



sweet-hot garlic sauce

nahm jeem gratiem

- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup white vinegar
- ½ cup water
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped garlic
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon chili-garlic sauce (*sambal oelek*),
or Sri Rachaa sauce, or minced fresh hot red
chili peppers, or 1 to 2 teaspoons dried red
chili flakes

Sweet-Hot Garlic Sauce is simply wonderful and wonderfully simple. Heat transforms six humble ingredients into a beautiful red-gold sauce, a perfect foil for crisp fried spring rolls and the garlicky richness of gai yahng, Grilled Garlic Chicken, Issahn Style (page 57). To give this sauce its spicy edge, you have many options. My favorite is chili-garlic sauce (sambal oelek). This fire-engine red purée of fresh hot red chilies, garlic, and vinegar has visible seeds and a serious kick, and gives the best color. Other good choices are Sri Rachaa sauce; Tabasco sauce; dried red chili flakes; or a generous spoonful of minced and mashed fresh hot red chilies. Many Asian markets carry a decent version of this dipping sauce.

*Sweet-Hot Garlic Sauce makes a pleasing accompaniment to Sticky Rice (page 98), and anything grilled or fried; on the other hand, it tastes delicious tossed with steamed asparagus or broccoli, mixed with mayonnaise, or splashed into dressings and dips. I try to keep it on hand all the time. My dear friend and fellow cookbook author Crescent Dragonwagon likes it so much, she includes it in her magnum opus, *The Passionate Vegetarian*, with a new name: *Thai Crystal*.*

In a medium saucepan, bring the sugar, vinegar, water, garlic, and salt to a gentle boil over medium heat, stirring well to dissolve the sugar. Simmer 8 to 10 minutes, until you have a thin, smooth syrup. Remove from heat, stir in chili-garlic sauce, and set aside to cool. (If you use fresh hot red chili peppers or dried red chili flakes, use a fork to mash them up on your cutting board with the garlic and the salt, and then scoop the coarse paste into the warm sauce.) Serve at room temperature with Grilled Garlic Chicken, Issahn Style (page 57), or any other grilled or crisp-fried food. Sealed in a glass jar, it keeps in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Makes about 1¼ cups