

Recipe by Julia Heffelfinger

Grilled Ginger-Pork Meatballs with Rice Noodle Salad

Serves 4 to 6

Looking to switch up your grill routine? These chilled noodle bowls are perfect for the dog days of summer when you're craving something light yet filling. The star of this recipe is the Vietnamese-influenced pork kofta. The oblong grilled meatballs are scented with fresh ginger, lime zest, garlic, and fish sauce and get beautifully charred over the fire. Serve them over a pile of chilled rice noodles and with lots of crunchy vegetables and bright herbs. The best thing about this recipe? Both the meatball mixture and the zippy fish sauce vinaigrette can be prepared in advance, so it's easy to pull together at dinnertime. The vinaigrette is inspired by one of my favorites from Chef David Chang. Here I use it as a dressing for the cold rice noodle salad, but it's also fantastic tossed with roasted broccoli or Brussels sprouts, or spooned over grilled fish.

Meatballs

6 metal or wooden skewers (see Note)
1½ pounds ground pork
¾ cup plain or gluten-free breadcrumbs
3 Tablespoons fresh ginger, peeled and minced
2 Tablespoons fish sauce
4 garlic cloves, minced
2 teaspoons finely grated lime zest
¼ to ½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
½ teaspoon kosher salt
Canola or grapeseed oil, for brushing

Salad

½ cup fish sauce (adjust to taste—some fish sauce brands are saltier)
¼ cup brown sugar
3 Tablespoons fresh lime juice (from 1 lime), plus lime wedges for serving
2 Tablespoons rice vinegar
2 Tablespoons very thinly sliced cilantro stems, plus small sprigs for garnish
2 Tablespoons chopped mint, plus small leaves for garnish
2 Tablespoons minced jalapeño or serrano pepper
1 garlic clove, minced
1 pound rice noodles
2 Tablespoons canola or grapeseed oil
1 head romaine lettuce, thinly sliced
1 small bunch of scallions, thinly sliced
3 Persian cucumbers, thinly sliced
3 large carrots, julienned
Store-bought crispy shallots (optional; I like the Lars brand) and chopped salted roasted peanuts or cashews, for garnish

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1. **Prepare the Meatballs** In a large bowl, combine all of the ingredients and mix gently with your hands. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour and up to overnight. If using wood skewers, soak them in water for at least 1 hour before using.
2. Divide the pork mixture into six portions, about 4 ounces each. Mold each portion around a skewer, forming it into an oblong meatball about 1½ inches thick. Wet your hands, if needed.
3. **Prepare the Salad** In a small bowl, whisk the fish sauce with the brown sugar, lime juice, rice vinegar, chopped cilantro stems, chopped mint, pepper, garlic and, ¼ cup of water. Set the fish sauce vinaigrette aside.
4. In a large pot of salted boiling water, cook the rice noodles according to the package instructions. Drain and rinse under cold water. Transfer the noodles to a rimmed baking sheet and drizzle with the oil and 2 tablespoons of the fish sauce vinaigrette. Toss to coat.
5. When you're ready to cook, preheat a grill to medium (400°F). Clean the grate thoroughly and brush with oil. Alternatively, set a grill pan over medium-high heat and brush with oil. Grill the skewers over direct heat with the lid closed, turning once, until well browned and cooked through, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer to a plate to rest.
6. Divide the rice noodles, romaine, scallions, cucumber, and carrots among shallow bowls. Top each bowl with a skewer. Drizzle with some of the fish sauce vinaigrette and garnish with small cilantro sprigs, torn mint leaves, crispy shallots, and chopped nuts. Alternatively, arrange the rice noodles, vegetables, skewers, and garnishes on a large platter and let people build their own bowls. Serve right away, passing lime wedges and more fish sauce vinaigrette at the table.

NOTE For this recipe, we like to use two-pronged skewers (we like [these bamboo ones](#)). They hold the pork kofta (meatballs) in place and make them easier to turn on the grill. They're also great for kebabs and for grilling unwieldy foods like shrimp and cherry tomatoes.