure the yellow color is from eggs and not food coloring when purchasing egg noodles.

Lo mein are generally soft and chow mein are firmer and crispier. Both are shaped similar to spaghetti, but thicker, chewier and more available fresh at an Asian market or widely available dried.

Both fresh and dried noodles need to be briefly boiled to al dente or almost cooked before using in a variety of noodle dishes and stir fries. These noodles can be stir fried as well until crispy.

3. Glass or Cellophane Noodles

Glass noodles are chewy, springy, thin, threadlike, translucent, neutral tasting, basically like see through spaghetti, made from different starches other than wheat or rice and water. Perfect for stir fries and crispy when deep fried.

Unless deep frying, these noodles need to be soaked before being boiled for a few minutes. Once drained and rinsed with cold water, they need to be tossed in oil to prevent them all from sticking to each other.

They absorb the flavors they are cooked in beautifully and if they are not served in soup you need to heavily salt the cooking water.

4. Soba Noodles

Soba noodles are thin, straight, light to medium brown colored noodles, with a nutty flavor, made from buckwheat flour, wheat flour and water, and are found mainly in Japanese and Korean dishes.

These noodles are most commonly served cold in a salad or in a hot Japanese soup or with a dipping sauce.

These noodles can be found dried in most Asian supermarkets. You do not need to soak these noodles. They boil in minutes and need to be soaked in cold water immediately after to stop the cooking process.

5. Ramen Noodles

Ramen is the most popular of all the Asian noodle varieties and is most commonly wheat based, although can be an egg noodle too.

They are a thinner noodle than chow mein or lo mein, curly, thin, very long, and are pale yellow or off white. These noodles can be purchased dried or fresh.

Instant, mass produced varieties of dried ramen soups are widely available on grocery shelves everywhere and take minutes to boil and prepare.

I urge you to purchase and use dried Ramen noodles that do not include soup packets at least once to see the difference in the noodle. Try adding those Ramen noodles to your prepared broth and they will soften in minutes.

Authentic ramen restaurants will serve fresh version of the noodle or you can purchase fresh Ramen noodles at larger Asian grocery stores. If you ever have the opportunity, I urge you to try them fresh at least once.

6. Udon noodles

Udon noodles are a very pale, white, neutral flavored, Japanese and the thickest, fattest, chewiest wheat flour based Asian noodle, commonly found in hot soups and some cold dishes as well.

They can be purchased fresh, frozen but most commonly come in pre-cooked, vacuum sealed, portioned packages. Before using them, they need to be boiled for just a few minutes. They absorb so much flavor.

7. Somen noodles

Somen noodles are made with wheat flour, are very long and thin, white, smooth, made mainly by machines stretching the dough instead of cutting it. Sold in individual and sometimes colored portions.

They are most commonly served with Japanese dipping sauces or in both hot and cold Korean soups.