



Cook

Sichuan

in America

Recipes with love from
**The Robot Book
Club**

Cook Sichuan in America

Bold Flavors and Authentic Home Cooking for the Western Kitchen

The Robot Book Club

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Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: Sichuan Home Cooking.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

In a land far from the red basin, in a Midwestern suburb, perhaps, where the scent of freshly cut grass often drowns out the sharper, more immediate fragrance of blooming chili oil, a specific hunger persists. Not just for sustenance, but for something elemental, a taste that transcends memory, a deep craving for the uncompromising flavors of home. This book isn't for the curious tourist or the culinary explorer seeking a "Silk Road experience" on sanitized terms. Forget the white tablecloths and the softened edges, the polite interpretations. This is for the ones who truly know. The ones who remember the searing heat, the insistent numbing, the unvarnished truth of Sichuan cooking.

It's for you, navigating the intricate dance of an American life, raising children who might choose school cafeteria pizza while their palates secretly yearn for the visceral punch of fermented bean paste. This is about reclaiming the weeknight, not with compromise, but with strategic cunning. Because authentic Sichuan isn't found exclusively in elaborate banquets or restaurant spectacles; it is *jiachangcai*, the everyday, robust, and utterly essential home cooking that fuels generations.

Here, the very soul of the kitchen breathes within a *pao cai* jar—a living, ancient brine that offers instant access to a thousand foundational flavors, a culinary heirloom maintained with casual reverence. Mornings here awaken with a savory jolt of noodles, not a sugar rush. Weeknights are conquered not by intricate technique, but by a hot wok and familiar ingredients, delivering true homeland taste in the time it takes to catch the evening news. Weekends explode with the communal, boisterous joy of a "fly restaurant"—bold, unapologetic dishes meant for sharing, for cold beer, and for loud, unfettered laughter. And

when the world finally settles, there are the soothing, tactile comforts of handmade doughs, rich broths, and subtle sweets, whispered into existence by the timeless wisdom of grandma's hands.

This is more than a cookbook. It's a manual, a quiet rebellion against dilution. A practical map back to those deeply specific flavors, rediscovered and celebrated right in your American kitchen. It's about keeping a vital flame lit, passing on a taste, and proving that home is not just a place on a map, but a powerful, unforgettable taste on the tongue.



The Mother Brine: Pao Cai

The living, bubbling foundation of the Sichuan kitchen, demystified for the American pantry.

Every serious kitchen in Sichuan has a heartbeat, and it lives in a ceramic crock in the dark. The pao cai tan—the mother brine— isn't just a recipe. It's a living, breathing ecosystem, an heirloom of lactic magic fed by scraps of radish, cabbage, and time. It provides the acidic backbone that cuts through the numbing assault of chili oil and pork fat. You don't just make a brine; you raise it.

Moving that tradition into an American pantry doesn't mean compromising the soul of the thing. The mechanics are honest and simple: water, salt, aromatics, and patience. Once the mother is awake, it provides. From lightning-fast overnight "shower pickles" to crisp, sour radishes that slap the palate awake, these are the indispensable, everyday sidekicks of the weeknight table. No pretense. Just the foundational funk of home.





Rou Mo Pao Jiang Dou

肉末泡豇豆

ròu-mò-pào-jiāng-dòu

In Sichuan, the true measure of a household's kitchen isn't found in elaborate banquet spreads, but in the humble pao cai jar bubbling quietly in the corner. This is 'lan rou jiang dou'—a spectacularly comforting, unapologetic rice-killer engineered from sheer domestic ingenuity. Growing up in a quiet Ohio suburb, you might have smelled this sharp, slightly funky aroma wafting through the house on a weeknight. It relies entirely on the acidic, umami-rich punch of lacto-fermented long beans cutting through vigorously rendered pork fat. There is no restaurant pretense here, just a fiercely authentic masterpiece that transports you straight back to the homeland.

INGREDIENTS

8 oz	pickled long beans <i>rinsed thoroughly, soaked 10 minutes if overly salty, squeezed entirely dry, and cut into 1/4-inch pebbles</i>	5 small	dried red chilies <i>snipped into small segments, seeds removed</i>
8 oz	fatty ground pork	1 tsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns
1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>finely minced</i>	1 tbsp	Shaoxing rice wine
3 med cloves	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	1 tsp	light soy sauce
		1/2 tsp	dark soy sauce
		1 tsp	white sugar
		2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil

PREPARATION

- **Control your moisture.**

Squeeze the rinsed pickled beans aggressively dry with paper towels; any residual water will ruin the dry-fry technique.

