

# CANH KHỔ QUA

by Christine Nguyen

[Illustration of a bowl of canh khổ qua (stuffed bitter melon soup) with the words “stuffed bitter melon soup” handwritten around the borders]

Vietnam, 1953  
the last of the rain  
has settled. a rainbow  
begins to form as i  
go out to grab some  
groceries. the produce  
man smiles and waves  
as i head home.  
metal against wood.  
burning embers.  
boiling broth.  
and just like that:  
dinner is served.

## Ingredients

[Illustrations of a salt shaker, a bundle of green onions, a bottle of fish sauce, a bundle of cilantro, ground pork, a pepper shaker, an MSG shaker, a box of chicken stock, and two bitter melons]

## How to Make

1. wash and cut two large bitter melons into 3 or 4 segments. remove the insides with a spoon. set aside.
2. in a separate bowl, combine one pound of ground pork, salt, MSG, fish sauce, black pepper, chopped scallions, garlic powder, wood ear mushrooms, and softened vermicelli noodles. NOTE: there aren't exact measurements for these ingredients. your ancestors will let you know when to stop.
3. use a spoon to tightly stuff each segment of the bitter melons with the meat mixture. gently squeeze the segments to ensure that nothing falls out.
4. in a large pot, bring one can of chicken stock and an equal amount of water to a boil. once boiling, reduce heat and add salt, sugar, MSG, black pepper, the stuffed bitter melons, and cilantro to finish. cook until the bitter melons are tender and the pork is thoroughly cooked. serve with white jasmine rice.

[Illustration of a bowl of canh khổ qua with “enjoy!” handwritten on the upper-left corner of the bowl and “leftovers: 10/10” handwritten on the upper-right corner of the bowl]

## Then and Now

[Photo of my mother, her sister, and two brothers standing underneath an old photo of them and my maternal grandparents]

[Photo of my entire family from two Christmases ago]

When WORDS become too much we EAT instead

## Muối Muối Lê

to the woman who took care of 10 younger siblings.

to the woman who chased a disrespectful soldier with a bat.

to the woman who prepares my favorite dishes everytime i come home.

to the woman who keeps us all afloat.

[Screenshot of my grandmother and me on FaceTime together]

## USA, 2019

water droplets on

the surface of the

vegetables reflect

the yellowing overhead

lamps. My

son bought ground

pork last sunday.

my bitter melons

are finally in

bloom.

metal against wood.

a glowing red circle.

boiling water.

and just like that:

lunch is served.

A ZINE BY CHRISTINE N. ♥