



# Sapasui: It's hard to get wrong!

by Susan Paris

Carlos Vakalaloma has lots of interests. He likes playing rugby (he's a prop) and doing jigsaw puzzles (the old-school kind with up to a thousand pieces). During lockdown, he also spent a lot of time cooking.

Carlos is happy in the kitchen. For a while, he helped his mum cook tea every Wednesday night, though he admits "that kind of stopped". Still, he can make a pear and chocolate cake. He can also make baked ziti, a classic Italian dish that involves mince and pasta. Carlos really likes Italian food. But if he was forced to choose his favourite meal, to both cook and eat, he'd say sapasui.

Sapasui is eaten all across the Pacific. The dish is a version of chop suey, which originally comes from China. It contains the same main ingredients: vermicelli, meat, garlic, and soy sauce. Because sapasui is so popular, people have lots of opinions on the best way to make it. The good news, according to Carlos, is that it's easy to figure out for yourself. He learnt by watching an online tutorial. The recipe took no time to master. In fact Carlos was soon confident enough to suggest selling sapasui at his school's market day. He led a team of four cooks, making enough food to feed dozens of people.

Carlos's friends (and fellow cooks) were dubious about adapting the recipe to make that much food. They were worried about getting the quantities right. "But they shouldn't have been," says Carlos. "Sapasui is hard to get wrong. I knew what I was doing!" Carlos is happy to share his recipe. He doesn't have a whole lot of advice, other than to sometimes add some vegetables. He suggests sliced carrot. He also says the amount of ginger doesn't really matter. He uses a small chunk about half the length of his thumb. And he does warn against experimenting with different kinds of noodles. "Stick with vermicelli," he says. "They're made from rice and are really thin. You don't have to pre-cook them."



## SAPASUI

Variations of sapasui are found throughout the Pacific. It's been eaten there for a long time. People think the dish most likely made its way to the Pacific in the 1840s, when the first Chinese migrants arrived in Sāmoa. This means families like Carlos's, who come from Fiji, have been making sapasui for seven generations.

### Ingredients

300 gms gravy beef	2 cloves garlic	1 cup soy sauce
250 gms vermicelli noodles	Fresh ginger	Vegetables
1 onion	3 T canola oil	

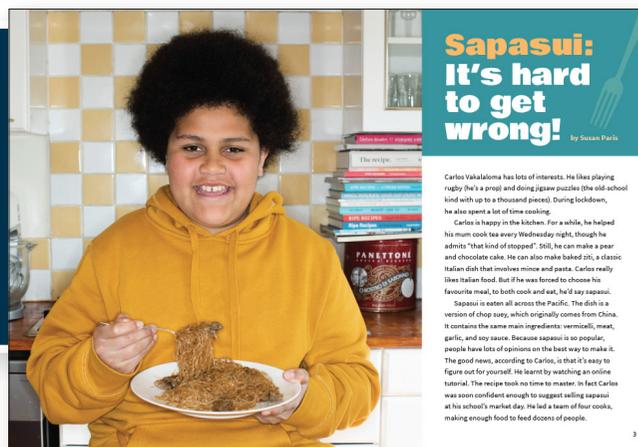
### Method

1. Cut the gravy beef into bite-sized cubes. Rinse the meat in a bowl of water.
2. Get a big pot. Add one cup of water and simmer the meat for about 15 minutes.
3. Chop the onion. (Carlos says not too chunky.)
4. Crush the garlic. (Carlos uses a garlic crusher.)
5. Peel and grate the ginger. (Carlos uses a cheese grater.)
6. Put the vermicelli noodles in a bowl of cold water to loosen them first. Leave for ten minutes.
7. Drain excess water from the cooked meat. Then add the canola oil, onion, garlic, and ginger.
8. Fry everything until it goes soft (about ten minutes), then turn off the heat and leave for five minutes.
9. Add the soy sauce to cover the meat.\* Leave for another five minutes.
10. Cut the noodles so they're not too long. (Carlos uses scissors and cuts the noodles while they're still soaking.)
11. Drain the noodles, then add to the meat in several batches, stirring as you go. (Carlos uses a wooden spoon.)
12. Adding vegetables (carrots or broccoli)? Now is the time. Pre-cook them.
13. Add a little extra water if the noodles are looking dry. Leave them to sit for five minutes. Now you're done.

**\* Actually, Carlos does have one last bit of advice. He says some brands of soy sauce are saltier than others. Add the soy sauce slowly and taste as you go. You might not need the whole amount.**

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