- **Hold the salt.**

Pickled long beans carry immense salinity from their brine, so this recipe deliberately omits any added salt to keep the final dish perfectly balanced.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Dry-fry the minced pork until the fat renders.**

Heat a wok or heavy skillet over medium-high heat with the oil. Add the pork and break it apart vigorously. Wait patiently until the water evaporates and the sound changes to a sharp crackle, frying the meat in its own fat until golden and toasted.

- 2. Awaken the aromatics in the hot fat.**

Push the toasted pork to the side of the wok. Drop the ginger, garlic, chilies, and Sichuan peppercorns into the pooling pork fat, letting them sizzle for 15 to 30 seconds until the kitchen smells intensely fragrant.

1. Deglaze the wok with Shaoxing wine.

Toss the pork back into the aromatics and splash the rice wine around the hot perimeter of the pan, stirring as the alcohol burns off.

2. Stir-fry the pickled beans aggressively over high heat.

Add the chopped beans to the wok and crank the heat. Toss them continuously for two to three minutes so they absorb the infused pork fat.

3. Balance the acidity with sugar and soy sauces.

Sprinkle in the sugar—the grandmother's secret for rounding out the sharp lactic acid—along with the light and dark soy sauces. Toss for another minute until the mixture is uniform and glossy.

4. Serve immediately alongside staple carbohydrates.

Plate it up and eat it with steaming jasmine rice, or fold it directly into a simple bowl of plain congee.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Source the right beans.**

If you don't have an active mother brine at home, vacuum-packed suan dou jiao from the local Asian market works perfectly. Just remember to rinse them.

● **Embrace the fat.**

Do not buy lean ground pork; the dish relies entirely on rendering the fat from standard 70/30 ground pork to mellow the sharp acidity of the fermented beans.



Yu Xiang Rou Si

鱼香肉丝

yú xiāng ròu sī

If you grew up in a Chinese-American household, the smell of ginger, garlic, and vinegar hitting a hot wok is the smell of a Tuesday night. Yu Xiang Rou Si sounds like a magic trick: a 'fish-fragrant' pork dish that contains absolutely zero fish. Born in Sichuan from the frugality of reusing pickled red chilies and seasonings from the family's mother brine, it is a perfectly balanced sweet, sour, salty, and spicy masterpiece. The trick here isn't restaurant wok skills. It's the strict math of the golden sauce and the velvet texture of the meat, pulled off with ingredients you can easily grab at any suburban Asian market. This is exactly what home tastes like.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 lb	pork tenderloin <i>partially frozen for 20 minutes, then sliced against the grain into 1/8-inch thick matchsticks</i>	1/2 med	green bell pepper <i>sliced into thin strips</i>
1 tbsp	Shaoxing rice wine	3 tbsp	Lao Gan Ma Pickled Red Chilies <i>finely minced (or substitute 1 tbsp Sambal Oelek mixed with 1 tbsp Pixian Doubanjiang)</i>
3 tbsp	light soy sauce <i>divided (1 tbsp for marinade, 2 tbsp for sauce)</i>	1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>finely minced</i>
2 tbsp	cornstarch <i>divided (1 tbsp for marinade, 1 tbsp for sauce)</i>	3 tbsp	garlic <i>finely minced</i>
4 tbsp	water <i>divided (1 tbsp for marinade, 3 tbsp for sauce)</i>	3 med	scallions <i>whites and greens separated, finely chopped</i>
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>plus 1 tsp for sealing the marinade</i>	2 tbsp	Chinese black vinegar <i>preferably Chinkiang</i>
1/2 cup	dried wood ear mushrooms <i>rehydrated in warm water for 30 minutes, hard stems removed, sliced into thin strips</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	white sugar
1 med	medium carrot <i>peeled and julienned into thin matchsticks</i>	1/2 tbsp	dark soy sauce

PREPARATION

- **Gather and measure all ingredients before you heat the wok.**

The actual cooking process takes under five minutes. You will not have time to chop, mince, or measure once the oil is smoking.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Velvet the pork to protect it from the heat of the wok.**

Place the matchstick-sliced pork in a bowl. Add the Shaoxing wine, 1 tablespoon of light soy sauce, and 1 tablespoon of water. Massage the liquids into the pork until it is completely absorbed and looks sticky. Sprinkle in 1 tablespoon of cornstarch and mix until coated, then stir in 1 teaspoon of neutral oil to seal the marinade. Let sit at room temperature for 15 to 20 minutes.

