Thai Beef Salad

Spicy · Serves 2

Ken's note: TBD

A sharp, sweet, salty, spicy dressing, warm sliced steak, herbs, and toasted rice powder (khao khua). Don’t overdress — add some dressing, toss, then adjust. The vegetables and herbs release moisture as they sit. Leftover dressing is good on grilled meat.

Ingredients

Toasted rice powder (khao khua)

- 100 g Thai glutinous (sticky) rice — this rice, not another kind

Dressing

- 3 garlic cloves
- 2–4 Thai red chiles, roughly chopped (green will work; they’re sharper)
- 6 cilantro stems
- ½ stalk lemongrass, roughly chopped
- 1 tsp grated or minced ginger
- 1–2 Tbsp palm sugar, or light brown sugar
- Juice of 1–2 limes
- 4 Tbsp fish sauce
- 2 tsp light soy sauce
- 2 tsp grapeseed oil or another neutral oil

Crispy garlic and shallots

- 3 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 2 shallots, thinly sliced
- Toasted sesame oil

Steak

- 1 (14-oz / 400 g) steak, something with good marbling (sirloin, ribeye, bavette, hanger, rump, or filet)
- Sea salt
- Neutral oil or beef tallow
- 2 Tbsp unsalted butter
- 1 stalk lemongrass, halved

Salad

- 10 cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 cucumber, halved lengthwise, seeded, and cut into bite-size pieces
- 1–2 shallots, thinly sliced into rounds
- 2 spring onions, sliced
- 1 bunch cilantro
- 1 bunch fresh mint

Method

1. Toast the glutinous rice in a dry skillet over medium-high heat, stirring often, until deeply golden and fragrant. Cool slightly, then grind it coarse — a few seconds in a spice or coffee grinder is enough. A mortar and pestle is optional. You won’t use all of it; leftovers keep.
2. For the dressing, pound the 3 garlic cloves to a rough paste in a mortar (or pulse in a processor). Add the chiles, cilantro stems, lemongrass, ginger, and palm sugar, and pound or pulse to a rough aromatic paste. Mix in the lime juice, fish sauce, soy sauce, and oil. Taste and adjust — more lime for acidity, more sugar for balance, more fish sauce for salt and depth. Set aside to infuse.
3. For the garnish, add a generous amount of toasted sesame oil to a cold pan, add the sliced garlic, and bring it up slowly over medium heat until deeply golden; take it out a little early, as it keeps coloring. In the same oil, fry the shallots until golden and crisp, again pulling them just before the color you want. Drain both on paper towels.

4. Salt the steak and refrigerate it uncovered a couple of hours or overnight if you have time. Heat a skillet to medium-high, add a little oil or tallow, and sear the steak, flipping every 45 seconds, until a deep crust forms. For a thinner steak, you can refrigerate it 5–10 minutes here so the center doesn’t overcook. Lower the heat, add the butter and the halved lemongrass, and when the butter foams, return the steak and baste 1–2 minutes. Rest 5 minutes, then slice thinly against the grain.
5. In a large bowl, combine the tomatoes, cucumber, raw shallots, spring onions, cilantro, mint, and steak. Spoon on some of the dressing, a generous sprinkle of toasted rice powder, and some of the crispy garlic and shallots. Toss quickly so the warm steak takes on the dressing and the herbs stay fresh. Taste and add more dressing if it needs it — don’t flood it. Finish with more crispy shallots, garlic, and rice powder, and serve right away.