

## Vietnamese

### About the Culture

- Vietnam occupies the eastern portion of the mainland of Southeast Asia and is heavily influenced by cultures from neighboring countries, as well as previous foreign occupation from China, France, Japan, and the US.<sup>1</sup>
- There are 2 distinct regions consisting of the northern and southern parts of the country with each region containing diverse ethnic populations speaking distinct languages and practicing individual cultural traditions.<sup>1</sup>
- A unifying characteristic among Vietnamese ethnic groups is a focus on family and small communities.<sup>1</sup>
- Common religious practices include Buddhism and Taoism.<sup>1</sup>



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### Eating Customs and Traditions

- Vietnamese cuisine is unique and reflects diverse cultural eating traditions due to its location close to many southern Asian countries and previous foreign occupation.<sup>2</sup>
- Typically 3 meals a day are consumed:<sup>3</sup>
  - ▶ **Breakfast (bữa sáng)**—consists of oatmeal, french bread with butter and jam, rice cakes with minced meat, or pho a very popular soup containing rice noodles and meat.
  - ▶ **Lunch (bữa trưa)**—consists of banh mi (French influenced sandwich), rice vermicelli, or meat wrapped in rice paper.
  - ▶ **Dinner (bữa tối)**—is almost always served with rice accompanied by steamed or stir-fried vegetables with pork or fish.
- Fasting is common when individuals are sick or for religious reasons. This includes abstaining from meat on certain days.<sup>3</sup>
- Many people believe in the Chinese yin (cold)/yang (hot) categorization of food and try to consume a balance of these different foods.<sup>3</sup>

### Cultural Ingredients

- Many Vietnamese adults are lactose intolerant, and therefore dairy products are not commonly consumed.<sup>3</sup>
- Rice is a staple food and consumed with almost every meal in some way including steamed rice, porridge, or as noodles.<sup>3</sup>
- Foods are typically lightly prepared using grilling, steaming, stewing, sauteing, and stir-frying methods to accompany seasoning and fresh spices including basil, shallots, ginger, lime, and cilantro.<sup>2</sup>
- Fish is the most common protein in Vietnamese diets, but cheaper common ingredients such as pork and beef have also become popular.<sup>3</sup>

# SNAP-Ed Cultural Awareness Toolkit—Vietnamese

## Adapting SNAP-Ed Curriculum to Reflect Dietary Patterns

- Promote non-dairy foods high in calcium, such as tofu or fortified soy products, to increase dietary intake of calcium.
- Reinforce using pre-established cooking methods such as steaming and stir-frying to help decrease saturated fat intake.
- Focus conversations around ways to include more whole grains and fiber in the diet.
- Promote low-sodium options with emphasis on continued use of fresh herbs.

## RECIPE RESOURCES

University of Hawaii

[Vietnamese Cultural Cuisine \(Pamphlet\)](#)

POPULAR FOODS	DESCRIPTION, SEASON, AND STORAGE	COMMONLY AVAILABLE FORMS AND SUBSTITUTIONS
Chinese Broccoli (Gai Lan)	<p>Part of the brassica family with broad blue-green leaves and thick edible stems.</p> <p>Available all year, best during spring and fall.</p> <p>Wash leaves under cold water for 30 seconds and remove any fibrous parts.</p> <p>Store in a plastic bag in the drawer of the fridge for 3-5 days.</p>	<p>Green broccoli, broccoli rabe, bok choy, and spinach</p> <p>Fresh</p> <p>Cut and packaged</p> <p>Frozen (in pieces)</p>
Fish sauce (Nuoc Mam)	<p>Made of the liquid exuded by fermented fish and salt, this condiment is used to flavor dishes, similar to salt and pepper in western diets.</p> <p>Strong assertive flavor, typically mixed with acid or heat.</p> <p>Available all year</p> <p>Store in cool dark, place at room temperature for 3 to 4 years (opened or unopened)</p>	<p>Golden Mountain sauce or low-sodium soy sauce are similar alternatives.</p> <p>Vegan fish sauce is available and made of seaweed instead of fish.</p> <p>Choose fish sauce brands free of added sugars such as caramel or molasses, which does not impact flavor.</p>
Thai Basil (rau quế)	<p>Part of the mint family with purple stems, hearty leaves, and strong anise like flavor.</p> <p>Available all year</p> <p>Rinse leaves under cold running water and pat dry.</p> <p>Store fresh leaves wrapped in damp paper towels in a large plastic bag in the fridge for up to 4 days. Can be stored with stems in a jar of water and leaves covered by a plastic bag in the fridge for up to 1 week.</p> <p>Freeze in an airtight zip-loc bag for up to 3 months.</p> <p>Dried basil should be stored in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for up to 6 months.</p>	<p>Sweet basil, purple basil, dwarf basil, italian basil, and mint.</p> <p>Fresh as leaves or in whole plant form with roots.</p> <p>Dried in bulk and individual packaging.</p> <p>Frozen (leaves)</p>

## References

1. Osborne M. Vietnam. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vietnam>. Accessed March 2, 2022.
2. University of Hawaii. Vietnamese Cultural Cuisine. 2007.
3. Tu J. Nutrition and fasting in Vietnamese culture. EthnoMed. <https://ethnomed.org/resource/nutrition-and-fasting-in-vietnamese->