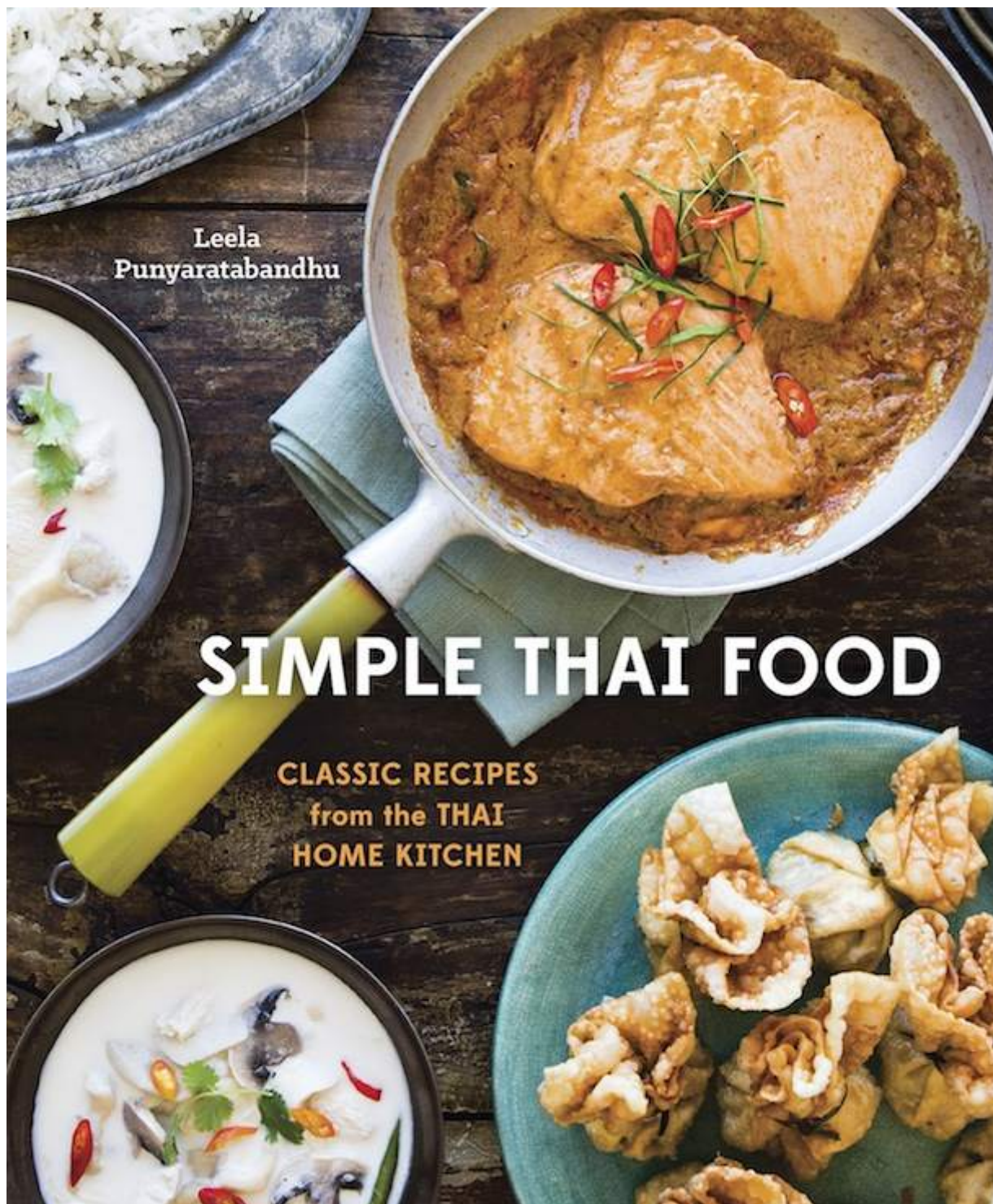


# Cook the Book: 'Simple Thai Food' by Leela Punyaratabandhu

KATE WILLIAMS



There is a tendency in these, our food-obsessed days, to view cookbooks on foreign cuisine to be all-or-nothing propositions—they should be authentic, detailed, and substitution-free, or else they're simply American cookbooks in disguise. But I believe that there's an important middle ground between the Pok Pok cookbooks of the world and the

mass-market "Asian-style" books that show up at every garage sale. In this space are titles like *[Simple Thai Food](#)* by Serious Eats contributor [Leela Punyaratabandhu](#).

*Simple Thai Food* is neither dogmatic nor full of shortcuts. Some of its recipes will likely be very familiar to anyone who's set foot in an American Thai restaurant; you'll find tom kha kai, pad thai, and green papaya salad. At the same time, even Thai food veterans will find new dishes, like leaf-wrapped salad bites filled with nuts, ginger, shallots, and dried shrimp. Punyaratabandhu writes most of these recipes as she would prepare them for Thai guests, using scratch-made curry pastes and generally hard-to-find ingredients. Yet in her extensive and detailed headnotes, she includes helpful hints for preparation, shopping tips, and, most importantly, good ideas for substitutes. In this way, readers are given a wealth of options, none more (or less) delicious than the last.

However, it is important to note that the book isn't *exactly* simple. Sure, these dishes are easier to make than those in, say, the *[Pok Pok cookbook](#)*, but many have a steep learning curve. There is quite a bit of prep work involved in much of Punyaratabandhu's food, and if you do choose to make things like curry pastes from scratch, you'll want to allow yourself some extra time. This fact is not to say that the recipes aren't worthwhile; in fact, every dish I made from the book smacked of fish sauce, lime juice, and chilies in all the right ways.

This week, we'll taste a range of Thai treats, starting with sweet-and-sour **son-in-law eggs**. Next we'll move on to the aforementioned **salad bites** and a refreshing dish of **pork with iced broccoli stems**. Later in the week, we'll grill **rib-eye** and serve it with a **fiery roasted tomato sauce**, and finish out our exploration with a pot of **curry chicken noodles**.

## Win 'Simple Thai Food'

Thanks to our good friends at Ten Speed Press, we have five (5) copies of *[Simple Thai Food](#)* to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win a copy is to tell us **your favorite Thai dish** in the comments section below.