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**I send you all best wishes for an auspicious New Year of the Snake.** Yes, in case you missed the memo, the Chinese New Year celebrations begin this coming Sunday. The Chinese or Lunar New Year starts with the first new moon of the ancient Chinese calendar and the celebrations continue until the moon is full. The holiday does more than mark the arrival of the new lunar year; it celebrates luck, happiness and prosperity. This year's lunar celebration is a welcome relief. With all the cold and dreary weather we have been having, any excuse to celebrate is a good one.

**According to Chinese custom, the New Year calls for a new look and a clean sweep.** Tradition demands that we welcome the New Year with new clothes. If you are a shopaholic, feel free to shop 'till you drop. In the days leading up to the new moon, Chinese families are also busy with mops and brooms. House and hearth are given a good going-over to sweep away any bad luck and clear the way for a bright future. Windows and doors are thrown open to welcome the New Year and the luck it brings. It's pretty chilly in New Hampshire in February so I think I'll keep my windows closed.

With clean houses and a great new look, the Chinese celebrate for fifteen fun-packed days. There are dinners with family and friends, special services to honor ancestors, gifts, parades and fireworks. Through western eyes it may look a bit like Thanksgiving, Memorial Day, Christmas, Mardi Gras and the 4th of July all rolled into one.

**Many of today's Lunar New Year traditions developed in ancient China.** According to legend, a Nian comes out of the mountains during the winter to hunt for humans. Fortunately, the ancients discovered that this man-eating beast is sensitive to loud noises and the color red. To keep the Nian at bay, the celebrations are packed with noisy fireworks, drums and cymbals and red is everyone's go-to color.

**Unlike western New Year celebrations, gifts are a big part of the festivities** and children traditionally receive red packets of money. Amounts are carefully chosen since certain numbers reflect good luck and honor. Even numbers are generally considered lucky, but beginners beware. Eight is very lucky but four is associated with death and funerals.

**But the most important gift of the Lunar New Year is time spent with family and friends.** Special holiday dinners with dishes symbolizing wealth, happiness and good fortune are shared. Whether you decide to throw a big party or meet a few friends at your favorite Chinese restaurant, put on your finest red sweater and gather around the table for a festive meal. Have a wonderful celebration and,

Bon appétit!



## Lettuce Wraps with Shrimp & Noodles

*A great choice for a New Year celebration! Lettuce symbolizes prosperity, shrimp signifies happiness and good fortune, noodles represent long life and water chestnuts denote unity.*

*Happy New Year!*

Serves 8



About 2 1/2 pounds shrimp  
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste  
1/4 cup Chinese rice wine or dry sherry  
1 tablespoon hoisin sauce  
1 teaspoon honey  
1 tablespoon soy sauce  
Peanut oil  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
2 teaspoons minced peeled ginger  
2 teaspoons minced jalapeno pepper  
Juice of 1 lime  
4 scallions, thinly sliced  
1/2 cup diced water chestnuts  
Romaine leaves

Prepare the noodles (recipe follows) and set aside.

Season the shrimp with salt and pepper.

Put the rice wine in a bowl, whisk in the hoisin sauce, honey and soy sauce. Whisk until smooth and well combined.

Heat a little oil in a wok or large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the garlic, ginger and jalapeno, and stir-fry for 15-30 seconds. Add the shrimp and stir-fry about 2 minutes. Add the hoisin mixture and toss to combine and cook 1-2 minutes more or until the shrimp are pink and cooked through. Remove from the heat, drizzle with lime juice, sprinkle with water chestnuts and scallions and toss.

Set out platters of romaine leaves, shrimp and noodles and let everyone assemble their own lettuce cups. To assemble: place a small mound of noodles on a romaine leaf and top with shrimp and water chestnuts. Roll up the lettuce leaf and enjoy.





*Another recipe from Susan Nye:  
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## Chinese Noodles

About 4 ounces vermicelli rice noodles  
1 tablespoon canola oil  
3 tablespoons unseasoned rice vinegar  
1 tablespoon soy sauce  
1 tablespoon fish sauce  
1 tablespoon hoisin sauce  
1 teaspoon sesame oil  
Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Put the vermicelli in a bowl, cover with hot water and soak for 10 minutes. Drain, rinse under cold water and drain well.

While the noodles soak, put the oil, vinegar, soy, fish and hoisin sauces and sesame oil in a bowl, season with salt and pepper to taste and whisk to combine. Add the drained noodles and toss to combine.