

Recipe Packet: Basic Chinese Cuisine – Week One

1. General Chinese Cooking Principles:

- Try to vary the meat and vegetables in a dish, so that there is an interesting variety of flavors, textures, and colors. The Chinese believe it is important to find balance and harmony in every aspect of life, including food.
- Fresh is best: always use fresh ingredients when possible.
- Be sure to have everything prepared before you start cooking: the vegetables washed, drained and cut; the meat cut and marinated; the sauces prepared.

2. Chinese Cooking Equipment:

- While you don't absolutely need one, a wok is the one piece of cooking equipment you may want to purchase before you start cooking Chinese food.
- While it's nice to own one, you don't need a cleaver to cook Chinese food.

3. Preparing Vegetables:

- Wash green, leafy vegetables ahead of time. This gives them more time to drain so they will not be too wet when you stir-fry.
- Place all the cut vegetables on a tray or cooking sheet. That way, you won't forget anything. Just be careful not to mix them up, as cooking times will vary among vegetables.

4. Stir-frying Vegetables:

- When stir-frying vegetables, cook the toughest and thickest vegetables for a longer period than the softer, leafy vegetables. Vegetables such as broccoli, carrots, and cabbage need to be cooked longer than bok choy, which in turn is cooked longer than snow peas or bean sprouts.
- If you are uncertain in which order to cook vegetables, simply stir-fry them separately. Never overcook.

5. Tofu (Bean Curd):

- For stir-frying or deep-frying, use firm or extra-firm tofu. Firm tofu will keep its shape and not fall apart in the wok.
- Drain the tofu before using, as this allows it to absorb the other flavors in the dish.

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6. Meat and Fish:

- Always marinate fresh meat.
- If a marinade calls for cornstarch, add it last. It will act as a binder.
- Always cut beef across the grain. This helps make it more tender.
- Cut the meat into uniform pieces so that it will cook more evenly.
- When cooking meat or poultry, make sure that the wok is very hot before adding the food.
- If preparing stir-fried meat and vegetables, stir-fry the meat first and set it aside. Usually you will return it to the wok with a sauce during the final stages of cooking.

7. Cooking With Oil:

- When adding oil for stir-frying, drizzle the oil down the sides of the wok.
- When deep-frying, to tell if the oil is hot enough, simply stick a chopstick in the wok. When the oil sizzles all around it, you can begin adding the food.

8. Sauce and Seasoning Tips:

- Always use fresh ginger, not powdered.
- The formula for mixing cornstarch and water is 1 to 2 or 1 to 4: for example, 1 tablespoon of cornstarch with 2 tablespoons of water.
- Don't use more cornstarch than called for in the recipe

9. Rice:

- For best results when cooking rice, use long grain rice.
- When making fried rice, use cold cooked rice, preferably at least one day old.

Finally, remember that, in the immortal words of one of my favorite cooking teachers: ***"the two most important things about Chinese cooking are a hot stove and a sharp knife."***

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Black Bean Sauce:

Makes approximately 2 cups

¼ cup fermented black beans
½ cup canola oil
¼ cup minced garlic
¼ cup peeled and minced fresh ginger
3 stalks scallions, white and green parts, sliced 1/8 inch thick
2 teaspoons sambal oelek, or any garlic chili paste
¼ cup Shaoxing rice wine
pinch kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Soak the black beans in 2 tablespoons of hot water to soften. Heat a wok or large sauté pan over high heat. Add the oil and swirl to coat the pan. Add garlic, ginger, and scallions, and stir-fry until the mixture has softened, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the beans, sambal oelek and wine, decrease the heat to medium, and cook until the mixture is reduced by three quarters, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the salt and pepper.

Remove the mixture from the heat and allow it to cool. Transfer half of the mixture to a blender and purée it at high speed. Stir the purée back into the remaining mixture and cool completely. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator until ready to use.

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Stir-Fried Vegetables With Black Bean Sauce

Serves 4-6

3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 slice peeled ginger, the size of a quarter
½ white onion, large dice
1 large carrot, peeled and bias-sliced
2 stalks celery, trimmed and bias-sliced
4 Shiitake mushrooms, trimmed and thinly sliced
1 red bell pepper, large dice
1 small handful green beans, trimmed
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
2 green onions, thinly sliced
2-3 tablespoons Black Bean Sauce
pinch of salt and pepper, to taste

In a large wok over medium high flame, add the oil and heat until it ripples. Season the oil with a piece of peeled ginger and a pinch of salt.

