

Vanilla poached prawns

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The delicate notes of the spice marry wonderfully with the sweetness of the prawns, and here the other great spice native to Mexico gives a little fire to the sauce with just a few pequin chillies.

The vanilla plant is a variety of orchid that was originally cultivated in the Gulf of Mexico by the Totonac people thousands of years ago. Though used ubiquitously in sweets, the unusual pairing of vanilla and shellfish is, in fact, a classic of modern sauces.

Ingredients (serves 4)

Preparation time: 25 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes

Poaching stock

- 400g large banana [prawns](#)
- 1 vanilla pod
- ½ white onion, roughly chopped
- 2 basil stalks
- 6 black peppercorns
- 3 Mexican bay leaves

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- 3 fresh green pequin chillies
- 3 parsley stalks
- 1200ml water
- Salt, to taste

To Serve

- 70ml white wine
- 150g unsalted butter, diced and chilled
- ¼ cup cooked baby peas
- 12 dried red pequin chillies
- ¼ cup black turtle beans, cooked, drained and rinsed
- 8 baby green onions, quickly blanched and refreshed
- ½ bunch baby basil

Method

Peel the banana prawns, reserve the uncooked prawn meat in the refrigerator and place the heads and shells in a 25 cm pot.

Slit the vanilla pod down the side with a sharp knife and scrape out the seeds and reserve. Roughly chop the empty pod and add to the pot with the prawn shells. Add the remaining poaching stock ingredients and bring to the boil. Reduce to a simmer for the flavours to develop for five minutes.

Meanwhile in a non-reactive 10 cm saucepan, bring the white wine and the reserved vanilla seeds to a boil and reduce to half. Reserve.

Bring the stock back up to a steady boil and add the prawns. Be sure to keep the stock boiling as this will ensure a firm texture. Let them cook for around 60 seconds, then gently remove and keep them warm.

Place the reduced wine back on the stove and bring to a boil. Add a pinch of salt and lower the heat to a minimum. Start adding the diced chilled butter, swirling the pan constantly as it melts. Continue adding the butter until it has all been combined. Add the prawns, baby peas, chillies, black beans and baby onions and gently coat the ingredients with the sauce. Serve immediately, garnished with baby basil leaves.

Note: Pequin chilli is available in its dried form from Mexican grocers and speciality food stores. To substitute fresh use a few slices of a small hot green chilli with the seeds removed.

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