2. **Mix the golden sauce.**

In a small bowl, whisk together the Chinese black vinegar, remaining 2 tablespoons of light soy sauce, white sugar, dark soy sauce, remaining 1 tablespoon of cornstarch, and 3 tablespoons of water. Whisk until the sugar and cornstarch are completely dissolved. Set aside.

3. **Slip-fry the pork briefly and remove it from the wok.**

Heat a wok or large, heavy skillet over high heat until it begins to smoke. Add 3 tablespoons of neutral cooking oil. Immediately add the marinated pork, spreading it out in a single layer. Let it sear for 10 seconds, then rapidly stir-fry until the pork turns pale and opaque, about 1 minute. Scoop the pork out of the pan, leaving the oil behind.

4. **Build the fish-fragrance base over moderate heat.**

Turn the heat down to medium-low to prevent the aromatics from burning. Add the minced pickled chilies to the remaining oil and stir-fry for about 30 seconds until the oil turns a beautiful reddish-orange. Add the minced ginger, garlic, and the white parts of the scallions. Toss for another 15 seconds until highly fragrant.

5. **Execute the high-heat finish.**

Turn the heat back up to high. Add the julienned carrots, wood ear mushrooms, and bell pepper, stir-frying aggressively for 1 to 2 minutes until crisp-tender. Return the pork to the wok and toss to combine. Give the golden sauce a quick stir to lift the settled starch, and pour it around the edges of the hot wok. Toss rapidly. Within 5 to 10 seconds, the sauce will bubble, thicken, and cling beautifully to the pork and vegetables.

1. Garnish and serve immediately.

Turn off the heat, toss in the green parts of the scallions, and plate immediately. Serve with massive bowls of steamed white rice. The sauce is designed to bleed into the rice, creating the ultimate comfort-food bite.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Achieving the perfect matchstick slice is critical for texture.**

Partially freezing the pork for 20 minutes before slicing gives you the structural firmness needed to cut uniform, 1/8-inch shreds against the grain.

- **Accept no substitutions for Chinese black vinegar.**

The malted, complex depth of Chinkiang vinegar is non-negotiable for the Yu Xiang flavor profile. Rice vinegar or white vinegar will render the dish excessively sharp.

- **The starch will settle to the bottom of your sauce bowl.**

You must give the bowl sauce a vigorous stir right before pouring it into the wok to ensure proper gelatinization.



Pao Jiao Niu Rou

泡椒牛肉

pào jiāo niú ròu

If there is a line that separates the tourist from the grandmother, it is how they treat beef. This dish relies on a brutal chemical truth: flank steak sliced against the grain, massaged with starch, and sealed with oil will survive intense heat to emerge unimaginably tender. Paired with the funky, lactic tang of pickled Sichuan peppers pulled straight from the mother brine, it cuts through a bowl of white rice like a lightning bolt. No fancy equipment is needed here, just a hot pan, a sharp knife, and the willingness to cook aggressively for exactly ninety seconds.

INGREDIENTS

12 oz	flank steak <i>partially frozen and sliced 2mm thick against the grain</i>	1/2 cup	Sichuan pickled peppers <i>roughly chopped</i>
1/4 tsp	baking soda	1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>julienned</i>
1 tbsp	light soy sauce	3 med cloves	garlic <i>thinly sliced</i>
1/2 tsp	white pepper	1/2 cup	Chinese celery <i>cut into 2-inch segments</i>
1 tbsp	cornstarch	1 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	water	1 tbsp	Shaoxing wine
4 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>	1 tsp	black rice vinegar

PREPARATION

- **Firm the beef in the freezer.**

Place the steak in the freezer for twenty to thirty minutes until it is firm but not frozen solid, which provides the resistance needed for precise knife work.

- **Slice strictly against the grain.**

Locate the direction the long muscle fibers run and slice perpendicular to them into very thin pieces; this mechanical breakdown is the non-negotiable secret to grandmother-level tenderness.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Velvet the beef.**

Place the sliced beef in a mixing bowl with the baking soda, light soy sauce, white pepper, and water. Massage aggressively with your hands until tacky and all the liquid is absorbed, then stir in the cornstarch and gently fold in one tablespoon of the neutral oil to seal it.

