

The Role of Food in Human Culture: A Summer Recipe from Vietnamese Culture

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➤ The Role of Food and Human Culture



➤ Many of us grow up eating the food of our cultures, enjoying family recipes passed down for generations. Food is a link to our heritage and cultural identity. Food affirms ethnic ties, bringing family and friends together. In stimulating our senses--smell, sight, taste, touch--food recalls life's most meaningful moments. Food and culture signify part of who we are, how we connect, what we value, and how we express ourselves as human beings.

➤ The Three Diet Cultures of Asia

Many Asian cultures have a shared tradition of gathering the family to socialize or celebrate special events over big meals. Still, numerous regional cultures of Asia have their own ethnic cuisines, reflecting history and environment. According to culinary historians and anthropologists there are three major Asian dietary cultures in traditional Asian cooking.

Southwest cooking style uses hot peppers, black pepper, cloves, and other strong spices, along with curry. Rice and chapati (flat bread) are a key part of the diet, while beans play an important role in regular meals. **Northeast** cooking style highlights fats, oils, and sauces in cooking, while the foods, spices and seasonings are considered medicines to promote a long and healthy life. **Southeast** cooking style is a delicate balance of quick stir-frying, steaming, and/or boiling, emphasize distinct spices and seasonings (citrus juices, basil, cilantro, mint, galangal, lemon grass, tamarind) that enhance aroma. While **Northeast** cuisines use soy sauce in meals, **Southeast** cuisines use fish sauce for flavor.

➤ **Vietnamese Cuisine**

Vietnamese cuisine features a combination of flavoring ingredients with five distinctive tastes—**sweet, salty, spicy, bitter, or sour**. Each dish highlights light and balanced flavors of these elements. Many main dishes are made with rice noodles, rice papers, and rice flour (instead of wheat). Vietnamese recipes use common ingredients such as shrimp paste, fish sauce, bean sauce, fresh herbs (lemongrass, ginger, mint--húng nhủi, Vietnamese mint, cilantro, chili, lime, and Thai basil). With a balance of fresh herbs, vegetables, meats and rice, Vietnamese food is considered one of the healthiest cuisines worldwide.

- **Spring Rolls:** Vietnamese spring roll, or summer rolls “Gỏi Cuốn,” is a traditional Vietnamese dish with several layers of pork or shrimp, herbs, vegetables, and thin rice vermicelli noodles (bún) rolled in rice paper (bánh tráng). Vietnamese spring rolls are not deep-fried or cooked. They are served freshly made at room temperature, with a side of peanut dipping sauce or Vietnamese dipping fish sauce.



Vietnamese American spring/summer rolls. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, homemade food is important to keep your family safe and healthy while spending time in the kitchen. Consider making your own [Vietnamese spring rolls](#) and enjoy a delicious meal as a snack, light lunch, or special treat. Spice up your creativity and culinary interest by using traditional rice paper with fillings of your choice of vegetables or meats and try different dipping sauces. A fresh healthy meal makes you feel good and happy!

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