Cook the hardier vegetables first – the ones that take longer to cook should be stir fried first, then the more tender, softer vegetables last. Everything should be cooked evenly.

Toss the onion, carrot and celery into the wok and sauté, moving the vegetables around in the wok quickly using a spatula. When the vegetables begin to look tender, about 4 minutes, add the mushrooms and continue tossing in the hot wok. When the mushrooms look soft, add the bell pepper and continue to toss. Lastly, when the bell peppers begin to soften, add the green beans and toss until the green beans are tender, about 4 more minutes. Add the garlic and toss until fragrant.

Season with a pinch of salt and pepper. Turn the heat off and toss in 2-3 tablespoons of black bean sauce. Transfer to a platter and garnish with sliced scallions. Serve hot over steamed rice.

Note:

- If adding any protein to this dish, cook the protein first after the oil has been seasoned. Remove the meat from the wok, continue to cook the vegetables and then toss the meat back in after the garlic has been added.
- Remember: slice your meat thinly across the grain and marinate briefly with salt, pepper, 1 teaspoon of cornstarch and a splash of rice wine. Cook your meat thoroughly before removing it from the wok.

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Won Ton Broth

Makes roughly 1 quart of broth

2 pounds chicken backs, wingtips and other chicken bones
1 ½ pounds pig's trotters, split or chopped into chunks
3 ounces Chinese ham or salt pork
1 quart low-sodium chicken broth
1 strip of Kombu
1 ounce dried shrimp
8 green onions, whites and greens reserved separately
1 4-inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled
½ head Napa cabbage, cut into chunks
1 star anise
Kosher salt

Combine the chicken bones, pigs trotters and ham in a large stockpot and cover with water. Bring to a boil for 10 minutes, then dump the contents into a strainer set in the sink. Let the liquid drain away and run cold water over the bones and meat – cleaning and rinsing away any coagulated blood and scum. Return everything to the stockpot.

Add the chicken stock, and enough water so that the liquid is 1-inch above the surface of the bones. Add the kombu, dried shrimp, scallion whites only, the fresh ginger and the cabbage.

Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to low and simmer the broth, uncovered, for about 2 hours.

Using tongs or a skimmer, discard the solid pieces and strain the broth through a fine mesh strainer lined with cheesecloth into a large saucepan. You can skim any of the fat off the top of the broth with a large spoon, or you can chill the broth in the fridge overnight and skim the fat off the next day. The fat will solidify and you can use a spoon to remove the fat off the top of the broth. The chilled broth may look quivery and jelly-like and that's exactly what you want! Reheat the broth when you are ready to serve.

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Pork and Shrimp Wontons

Makes 24 -36 wontons

24 small shrimp, shelled and de-veined
Kosher salt and white pepper
½ teaspoon baking soda
1 pound ground pork
2 teaspoons sugar
1 teaspoon light soy sauce
2 teaspoons sesame oil
1 tablespoon fresh ginger peeled and finely minced
1 scallion, white and green parts finely minced
1 package thin wonton wrappers

Place the shrimp in a bowl add baking soda, 1 teaspoon of salt and ¼ cup of water and mix together. Let the shrimp sit for at least 15 minutes. Drain when you are ready to add to the wonton filling mixture.

In a large mixing bowl, combine the pork, ginger, sugar, soy sauce, sesame oil, scallions and 1 teaspoon of salt and a pinch a white pepper. Use your hands to mix together until everything is thoroughly combined. Drain and dry the shrimp by pressing them with paper towels, roughly chop to retain pieces of shrimp, and add to the pork mixture.

Place one wonton wrapper on a clean work surface and place a tablespoon-sized portion of the filling. Dip your index fingertip in a small bowl of water and moisten the edges of the wonton wrapper.

Lift the two opposite corners up to meet at a point, and use your fingertips to seal the rest of the sides, forming a triangle – squeeze as much air out as possible. Pull the opposite corners towards each other and pinch together (use a dab of water to keep them together). Transfer to a plate and repeat with the remaining wonton wrappers and filling.

To serve, bring the soup to a boil. Add the wontons and 1 cup of shredded Napa cabbage and cook until the wontons are cooked through, about 3-4 minutes.

Evenly divide the wontons and broth into warmed bowls and garnish with sliced scallions. Cool for at least 1 minute and serve.