1. Prepare your mise en place.

Chinese stir-frying waits for no one, so have your chopped peppers, ginger, garlic, celery, sugar, wine, and vinegar arranged right next to the stove before the heat ever goes on.

2. Flash-fry the meat.

Heat a heavy skillet or carbon steel wok over high heat until it just begins to smoke, add two tablespoons of oil, and immediately spread the beef out in a single layer. Let it sear undisturbed for five seconds, then rapidly stir until it just loses its raw red color and immediately pull it from the pan.

3. Fry the mother brine aromatics.

Return the empty pan to medium-high heat with the last tablespoon of oil. Toss in the pickled peppers, garlic, and ginger, stirring constantly for fifteen seconds until that sharp, garlicky aroma hits the air, followed by the celery for another thirty seconds.

4. Execute the final toss.

Crank the heat to maximum, return the beef and its juices to the pan, sprinkle in the sugar, and pour the Shaoxing wine around the hot edge of the wok so it instantly steams. Toss everything rapidly for thirty seconds to combine, pull off the heat, stir in the black vinegar, and serve piping hot.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Faking the mother brine.**

If you cannot source authentic lacto-fermented Sichuan peppers, buy a jar of standard American pickled jalapeños. Rinse them thoroughly to strip away the harsh industrial distilled vinegar, and mix them with a teaspoon of Sambal Oelek to mimic the proper texture and heat.



Pao Jiao Tu Dou Si

泡椒土豆丝

pào jiāo tǔ dòu sī

Forget the gloopy, vinegar-drenched potato dishes you've had at generic takeout joints. This is what a Sichuan grandmother makes on a Tuesday night. It is a masterclass in starch manipulation and lactic funk, relying entirely on the magical depths of the household pao cai jar. Thin, impossibly crisp potato matchsticks hit a blistering wok with fermented peppers and their mother brine, creating a dish that is bright, aggressively savory, and unapologetically authentic. No shortcuts, no fancy equipment—just a knife, a wok, and the uncompromising flavors of home.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	Russet or Yukon Gold potatoes <i>peeled</i>	3 med	garlic cloves <i>thinly sliced</i>
4 med	Sichuan pickled peppers (pao jiao) <i>roughly chopped</i>	1/4 cup	fresh green bell pepper or jalapeño <i>thinly sliced</i>
2 tbsp	pickled pepper brine (pao jiao shui)	2 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced on the bias</i>
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 tsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns	1/4 tsp	chicken bouillon powder or MSG

PREPARATION

- **Julienne the potatoes manually.**

Cut a thin slice off one side of the potato so it sits flat, then slice into 1/8-inch planks, stack those planks, and slice lengthwise into 1/8-inch matchsticks. Put the cheese grater away; mechanical shredding destroys the cellular structure and ruins the crunch.

- **Wash away the surface starch.**

Immediately submerge the cut potatoes in a large bowl of cold water for 10 to 15 minutes. Drain the milky water, then rinse under cold running water two or three more times until the water runs completely clear, and drain thoroughly in a colander.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Infuse the oil with Sichuan peppercorns.**

Place your wok over medium heat and add the cold oil and whole peppercorns. As the oil heats, let the peppercorns fry gently for 60 to 90 seconds until highly fragrant and slightly darkened, then scoop them all out with a slotted spoon and discard.

1. Fry the aromatics.

Turn the heat up to medium-high and toss the sliced garlic and chopped pickled peppers into the infused oil. Stir-fry for about 15 seconds until the garlic is fragrant and the fermented aroma hits you.

2. Flash-fry the potatoes.

Crank the heat to maximum, then add the thoroughly drained potatoes and sliced fresh peppers. Toss and stir continuously for 2 minutes until the edges of the potatoes begin to turn slightly translucent but the centers remain crisp.

3. Deglaze with the mother brine.

Pour the reserved pickled pepper brine down the side of the hot wok so it sizzles on contact, then sprinkle in the salt and bouillon powder. Toss everything aggressively for 30 seconds so the potatoes absorb the sour, savory liquid.

4. Garnish and serve immediately.

Turn off the heat, toss in the scallions, give it one final mix, and transfer immediately to a plate to serve hot alongside steamed rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the soak.**

If you skip the cold water rinse, the surface starches will turn your potatoes into a gummy, sticky paste the second they hit the hot wok.

● **Extract and discard the peppercorns.**

Blooming the spices in cold oil gives you all the authentic, numbing aroma without the jarring texture of biting into a whole woody husk mid-meal.



