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Hot Chili Orange Oil

The bright orange, deeply flavored oil builds to a slow burn. It is delicious on cold noodle salads, with peanut chicken or tofu, and mixed with soy sauce for dipping spring rolls and dim sum.

Season: Any time Yield: 2 1/2 cups Store: Cool, dark pantry (6 months)

3 large organic oranges

1/2 cup dried hot red chili flakes

3 cloves garlic; peeled and lightly smashed

1 tablespoon fermented black bean paste

2 cups peanut or canola oil

Scrub oranges with a soft brush and mild soap to remove any vegetable wax. With a sharp vegetable peeler or paring knife, remove the bright orange zest from the fruit in large strips, avoiding the bitter white pith. Finely mince the zest.

Combine the zest with the chili flakes, garlic, bean paste, and oil in a heavy 2-quart saucepan. Bring to a low boil over medium heat and simmer for 15 minutes. Caution: the chili fumes coming off the simmering oil are powerful; avoid direct contact with eyes or nose! Remove from heat and let stand until cool.

Store the oil with its seasonings in a glass jar, covered, at room temperature.

Lavender Lemonade Cooler

You can substitute thyme, mint, pineapple sage, or rosemary syrup for the lavender syrup. Mix things up at your next summer cocktail party by offering a variety of herbal syrups together with the rest of the makings for this refreshing cooler.

Season: Mid to late summer Yield: Variable Store: Serve immediately

Lavender syrup (recipe below)

Fresh squeezed lemon juice

Vodka

Sparkling wine, chilled

Fresh blueberries and raspberries

Sliced lemons

1 stem fresh lavender

Combine the lavender syrup with the lemon juice for a sweet/tart base. Fill tall glasses with ice; add 1 shot of vodka to each glass. Add the lavender-lemon syrup to three-quarters full. Garnish with berries, a lemon slice, and a lavender sprig and top up with sparkling wine.

Variation: For an alcohol-free version, combine herbal syrup, lemon, juice, and sparkling water to taste; add garnish.

Lavender syrup

3 cups water

1 cup fresh herbs

2 cups sugar

Bring the water to a boil in a saucepan over medium heat. Remove from heat and add the herbs; cover and steep for several hours to make a strong infusion. Strain the liquid into a nonreactive pan, add the sugar, and bring to a boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar completely. Boil without stirring to thicken, about 10-12 minutes. Remove from heat, cool and bottle. The syrup keeps well in the refrigerator, good up to 3 months.