

Herbs and Spices used in Thai Cooking

Horapha. Kaphrao and maenglak are varieties of sweet basil, annuals growing about 40 cm high. Horapha seems to be the nearest to the sweet basil used in European tomato dishes and Italian pesto. a sauce eaten by the Genoese with pasta and also used as a flavouring for soups. Horapha is used here as a vegetable and for flavouring. Kaphrao leaves are narrower and often tinged with reddish purple. It releases its aroma and flavour only when cooked and is used with fish, beef and chicken. Maenglak leaves are slightly hairy and paler green than horapha. It is sometimes called lemon-scented basil but definitely has a peppery taste when chewed; it is very similar to Italian dwarf basil and is used as a vegetable and for flavouring. The seeds (luk maenglak) are used in desserts, becoming gelatinous when soaked in water for a few minutes. In countries where these sweet basil are not available fresh, you should grow them yourself since dried ones are useless and all three are easy to grow from seed. In temperate climates they may be grown outdoor in summer in full sun or in pots in the kitchen window the rest of the year

Mint; bai saranae; *Mentha arvensis*. this mint is similar to the mint used for mint sauce in England and is used here as a vegetable and for flavouring.

Pepper; Phrik thai; *Piper nigrum*. Black pepper is milder but more aromatic than white pepper. Fresh green peppercorns are delicious with a special aromatic taste of their own and are available all year round but are best towards the end of the rainy season.

Chillis; phrik: *Capsicum* spp. Scientists believe that chillis are native to Central America and that they were brought to India and the Far East by the Portuguese in the 16th Century. They are called "ship pepper" in India to distinguish them from the native pepper, *Piper nigrum* or phrik thai. This means that Thai food has been chilli-hot for only the last 400 years. Many Thais, including one of our foremost botanics, are reluctant to believe this, arguing that chillis may have been brought to Asia across the Pacific or even that chillis originated in Central Asia and were taken by Mongoloid people to the New World. They also argue that chillis have been known and used for centuries as a medicine as well as a condiment, to lower high blood pressure and cholesterol.

Whatever the arguments, there are over ten kinds of chillis in local markets varying in size and pepperiness. The smallest and hottest is phrik khi nu of which the kind called phrik khi nu suan is the hottest. Phrik chi fa are finger size and may be red, green or yellow. Both these chillis are *Capsicum frutescens*. A larger one, *Capsicum annum*, phrik yuak, is pale green and used for stuffing. Another variety popular in Chiang Mai is phrik num. The bell or sweet peppers are not used in Thai cooking but may be used as substitutes. In recent years a new chilli has been imported from Mexico called phrik khi nu Kaset which has a longer pod than our native phrik khi nu.

Garlic; krathiani: *Allium sativum*. Garlic can be bought in quantity and should be hung by its stalks. It is easier to peel garlic after smashing the cloves with the side of a knife. To make garlic oil, chop a handful of garlic, and fry it in plenty of hot oil until golden. The oil and the fried garlic can be stored in a jar for garnishing kaeng chind and for tossing with noodles and rice. Pickled garlic: krathiam dang; pickled in vincai flavoured with a little sugar, may be bought at almost any market.

About the Author

Vipp Rongsit is an editor specialize in Thai food & Thai recipes.

[Thai Restaurants](#) | [Thai Salad Recipes](#) | [Thai Food Recipes](#)

Source: <http://www.serverforever.com>