Pao Cai Chao Fan

泡菜炒饭

pàocài chǎofàn

For those whose childhoods smelled like the sharp, mouth-watering tang of a family pickle jar cracking open, this is the dish that drags them right back home. Far removed from the soy-drenched, oversweetened takeout of the American suburbs, authentic Sichuan fried rice relies on the brilliant, lactic-acid brightness of the mother brine and the working-class patience to cook minced pork until every drop of water evaporates into sizzling fat. It is the ultimate utilitarian comfort food: just cold leftover rice, a handful of sour pickles, some ground pork, and a screaming hot wok.

INGREDIENTS

3 cup	cooked white rice <i>day-old and chilled</i>	1 tsp	fresh ginger <i>finely minced</i>
2 large	eggs <i>beaten with a pinch of salt</i>	2 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced, greens and whites separated</i>
1 cup	Sichuan pickled vegetables <i>finely diced and gently squeezed of excess liquid</i>	1 tsp	Sichuan peppercorns
5 oz	ground pork	2 small	dried red chilies <i>snipped into small pieces</i>
2 tbsp	lard or neutral cooking oil	1 tbsp	light soy sauce
2 clove	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	1/4 tsp	ground white pepper
		1/4 tsp	sugar

PREPARATION

- **Break up the cold rice with wet hands.**

Doing this before you start cooking ensures there are no large, dry clumps to fight with in the wok.

- **Squeeze the diced pickles gently to remove excess brine.**

Too much moisture is the enemy of good fried rice, and keeping the pickles dry ensures beautiful, separated grains.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Scramble the eggs quickly in a hot wok, then set them aside.**

Heat your wok over medium-high heat with half of the oil, pour in the beaten eggs, and scramble until just set but still soft, about 30 seconds. Remove them immediately to a plate so they don't turn rubbery.

- 2. Fry the ground pork until the water evaporates and it sears in its own fat.**

Add the remaining oil to the wok and drop in the pork. Do not stop when it just turns grey; keep frying until the dull bubbling changes to a sharp sizzle, signaling that the water is gone and the deep, savory fat is rendering out.

- 1. Push the pork aside and bloom the aromatics in the hot fat.**
Drop the garlic, ginger, scallion whites, peppercorns, and chilies into the oil pool. Fry for 15 seconds until intensely fragrant, then mix them into the browned pork.
- 2. Stir-fry the diced pickles to release their aroma.**
Add the squeezed pickles to the wok and toss everything together for a minute, waking up that vibrant, sour tang and cooking off any raw brine notes.
- 3. Crank the heat to high and toss in the cold rice.**
Use the back of your spatula to press the rice into the hot metal, breaking up any clumps so the seasoned fat coats every single grain.
- 4. Season the rice, return the eggs, and toss with the scallion greens before serving.**
Pour the soy sauce down the hot side of the wok so it sizzles, then add the white pepper, sugar, and cooked eggs, breaking the eggs up with your spatula. Toss in the scallion greens off the heat and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not substitute Korean kimchi for Sichuan pickles.**
Kimchi is fantastic, but its heavy garlic, gochugaru, and seafood paste will completely alter the dish. Look for vacuum-sealed packets of pickled yardlong beans or mustard greens at your local Asian market for that clean, lactic-acid brightness.
- **You can achieve great wok hei on a standard home stove with a little patience.**
If your burner is not a jet engine, let the rice sit undisturbed for 10 to 15 seconds at a time to toast against the hot metal before tossing.



Yu Xiang Qie Zi

鱼香茄子

yúxiāng qiézi

Forget the heavy, oil-slicked takeout versions you might have grown up with. This is the real deal, a masterpiece of sweet, sour, and savory alchemy built on the back of the lacto-fermented pickled chilies pulled straight from your mother brine. We skip the messy restaurant deep-fry in favor of a brilliant, practical salt-extraction trick that yields buttery, custard-like eggplant without the grease. Anchored by a heavy hand of ginger and the old-school trick of splitting your garlic into raw and cooked additions, this is exactly what it tastes like in a Sichuan home.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	Chinese or Japanese eggplants <i>trimmed, cut crosswise into 3-inch lengths, and quartered lengthwise into batons</i>	3 med	scallions <i>whites and greens separated, both finely sliced</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	4 oz	ground pork
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	Chinking black rice vinegar
2 tbsp	Sichuan pickled red chilies <i>finely minced</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	granulated sugar
1 tbsp	Pixian broad bean paste <i>finely minced</i>	1 tbsp	light soy sauce
1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>peeled and finely minced</i>	1/2 tsp	dark soy sauce
6 large	cloves garlic <i>finely minced and divided into two equal piles</i>	3 tbsp	water or unsalted chicken stock
		1 tsp	cornstarch or potato starch

PREPARATION

- **Tame the eggplant by drawing out its internal moisture with salt.**

Place the eggplant batons in a large bowl, sprinkle with the kosher salt, and toss vigorously. Let sit for 15 to 20 minutes until beads of water form, then gently squeeze the batons by the handful to expel excess water and pat completely dry with paper towels.

