

CURRIED TUNA

One staple in every American household is canned tuna. In some respects, if anything defines American cooking, it is canned tuna. We put it in salads. We make a cream sauce and mix in some canned tuna and pour the whole thing over noodles, which we then cover with breadcrumbs and bake—the proverbial tuna noodle surprise—which either can be very good or a nasty surprise indeed.

We mix it with chopped celery and green onion and mayonnaise for tuna salad sandwiches. When I was in college back east, the local pizza parlor made hot tuna grinders. Not having a clue what they were, I ordered one. It turned out to be a tuna submarine sandwich, made with mashed tuna and mayonnaise on a long roll, with shredded cheddar cheese sprinkled over the tuna and then the bottom half of the sandwich run under the broiler until the cheese melted. It was delicious.

And now I've just discovered a marvelous fusion of Indian and American cooking—curried tuna. It's very easy to do and quite delicious. Take and peel half a medium onion, and slice it into half-rings, just as thin as you can. Peel and finely chop a clove of garlic. Thinly slice one-half to one whole hot pepper, like a Serrano chile, seeds and all. Peel and grate about a half-inch long piece of fresh ginger. I used some of the ginger puree in a tube that you can get in the produce section of the supermarket. I keep tubes of garlic puree and ginger puree in the freezer and just squeeze out a couple of inches or so when I need them. You'll also need a couple of tablespoons of chopped fresh cilantro.

Heat an 8-inch frying pan over medium-high heat, and when hot add about 1 ½ tablespoons of cooking oil—I use canola oil as it can take high cooking temperatures without burning. Add the sliced onion and stir for a few minutes. Add the ginger, garlic and sliced chile and keep stirring, until the onion starts to brown slightly. Put in a teaspoon of curry powder and stir for another minute or two.

Add a 6-ounce can of oil-packed tuna and stir it around, breaking up any big lumps. Dark tuna is fine—you don't need to spend the money for the top of the line albacore. Only drain the tuna a little bit as the oil keeps the fish from drying out. Turn the heat to low, and add a generous amount of freshly ground black pepper. Check for salt—you may need to add a pinch. Cook for another minute or so and stir in the chopped cilantro. Stir well to mix and turn off the heat. This serves two and can easily be doubled.

You can eat this hot, cold or at room temperature. It is delicious over rice. It makes a wonderful filling for a sandwich, either stuffed it into some pita bread or on any sliced bread, with a piece of lettuce. A scoop of curried tuna makes a marvelous addition into just about any salad. It is wonderful just eaten as is, accompanied by some naan, which is Indian unleavened bread that you can get at the supermarket. If you can't get naan, you can sometimes find thick tortillas, or even flour tortillas will be fine. And the curried tuna makes a wonderful filling for any sort of wrap. As you can see, it's a great picnic dish.

I served the curried tuna with a tomato raita. Simply empty a small container of plain yogurt into a bowl. Add a couple of pinches of salt and about ¼ teaspoon of ground cumin. Then add two or three diced tomatoes—I just squeeze the seeds out before dicing them. Stir the whole thing up and add two or three tablespoons of chopped fresh cilantro or chopped fresh mint, or a combination of the two.

Cold beer or iced tea is the perfect accompaniment and some fresh fruit for dessert makes a perfect picnic—if it ever stops raining, that is! This is Steve Muni for the K-Nugget Kitchen.