

SESAME GREEN ONION OIL

1 cup chopped green onions,
white and green parts

1/8 tsp fine sea salt

1 pinch baking soda
(optional, for preserving
the bright color)

3 Tbsp neutral oil (such as
canola or peanut)

1 to 2 tsp toasted sesame oil
(use the maximum amount
for a toasty flavor hit)

1 Tbsp neutral oil (such as
canola or peanut)

2 Tbsp chopped shallots or
yellow onion

1 1/2 cups chopped shiitake,
cremini, or white mushrooms,
stems included

3/4 cup Umami Tofu Crumbles
(page 50) or diced jicama,
carrot, or sweet potato

1/8 tsp recently ground
black pepper

1 1/2 tsp Maggi Seasoning
sauce, Bragg Liquid Aminos,
soy sauce, or fish sauce
(store-bought or vegan
version, page 29)

Fine sea salt

2 petite baguettes or bolillo
rolls, 1/2 French-style
baguette, or other bread
suitable for banh mi

1/3 cup unsalted roasted
peanuts or cashews,
chopped or crushed

3 Tbsp Fast-Fried Shallots
(page 46) or store-bought
fried shallots or onions

Bánh Mì Hấp Nhân Chay**Steamed Banh Mi
Lettuce Wraps**

In Vietnam, baguettes are baked and eaten within 24 hours. After my mom migrated to Saigon in 1954 from Hai Duong in northern Vietnam, her family lived in a home tucked down a winding alleyway off a busy street. Every evening, a neighbor came home with a load of long baguettes, which were bent over from the tropical humidity. By the next morning, she'd have transformed the sad bread into a popular breakfast snack to sell at the open-air market. She cut thick slices, steamed them into pillowy-chewy softness, and topped them with green onion oil for humble bánh mì hấp, which simply means "steamed bread."

My mom replicated it for us in America, and I adored the slightly squishy bread and rich pungent garnish. Nowadays, bánh mì hấp is fanciful, topped with a jicama-meat mixture and other goodies and served with nước chấm, lettuce, and herbs for making wraps. You don't need meat for bánh mì hấp to be exciting. It's a deliciously thrilling way to use days-old bread.

Prepare the green onion oil

To make the Sesame Green Onion Oil: In a small microwavable bowl, stir together the green onions, salt, baking soda (if using), neutral oil, and sesame oil. Microwave on high power for 45 to 60 seconds, until the mixture bubbles and the onions just soften. (Alternatively, combine the neutral oil and sesame oil in a 1- to 1 1/2-qt saucepan and set over medium heat until an onion piece gently sizzles upon contact; then stir in the remaining green onions, salt, and baking soda and cook for 30 seconds until things soften.) Let cool to room temperature.

Cook the topping

Set a 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat and add the 1 Tbsp neutral oil. When the oil nearly ripples, add the shallots and cook, stirring for 1 to 2 minutes, until they turn soft and sweetly fragrant. Add the shiitake mushrooms, tofu crumbles, pepper, and Maggi, then continue sautéing for about 3 minutes, until the shiitakes are soft and just cooked through. (If you're using diced vegetables

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Leaves from 1 head of soft-leaf lettuce (such as butter or red- or green-leaf)

1 small handful mint, basil, shiso, or other soft-leaf fresh herbs other than cilantro

1 small handful cilantro sprigs

1 cup Nước Chấm Dipping Sauce (page 32)

instead of tofu, splash in 2 Tbsp water and steam-sauté, covered, for about 5 minutes until they're nearly done, then uncover toward the end to finish cooking and concentrate flavor.) Let cool for 5 to 10 minutes. Season with salt.

Steam the bread

Fill a wide pot, such as a 6-qt Dutch oven, with water to about ½ inch deep and set a collapsible metal steamer inside. (Or, set up a Chinese steamer, filling the bottom pot halfway with water.) Bring to a boil over high heat, then slightly lower the heat to steady the steam. Meanwhile, cut the bread crosswise into scant ¾-inch-thick slices. In batches, steam the bread, cut-sides down, for 3 to 5 minutes, until soft and warm; transfer the steamed bread to a platter and cover with a dish towel to keep warm. (If you're using a collapsible steamer, position the bread on the upward-sloping side to keep it from touching the water.)

Assemble and serve

Divide the green onions and their oil among the slices of bread, crown the bread with the shiitake topping, and sprinkle with the nuts and fried shallots. Arrange the lettuce and herbs on a platter and the sauce in a communal bowl for guests to portion out for themselves (or put the sauce in individual rice bowls or bigger dipping-sauce bowls). Tuck a piece of bread and its topping inside a lettuce leaf and add some herbs. Bundle it up, dunk in the sauce, and munch away.

Note

Timing Prep the green onion oil and shiitake mixture up to 3 days ahead. Refrigerate them separately and return to room temperature before using.

Check out page 128 for a bread-buying guide.