- **Mix the bowl sauce to ensure rapid deployment at the wok.**

In a small bowl, whisk together the Chinking vinegar, sugar, light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, water or stock, and cornstarch until the sugar is fully dissolved.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Pan-fry the salted eggplant until blistered and tender.

Heat a wok or large heavy-bottomed skillet over medium-high heat with 2 tablespoons of neutral oil. Add the dried eggplant in a single layer and pan-fry, tossing occasionally, until the skin is blistered and the flesh is golden-brown, about 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer to a paper-towel-lined plate.

2. Brown the ground pork to build a savory foundation.

Lower the heat to medium and add the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil. Add the ground pork and break it up with a spatula until crispy and browned, about 2 minutes.

3. Awaken the aromatics and chili pastes.

Push the pork to the side and add the minced pickled chilies and broad bean paste. Stir-fry for 30 seconds until the oil turns a brilliant, fragrant red, then add the ginger, exactly half of the minced garlic, and the scallion whites. Stir-fry for another 30 seconds, taking care not to burn the garlic.

4. Return the eggplant to the wok and introduce the bowl sauce.

Toss the softened eggplant back in to coat it in the red chili oil. Give your pre-mixed bowl sauce a quick stir to lift the settled starch, then pour it around the edges of the hot wok.

5. Thicken the sauce and add the raw garlic punch off the heat.

Increase the heat to high and toss gently as the sauce rapidly bubbles, thickens, and turns glossy, about 1 minute. Turn off the heat entirely, immediately stir in the remaining raw garlic and scallion greens, and serve at once.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Keep the fish out of fish-fragrant eggplant.**

Despite the name, there is no seafood in authentic Yu Xiang. The fish fragrance refers to the classic combination of aromatics historically used to mask the muddy flavors of river fish. Resist any urge to add fish sauce or oyster sauce.

- **The garlic split is non-negotiable.**

Dividing the garlic into two additions fried early for sweet caramelized notes, and stirred in raw off the heat for a sharp, volatile bite is a classic grandma secret that cuts right through the rich sauce.



Pao Jiao Ji Ding

泡椒鸡丁

pào jiāo jī dīng

Before the numbing hammer of mala conquered the globe, the soul of the Sichuan home kitchen lived in its pickle crocks. This dish is a monument to the mother brine, relying entirely on the fruity, lactic tang of fermented chilies rather than heavy bean pastes or sticky takeout glazes. It's practical, fast, and exactly how a grandmother would make it on a Tuesday night. Leave the doubanjiang in the pantry; we're keeping this pure.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	boneless skinless chicken thighs <i>cut into 1/2-inch cubes</i>	1 inch	fresh ginger <i>cut into thin matchsticks</i>
1 tbsp	light soy sauce	3 med	scallion <i>white and light green parts only, cut into 1-inch segments</i>
1 tbsp	Shaoxing rice wine	15	whole Sichuan peppercorns
1 tbsp	cornstarch	2 stalk	celery <i>cut into diamond shapes matching the size of the chicken</i>
1/4 tsp	kosher salt	2 tbsp	chicken broth
1 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 tsp	white vinegar
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 tsp	light soy sauce
1/2 cup	Sichuan pickled chilies <i>roughly chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	sugar
1 1/2 tbsp	pickled chili brine	1/2 tsp	cornstarch
3 med clove	garlic <i>thinly sliced</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Velvet the chicken.**

In a mixing bowl, vigorously massage the chicken cubes with 1 tablespoon light soy sauce, Shaoxing wine, kosher salt, and 1 tablespoon cornstarch until the liquid is entirely absorbed and the meat feels tacky. Stir in 1 tablespoon of neutral oil to seal it, and let it sit on the counter for 15 to 20 minutes.

