



Midsummer in southern Minnesota can be torrid, so here are three soothing, light chicken dishes that can be served at room temperature or chilled on hot days. (Two of the three are equally yummy made with braised tofu.) All three celebrate the beautiful produce and the small chickens of the season:

Bong-Bong Chicken
Summer Spring Rolls with Spicy Dipping Sauce
Avgolemono Soup

All three dishes are built on using the tender flesh of spring chickens and a remarkable poaching technique I learned from the late Barbara Tropp. If you are vegetarian, you can replace the chicken in Bong-Bong Chicken and the spring rolls with seasoned, braised tofu. Avgolemono Soup, a Greek classic, is made with the broth you create while producing the soft chicken breasts needed for the other two dishes.

Barbara Tropp's No-Poach Chicken Breasts

Barbara Tropp's "no-poach" method ensures perfectly silky, succulent chicken every time—and offers you a flavorful pot of broth into the bargain.

Ingredients: 2 lbs. fresh bone-in, skin-on chicken breasts*
2 thick slices of fresh ginger, skin on
1–2 scallions, cut in thirds

- Put enough cold water into heavy pot or Dutch oven with tight cover to cover chicken breasts by 2 inches, but don't put chicken in yet. Pot should be cast iron or enameled cast iron so it will retain heat over long no-poaching period.
- Cut two thick slices of fresh ginger; leave skin on. Clean and cut 1–2 green onions, then cut them into thirds. Smack slices of ginger and scallions with side of heavy knife to open them up a bit; add them to pot.
- Cover pot and bring it to rolling boil. Remove cover and slide breasts under water. Turn off heat, replace lid, and let breasts "no-poach" in hot water for next 2 hours. Pot will retain enough heat to stay hotter than 145° and cook chicken thoroughly and *safely*.
- At end of the cooking period, chicken will be ready for use, and you'll have a pot of beautiful chicken broth for your Avgolemono Soup.

** Chicken skin and bones contribute substantially to the savoriness of the broth, so leave them in—broth made from boneless, skinless chicken breasts has far less flavor. If you don't make your soup until Day 2 or 3, you can easily skim off any congealed fat from the surface of the refrigerated broth before reheating it.*

Day 1: Bong-Bong Chicken

This dish is always a crowd pleaser, and it's beautiful to look at: a ring of thinly sliced cucumbers surrounds a mound of rice noodles. Surmounting the noodles is a bed of shredded chicken covered in a spicy peanut sauce sprinkled with bright green cilantro. The dish uses rice noodles, so it's best served at room temperature. Prepare the complex sauce first because its flavor improves as it sits out at room temperature.

Spicy peanut sauce

Ingredients: 10 cloves of garlic, smashed and peeled
Fresh cilantro, most of a bunch
½ c. unsalted peanut butter
½ c. soy sauce
5 Tbs. sugar
½ tsp. Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
1–2 Tbs. hot chili oil

- Combine all ingredients and grind until close to smooth in a food processor or with a mortar and pestle. Leave a bit of texture to the sauce- it should not be completely smooth.
- Cover and allow flavors to marry while you prepare rest of dish. (This sauce will keep indefinitely in the refrigerator, if you can avoid eating it all at once.)

Chicken and Rice Noodles

Ingredients: 1–2 very firm cucumbers
 1 package of thin rice sticks (rice noodles)
 1 lb. no-poached chicken breasts, skinned, or 1 lb. julienned, braised tofu
 Fresh cilantro, a handful, coarsely chopped

- Slice 1–2 very firm cucumbers as finely as possible; a handheld mandolin is perfect for this, but you can do a creditable job with a sharp knife. Arrange the slices, slightly overlapped, around edge of large plate or platter.
- Bring large pot of water to boil; turn down to simmer and add package of rice sticks. Stir well to separate them. Cook until they're *al dente* (usually about 5–6 minutes). Drain and rinse under lukewarm water to separate. When they have drained, pile noodles onto plate/platter and arrange so that they're surrounded snugly by cucumber slices. **Save and refrigerate ¼ of the cooked noodles for use in Summer Spring Rolls.**
- Remove chicken breasts from the pot; remove their skins, and tear meat from bones. Bang (hence the *bong-bong*) meat with broad side of knife to open up its fibers. Using your fingers, tear meat into fine shreds. **Set aside and refrigerate a small amount of shredded chicken for use in Summer Spring Rolls.** Pile rest of chicken atop rice noodles.
- Pour spicy peanut sauce over chicken and sprinkle chopped cilantro over sauce.

Day 2: Summer Spring Rolls with Dipping Sauce

This is great fun to make for friends—which is to say, you prep the ingredients, and they assemble their own spring rolls. Like Bong-Bong chicken, this dish can be as easily made with braised tofu as with chicken.

Dipping sauce

Ingredients: ½ c. water
 ½ c. rice vinegar
 1 c. sugar
 1 tsp. salt
 1–2 Tbs. chopped garlic
 Sriracha sauce to taste
 Red pepper flakes (optional)

- Heat water, vinegar, sugar, salt and garlic until they produce a thin syrup.
- Remove from heat; add squirts of Sriracha sauce (or other hot sauce) to taste.

Spring Rolls

Ingredients: Cooked rice noodles saved from making Bong-Bong Chicken
 Cooked, shredded chicken or julienned braised tofu saved from making Bong-Bong Chicken
 Head of Boston or other soft lettuce
 Bunch of scallions
 ½ c. fresh mint leaves
 ½ c. fresh basil leaves
 1 carrot, julienned
 Sautéed fresh shiitake mushrooms (optional)
 Rice paper sheets

- Arrange neat piles of rice noodles and shredded chicken or tofu on large plate or platter.
- Separate leaves from head of soft lettuce, and make pile of these on platter.
- Pluck mint leaves from their stems; add to platter.

- Stack up pile of 8–10 basil leaves, roll up , then slice roll thinly to create lacy chiffonade of basil; add to platter.
- Julienne or otherwise create thin, short slices of carrot and add to platter.
- Using spray bottle, mist each rice paper sheet with warm water immediately before using it. The rice paper will soften up immediately.
- Pile your choice of ingredients on dampened sheet of rice paper, roll it up like burrito, and eat with dipping sauce.

Day 3: Avgolemono Soup

Skim the fat from refrigerated chicken broth, skin, and bones, reheat them, and they become the basis for one of the simplest and most satisfying of summer soups. Avgolemono is equally good chilled, at room temperature, or hot.

Ingredients: Broth, chicken skin, and chicken bones saved and refrigerated from no-poach chicken
 ½ c. long-grain white rice
 4 good egg yolks
 Juice of 3 lemons (Meyers are particularly nice)
 Salt

- Bring broth and chicken bits to simmer. After 10 minutes, strain out chicken skin and bones. Return strained broth to pot.
- Add ½ c. of rice; cover and let simmer for 15 minutes.
- In the meantime, beat yolks of 4 eggs until bright yellow and syrup-y.
- When rice has cooked to taste, slowly beat some of broth into egg yolks to slowly warm them up. Return broth-and-egg mixture to the soup pot.
- Squeeze lemon juice directly into soup, tasting frequently. Add salt only at end, to taste.
- Serve at any temperature.