“We don’t have Christmas in Thailand,” Serena’s father explained to me. “It wasn’t until we came to the United States and the children were born that we celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas.” On Thanksgiving, Serena remembers having her favorite Chinese food from her mother’s side, combined with Thai food from her father and stepmother’s side, along with a roasted turkey her father receives every year as a gift from his job. “It was really good,” Serena and her family laughed.

Christmas time was the same when it came to the tradition of a holiday feast.

“Yes, Christmas meals are important. It wasn’t Christmas unless we had a large meal with the family,” said Serena.

As with all of us during the holidays, there has to be one or two certain items on the table. For Serena and her family that is Thai Green Curry Chicken. “Most Americans think ‘pad thai’ when they think of Thai food. In Thailand that is a snack for us. If you go to Thailand and ask for the traditional Thai dish, they will serve you green curry.”

PREPARATION

Prep: Choose either a chicken breast and one leg to get the balance of flavor and convenience. It’s easier and sometimes preferred to serve chicken breast; however, it’s the bones that give the curry the full flavor. Cut the breast meat into bite-sized pieces. You can cut chicken leg into smaller pieces, but it is not necessary. Quarter the eggplants. Wash and pick pea eggplants from stems. In Thailand you’d use a slightly hot pepper called pig’s ear chili, but in the US, I substitute a sweeter chili pepper similar to a red bell pepper. Slice the chili thin, lengthwise. Wash and pick Thai basil.

Cooking: In a pot over medium heat, pour half of the coconut milk and green curry paste. Mix the paste with coconut milk well. Keep stirring to prevent the bottom from sticking and burning. You may need to lower the heat if it splatters too much. Keep stirring until you see greenish oil form. The coconut milk is pulling the color and fragrance out from the spices. This green oil will be floating beautifully in your curry. Add chicken to the curry mixture. Stir to coat the chicken for a couple minutes, until it is partially cooked. Add the eggplant, but hold off on the pea. Stir more. Add the rest of coconut milk and 1 cup of water. Let it simmer for 10 minutes or until the chicken is fully cooked. Add the pea eggplant. Add the seasonings: fish sauce and sugar. Taste for the balance of flavors, salty with a hint of sweet. Add the slices of red chili pepper and Kaffir lime leaf. Let it boil one more time. When you are ready to serve, add the Thai basil. Stir to mix the basil in and immediately turn off the heat to keep the basil green. Quickly pour into serving bowl.