- **Whisk the finishing sauce.**

In a small bowl, combine the chicken broth, white vinegar, 1 teaspoon light soy sauce, sugar, and 1/2 teaspoon cornstarch.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Pass the chicken through the oil.**

Heat a large, heavy-bottomed skillet or flat-bottomed wok over high heat until lightly smoking, then swirl in the 3 tablespoons of neutral oil. Add the velveted chicken, let it sear untouched for 10 seconds, then vigorously stir-fry for 1 to 2 minutes until just opaque on the outside (about 70 percent cooked), and immediately remove it with a slotted spoon.

2. **Bloom the aromatics.**

Lower the heat to medium, add the Sichuan peppercorns to the remaining oil, and let them sizzle for 5 seconds. Add the ginger, garlic, and scallion whites, tossing for 15 seconds, then add the chopped pickled chilies and stir-fry slowly for 45 seconds to coax their bright, acidic oils into the pan.

3. **Recombine and flash fry.**

Crank the heat back to high and return the chicken to the pan along with the celery diamonds. Toss everything together for 30 seconds so the chicken absorbs the chili oil.

4. **Lock in the flavor with the mother brine.**

Give your finishing sauce a quick stir to re-incorporate the cornstarch, then pour it into the pan along with the reserved 1 1/2 tablespoons of pickled chili brine. Toss rapidly for 30 to 45 seconds as the intoxicating, sour-spicy steam billows up and the sauce tightens into a glossy coating, then transfer to a plate and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Skip the bean paste.**

Many modern recipes try to boost this dish with a scoop of Pixian doubanjiang, but its heavy, earthy funk will completely obliterate the delicate, bright acidity of the pickled chilies.

- **Manage your heat.**

Standard American stoves lack the BTUs of commercial wok burners. If your pan loses heat when the chicken goes in and starts boiling in its own juices, pull the meat out immediately, let the pan recover, and cook in batches.

- **Taste your brine.**

The age of your pickled chilies dictates the dish's acidity. If your brine is aggressively sour, add an extra 1/2 teaspoon of sugar to the finishing sauce; if it's lacking punch, add a splash more white vinegar right at the end.



Kuai Shou Pao Cai Yu

快手泡菜鱼

kuàishǒu pàocài yú

There is a profound difference between the watered-down dishes of Americanized takeout and the pragmatic, fiercely flavorful meals a modern Chinese family actually eats on a Tuesday night. This is the latter. It is a highly authentic adaptation that trades the labor of butchering a whole river fish for accessible fillets without sacrificing a single degree of technique. The secret lies in dry-frying the fermented mother brine vegetables to unlock their deep, savory tang, and properly velveting the fish so it slips down the throat like silk. It is a sharp, bubbling cauldron of lactic acid, garlic, and hot chili oil that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	flaky white fish fillets <i>patted completely dry and cut into 1/4-inch thick broad slices</i>	6 med clove	garlic <i>minced and divided</i>
1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1 small piece	fresh ginger <i>minced</i>
1/4 tsp	ground white pepper	4 med	scallions <i>whites cut into 1-inch lengths and greens finely sliced</i>
1 tbsp	Shaoxing wine	4 cup	chicken broth
1 large	egg white	1 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	cornstarch	5 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>
1 1/2 cup	Sichuan pickled mustard greens <i>rinsed, squeezed dry, and chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	mustard seed oil
3 tbsp	pickled Sichuan chilies <i>chopped</i>	1 tsp	Sichuan peppercorns
1 tbsp	pickled ginger <i>minced</i>	8 med	dried red chilies <i>snipped into sections</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Velvet the fish slices to ensure a silky texture.

Place the dry fish slices in a bowl with the salt, white pepper, and Shaoxing wine, mixing gently until the flesh feels sticky. Massage in the egg white until absorbed, then sprinkle the cornstarch over the top and mix until every piece is coated in a thin, glossy paste to marinate for 15 minutes.

2. Dry-fry the fermented vegetables to release their essential aromas.

Heat a large wok over medium-high heat with two tablespoons of neutral oil, tossing in the fresh ginger, half the minced garlic, and the scallion whites for 30 seconds. Add the chopped pickled mustard greens, pickled chilies, and pickled ginger, stirring vigorously for 3 to 4 minutes until the moisture evaporates and the pickles caramelize slightly.

