



Winedog Speaks

Asian Noodle Soup

If you are a foodie in southwestern Ohio then you have entered the sanctified portals of Jungle Jim's in Fairfield numerous times in search of the ultimate gastronomic experience or to allow the vibes of the place to seep into your brain through your taste buds.

This past week I made my monthly pilgrimage after carefully balancing my checking account. (If you've been there then you understand.) I put on a fresh pair of Rockport walking shoes, grabbed my portable GPS and meditated over my shopping list for 2 days just to be sure I hadn't missed something.

Every visit is an adventure and this one was no exception. I'll normally use up at least two hours and figure for a 50/50 acquisition ratio (50 percent of what I buy is from my shopping list and the other 50 percent is the result of pure impulse buying). I was able to hit the ground running for about 65 feet and there came my first "Oh, that looks interesting" stop. It was the olive bar!

Now there are some that will see a cold table with sneeze guards organized with 20 one-quarter size stainless steel 4-inch deep pans filled with a mind blowing assortment of olives in 6 shades of green, plump and wrinkled black, and the occasional blend with cornichons and pearl onions mixed in for snap. Not me! I was suddenly transported to a sidewalk café in Nice looking out over the Mediterranean as a over-worked waiter hurried to my table with a glass of the local red wine, a board of ripe cheeses and a ceramic bowl filled with plump green olives stuffed with anchovies.

Chuh-ching! I move to my next stop after filling a quart-sized plastic container with \$15 worth of olives from four different countries. If you were there that day, I was the guy with the glazed look in his eyes leaning into the imported cheese case trying to sniff through the plastic wrapper on the sheep's milk Manchego cheese from Spain. I was just a little out of control.

I don't really remember a lot at this point but I know I spent a fair amount of time talking to a very healthy looking gentleman from somewhere in Indonesia about his vegetarian regiment and how his mother prepares banana flower pods that make him want to weep just thinking about them. (I'm still working on that recipe and, yes, Jungle Jim's does sell the pods.)

I won't bore you with the blow-by-blow of this trip but I did spend a fair amount of time in the Asian section of the store and realized that I've never offered any instruction on preparing udon noodles. My family and I love them and they are a quick, filling answer to any meal needs including breakfast. (Noodle shops in Japan do much of their business during the breakfast hours.)

I've noticed lately that most markets, not just the Jungle Jim's of the world, offer udon noodles in their Asian sections but if you really want to experience the full range that are offered you will have to visit an Asian market or JJ's if you are within driving distance.

Here's the basic instructions for preparing a tasty noodle soup that is healthy and very filling:

Japanese Noodles in Broth

You'll need:

2 cups finely chopped scallions or green onions

1 pound dried udon noodles

Japanese seven-spice mix (shichimi) - optional

4 quarts boiling water

8 cups low sodium chicken stock

¼ cup Japanese soy sauce

2 tablespoons sugar

Sea salt to taste (about 1 tablespoon)



Add your noodles to the boiling water and cook according to package instructions. You'll want them "al dente" and still firm, never mushy. Drain and rinse under cold water when done until your noodles are cool.

In a large pot over high heat bring to boil a combination of your chicken stock, soy sauce, sugar and salt. The broth must be served boiling hot. To reheat your noodles place them in a sieve and dip them into boiling water. Divide the noodles into bowls according to the number of servings you need, sprinkle with scallions and ladle 1 ½ to 2 cups of hot broth over each serving of noodles. Sprinkle on the spice mix if using according to taste.

If you'd like to have some fun later in the year, the Japanese have a tradition of serving a variation of this recipe to be enjoyed while viewing the first full moon in September. It is called:

Moon-Viewing Noodles

Prepare Japanese Noodles in Broth as instructed above and top each bowl with a carefully poached egg.

I did want to mention that several readers called and asked if I had a phone number for Brian's Fishin' 4 Chicken from last week's column. He can be reached at (513) 648-0111.

Hope you'll try some tasty udon noodles and we'll be visiting with Jeff Bledsoe next week who is the magician behind some of the best barbecue I've tasted in my life. He's going to share some of his secrets with all of you amateur "pit masters" out there manning smokers and grills. I'll see you next time! Cheers.

Allison, a native of Warren County in Southwestern Ohio, has been in the fine wine and fine dining field for 32 years in the South Florida, Chicago and Southwestern Ohio markets. He writes a weekly syndicated column, manages a fine wine business and is the executive chef for Winedog Fine Wines and Catering Services. You can visit his column archive at www.winedog.com and take your comments and questions directly to him at 888-288-0668 or email him at winedog@winedog.com. He has resided with his wife and two sons since 1999 in the country outside of Morrow, Ohio

