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The vast majority of American homes have at least one jar of peanut butter on the shelf. We reach for it to make the classic peanut butter and jelly sandwich just about every day. The recipe may vary to include banana, honey, cream cheese, marshmallows, and undoubtedly, other gourmet choices.

For such a mainstay of American food culture, the key ingredient for PB&J is a relatively recent phenomenon. Credit the Incans for grinding peanuts to make the first peanut butter of sorts. Yet eaters in the modern era were unaware of this culinary delight until that champion of breakfast, Dr. Kellogg himself reinvented it in 1895. The idea spread quickly after peanut butter was featured at the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri.

Peanut is referred to as a ground nut. It is a legume, botanically unrelated to tree nuts such as pecan and almond. Peanut plants are bushy like other bean plants except that the seed pods develop and grow underground. Another peanut feature unique among legumes is their high fat content, perfect for making a creamy, tasty food. A similar product made from a legume is hummus. However to make those lean chickpeas puree up nice and smooth, olive oil is a necessity.

Peanut butter is made by blending peanuts. That's it, just peanuts. Made in this way, the product is called natural peanut butter. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration standard of identity for peanut butter allows for the addition of salt, sweetener, and hydrogenated vegetable oil. Salt and sweetener are for taste; hydrogenated vegetable oil is for convenience to keep the peanut oil from separating and smooth for spreading, and to extend shelf-life. Fully hydrogenated vegetable oil does not contain trans-fatty acids.

Peanut butter's reach is well beyond the sandwich. The flavor of peanut pairs well with anything sweet. Classic savory sauces like this one from Chef Kurt become nutty and smooth with this special ingredient.

# RECIPE for health

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featured food:

## PEANUT BUTTER

### Thai Peanut Dipping Sauce

By Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski, Residential Dining Services  
Makes about 2 1/2 cups

- 2 T. sugar
- 1/4 c. fish sauce
- 3 T. fresh lime juice
- 1 1/2 c. creamy peanut butter
- 1/4 c. coconut milk
- 1/4 c. water
- 4 Thai chile peppers, diced with seeds
- 2 T. finely diced carrots
- 2 cloves of garlic, minced
- 1 T. fresh ginger, minced

Whisk sugar, fish sauce, and lime juice until sugar dissolves. Add remaining ingredients and stir together. Let stand for 30 minutes before serving.

Taste and adjust seasoning with lime juice, fish sauce, and sugar as desired.

This is a traditional accompaniment for grilled or broiled skewers of chicken and pork. Also delicious with rice crackers and spring rolls.

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