

## **Chopstix Cafe and Grill**

**Elegant Asian eatery in the Villages of Urbana**  
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**By Wendy Lerner**



*Photo by Travis Pratt*

Kung Pao Grilled Chicken lunch special features a mix of fresh flavors.

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Where: Chopstix Café and Grill, Villages of Urbana, 3531 John Simmons St. D8, Urbana

Phone: 240-699-0008

Hours: Sunday-Thursday, 11:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-10:30 p.m.

Credit cards accepted  
Children's menu  
Handicapped accessible

I contemplated trying Chopstix Cafe and Grill when I caught a glimpse of it while leaving the Urbana Regional Library one day. I thought about it again when one of the soccer moms said that her boys love the beef and broccoli dish there. When I finally made the time, I dined at Chopstix two nights in a row!

Where: Chopstix Café and Grill, Villages of Urbana

This modern Chinese eatery is nestled between the Painted Cone and New York J & P Pizza in the Villages of Urbana. My son and I entered through the tall glass doors that are framed floor to ceiling by windows. There are two separate dining rooms. We sat in the larger of the two at one of the three secluded little booths. The small white lamps at each booth were a nice touch. The smaller dining room is full of light with tables set up for large parties. The walls are earthy, painted ginger and adorned with tasteful Asian decorations and artwork. The dark hardwood floors and tables contrast well with the two-toned rattan chairs.

Blake and I ordered water and I requested Jasmine tea (95 cents). Patrons have a choice of three teas: Oolong, Green and Jasmine. My tea was served in an earthenware cup with additional hot water in a teapot. The tea was fragrant with a pleasant mellow taste. Blake ordered the house noodle soup (\$7.50). He noticed that French fries are included with the children's meals. Linda, our server and the restaurant manager, graciously agreed to serve him French fries (\$1) even though they are not an official side dish. I ordered the Asian grilled chicken salad (\$6.95) and the shrimp with vegetables (\$11.95).

Our fries were served with two dipping cups, one filled with ketchup, the other with honey. We even received tiny spoons with the sauces. The fries were thin, light and crispy, with a slightly sweet taste. This kind gesture made us look forward to the rest of our meal.

The meal-sized house noodle soup is a bit spicy (you can request a milder version) and consists of a chicken-based broth filled with thick udon noodles, large chunks of tender grilled chicken, carrots, zucchini and Chinese vegetables. We agreed that it was quite tasty. My son must have really liked the noodles because he did not want to share too many.

The Asian chicken salad is big enough for a meal in itself. It was served with plenty of large grilled chicken strips, cooked to perfection in sesame oil. The chicken lies atop a bed of iceberg lettuce, along with fresh, crunchy cucumber slices, dried cranberries, red onion, edamame and finely chopped almonds. I didn't even notice the dish of honey mustard dressing since the sesame oil on the chicken moistened the salad and was very good. The shrimp with vegetables was served in a tangy brown sauce. It was light, unlike some of the vegetable oil-based sauces I have had in the past. The large plump prawns were moist and delicious, tossed together with plenty of broccoli, water chestnuts, mushrooms, carrots and edamame. The white rice was striking with tiny jet-black roasted sesame seeds sprinkled on top.

I told Linda that the meal was wonderful and that I would definitely be back. She was genuinely happy to see me and my daughters the very next day. My girls were impressed with the classy eatery and great food. Emily and I shared an order of summer veggie rolls (\$3.25). The two large rice crepes were filled with bean curd, carrots and cilantro. They were cool, light and scrumptious. The red dipping sauce with just the right amount of hot red pepper flakes made this a delightful appetizer.

I ordered the egg drop soup with chicken and corn (\$1.95) and the house noodle vegetarian salad (\$4.95). The soup had a light broth (not too eggy) with a fantastic flavor. There was a slight taste of corn. None of the flavors overpowered the others. Great balance. The house noodle vegetarian salad was nicely presented. The long, thin noodles were tangled around small pieces of grilled red and yellow peppers, carrots and cilantro, all topped with tiny sesame seeds.

Emily ordered the shrimp with vegetables on my recommendation. Her entree, unlike mine from the night before, was served with some of those tasty grilled peppers. I bet the chef switches out different vegetables each day depending on which are the freshest.

Devon ordered chicken fried rice. The rice was fried in a tasty brown sauce with bits of carrots, scallions and eggs. She was especially impressed with the large tender pieces of grilled chicken.

If the secret's not out about Chopstix (the restaurant has been in Urbana for three months), I am more than happy to spread the word. It is obvious that the warm and friendly people running this business care a lot about serving fresh, unique Chinese food at more than reasonable prices.

*In Good Taste reports on an unannounced dining experience and is not meant to be a critical review.*

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