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Beginnings really make the meal at Northboro's Yoong Tong

DINING REVIEW

By **Jan Gottesman** MANAGING EDITOR

Yoong Tong Thai Restaurant, 278 Main St. (Route 20), Northboro, (508) 393-7714.

Hours: Lunch, Monday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; Dinner, Monday through Thursday, 5 to 9 p.m., Friday, 5 to 10 p.m., Saturday, 3:30 to 10 p.m., and Sunday, 3:30 to 9 p.m.

NORTHBORO — I've had a craving for good Thai food and an old favorite let me down with bland fare. So I arranged to be on Route 20 one Saturday and headed straight to Yoong Tong.

It didn't disappoint, starting and ending on amazing appetizers.

I love appetizers anyways, and Yoong Tong's have always been great. We bypassed Thai rolls (\$5.95), Thai dumplings (\$5.50), grilled lemongrass shrimp (\$7.95) and Thai scallion pancakes (\$5.50). We showed restraint and ordered only two favorites — Kratong Tong (known in some restaurants as gold cups, \$5.50) and curry puffs (\$5.50).

Portions aren't huge, with five cups and three puff pastry triangles, but flavors are big.

The thin, delicate cups were filled with minced chicken, onions, green peas, sweet corn and carrots. The favors were fresh and satisfying. The puffs were filled with chicken and vegetables in green curry. The pastry was flaky and buttery. It came with a delicate sweet and sour sauce, which wasn't necessary, but sure was tasty.

We reluctantly turned our attention away from the appetizers.

Noodle bowls included Yoong Tong beef, chicken or pork soup (\$9.95), Pacific soup with steamed seafood, fish balls, bean sprouts and cilantro served over Thai noodles in Tom Yam soup (\$14.95) and country noodle curry (\$14.95 and \$16.95). Salads are \$3.95 to \$16.95.

And entrées include grilled salmon, beef or chicken teriyaki (\$16.95), shrimp scampi (\$16.95), chicken pineapple (\$14.95), beef macadamia (\$16.95), green curry with chicken (\$14.95) or shrimp (\$16.95), steamed whole ginger fish (market price) and basil fried rice (\$11.95).

I had always heard good things about the tamarind duck (\$16.95) and my husband was intrigued by the pork garlic (\$14.95). And I had to order the pad Thai, the traditional noodle dish (\$10.50).

All three were good, although they were overshadowed by the amazing appetizers.

The duck would have been better if the skin was crisper, but the large segments came with fresh-tasting onions, tomatoes, mushrooms, pineapple, peppers, scallions and snow peas. The flavor of the sauce, especially the ginger, intensified when I got a chance to enjoy the leftovers.

The pork was better, with thin strips of white meat stir fried with scallions, mushrooms and baby corn, then topped with fried garlic. I didn't think it was hot enough to warrant the one chili pepper on the menu, but my husband likes things mild.

The pad Thai, which I asked for without peanuts, was very good, with soft noodles, a sweet flavor and succulent shrimp (I did miss the chicken other restaurants put in).

How much did we enjoy our appetizers?

There are desserts on the menu, including Thai pumpkin custard (\$6.50) and black sapphire rice pudding (\$5.50), but my husband and I quickly decided to try another appetizer instead.

Yes, the appetizers are that good.

The Kanom Jeeb (\$5.50) were four, Thai-style chicken and vegetable dumplings, steamed or fried (we chose fried) and accompanied by a ginger sauce. The flavor was amazing. I was full, but could have eaten another four ... or more curry puffs.

The cost for our feast (with leftovers enough for three lunches) was \$72.61, including a Kikkoman plum wine (\$5.50) and a Singha beer (\$4.75).

Ratings

Food (out of possible 5)

= { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar }

Atmosphere

= { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar }

Service

= { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar } = { cpstar }

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