

James Seow



I grew up in a Singaporean family with Chinese and Peranakan (Straits Chinese) heritage. My grandma is a Nonya (Peranakan woman). One of my fondest memories is watching her and my mum cook all sorts of Singaporean Chinese dishes with strong Malay and Indonesian influences. Many of them were hot, sour, sweet, spicy and pungent. I remember helping my grandma pound a wide range of rempah (spice mix) involving shallots, pandan, chillies, candlenuts, lemongrass, turmeric and all varieties of ginger with a mortar and pestle when I was a young boy.

My passion for cooking and love of eating is deeply influenced by the dedicated cooks in my family - my grandma, my mum and an aunt I was particularly close to. They inspired me with their honest home cooking, and their spirit of diligence in the kitchen. Feeding people well is an expression of love, care and affection in my family. Moments of sharing simple weekday dinners and elaborate celebratory feasts with family and friends are precious to me. Magic happens at the dinner table - it is where conversations begin, understanding grows, and relationships deepen.

All my happy food encounters and memories are documented in my food blog on [Instagram](#) & Facebook, The Well-Fed Nomad - www.facebook.com/thewellfednomad

Babi Asam (Pork in Tamarind Sauce) is a classic Peranakan dish that incorporates ingredients from its mother cultures - Chinese (e.g. salted soy beans, dark soy sauce) and Malay/Indonesian (e.g. candlenuts, tamarind, belachan). Peranakan cooking is one of many early fusion cooking styles, and brings together the beautiful flavours from diverse cultures provided by migrants, traders and natives in Singapore and Malaysia. It represents the unpretentious and authentic cooking my family and I adore at home.



Babi Asam is one of the many Peranakan dishes that can be served as part of a simple family dinner or an elaborate festive meal. It is savoury, a bit sour, and lightly sweet and pungent. I prefer to serve this dish in a thick

sauce with steamed rice on the side and a hot sambal chilli condiment. You can use chicken instead of pork (just shorten the cooking time), and leave out the belachan if you are allergic to shellfish. The dish will still turn out delicious.



BABI ASAM with James

Pork in Tamarind Sauce

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#thebentspoon

For more info visit

www.thorneharbour.org/thebentspoon

Preparation Time: 20 mins

Cooking Time: 45 mins

Serves 4



INGREDIENTS

700g pork belly

4 large red chillies, sliced

2 tbsp salted soy beans
(taucheo), mashed

1 tbsp tamarind pulp (asam)

600ml water

5 tbsp vegetable oil

2 tbsp shaved coconut

palm sugar (gula Melaka)

1 tsp dark soy sauce

1/4 cup chopped

fresh coriander leaves

Spice mix (rempah):

4 candlenuts (buah keras)

15 large shallots (bawang merah)

6 cloves garlic

1 tbsp fermented shrimp paste

(belachan)



METHOD

- 1) Rinse and cut pork belly into large bite-sized pieces.
- 2) Place tamarind pulp in a bowl with 200 ml water. Rub the tamarind pulp off the seeds. Strain the tamarind mixture through a sieve to get the tamarind juice. Discard pulp and seeds.
- 3) Peel and cut shallots and garlic into large pieces. Pound all spice mix ingredients with a mortar and pestle until you get a semi-fine paste. Alternatively, blend spice mix ingredients in a food processor.
- 4) Heat oil in a pot and stir-fry the spice mix paste until light brown and fragrant.
- 5) Add pork belly to the pot and stir lightly to brown the meat slightly, and coat them with the spice mix.
- 6) Add mashed salted soy beans, tamarind juice, dark soy sauce and coconut palm sugar. Stir lightly and add the remaining water. Bring to boil, then lower heat.
- 7) Add sliced chillies. Cover pot with lid and simmer for 30 to 45 minutes. Give it a good stir a couple of times during simmering to ensure the bottom of the pot does not burn.
- 8) When pork belly turns tender and a rich, thick sauce is formed, turn off heat.
- 9) Serve Babi Asam whilst hot with steamed white rice and sambal chilli condiment, garnished with chopped coriander leaves.