- 1. Build and simmer the broth to extract the savory depths of the mother brine.**
Pour the chicken broth into the wok, add the sugar, and bring to a rolling boil. Reduce the heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer for 10 minutes to create a milky, golden-green soup.
- 2. Poach the velveted fish gently in the simmering liquid.**
Ensure the broth is at a gentle simmer, then drop the marinated fish slices in one by one to prevent clumping. Let them sit undisturbed for 30 seconds to set the starch coating, then gently push them around with a ladle for 1 to 2 minutes until just opaque before transferring everything to a large serving bowl.
- 3. Trigger the final aromatic sizzle with smoking-hot oil.**
Mound the remaining minced garlic, scallion greens, dried chilies, and Sichuan peppercorns on top of the cooked fish. Heat the remaining three tablespoons of neutral oil and the mustard seed oil in a small pan until smoking hot, then carefully pour it directly over the aromatics to instantly release their volatile oils before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Never boil the pickles from raw.**
Treating the fermented vegetables like a raw soup ingredient leaves a metallic, harsh funk in the dish. Dry-frying them concentrates their sugars and softens the sharp lactic bite into a deeply savory tang.
- **The science of velveting.**
Coating the fish in egg white and starch creates a protective matrix that gelatinizes instantly in the hot broth, preventing the muscle fibers from seizing up and squeezing out their internal moisture.
- **Replicating authentic oil.**
Traditional Sichuan cooking uses roasted rapeseed oil. Adding a dash of mustard seed oil to your neutral cooking fat perfectly mimics that distinct, earthy aroma.



The 7:30 AM Awakening: Sichuan Breakfasts

High-impact, fast-assembly savory morning meals designed to wake up the senses.

There is no gentle easing into the day in Chengdu. Morning arrives with a slap to the senses—the sharp, metallic tang of roasted chilies and the deep hum of toasted peppercorns cutting through the damp air. This chapter brings that unapologetic wake-up call to the sterile quiet of an American suburb. It is an arsenal of high-impact, fiercely savory breakfasts engineered for the rush of a Tuesday morning, relying on smart weekend prep to bridge the gap between the street stalls of home and the bleary-eyed school run.

A steaming bowl of Chongqing Xiao Mian or a slick, chili-bathed Long Chaoshou before 8:00 AM isn't just sustenance; it is a defiant act of holding onto who you are. Here are the street-corner classics—from air-fryer crispy Juntun

Guokui to savory, silken Doufunao—streamlined for the modern kitchen but stripped of none of their soul. Fast, fiery, and completely uncompromising.





Chongqing Xiao Mian

重庆小面

chóngqìng xiǎomiàn

In the dense, humid mornings of Chongqing, the city wakes up not to coffee, but to the rhythmic clatter of bamboo spoons and the intoxicating, smoky punch of toasted chilies. For kids of the diaspora, recreating this bowl of little noodles in an American kitchen used to feel impossible without restaurant gear. But the grandmothers know the secret. It is not about a slow-simmered broth, but the precise, layered architecture of the seasoning bowl. By steeping aromatics into a mellow ginger-garlic water and embracing the unapologetic silkiness of

rendered lard, you unlock the exact, visceral taste of the homeland in fifteen minutes. Just the essentials you can grab at the local Asian market, and a bowl.

INGREDIENTS

2 large	garlic cloves <i>smashed and roughly chopped</i>	1/2 tsp	MSG or chicken bouillon powder
1 inch piece	fresh ginger <i>smashed and roughly chopped</i>	1/4 tsp	sugar
1/2 cup	boiling water	7 oz	dried alkaline wheat noodles
2 tbsp	light soy sauce	1 med bunch	leafy green vegetables <i>washed</i>
3 tbsp	chili oil with sediment	4 tbsp	Fuling Zha Cai <i>finely minced</i>
2 tsp	rendered lard	4 tbsp	roasted peanuts <i>crushed</i>
2 tsp	toasted sesame oil	2 med	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>
1 tsp	black rice vinegar		
1 tsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns <i>toasted and freshly ground</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Toast and grind the Sichuan peppercorns fresh.**

Pre-ground Sichuan pepper from the supermarket tastes like sawdust. Buy whole peppercorns, toast them in a dry skillet for ninety seconds until fragrant, and grind them fresh to deliver the crucial numbing sensation.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Steep the aromatics to create the foundational ginger-garlic water.

Place the smashed garlic and ginger into a small heat-proof bowl and pour the boiling water directly over them. Let this steep for at least ten minutes; this is the secret to getting that pervasive, savory homeland flavor without the burning aftertaste of raw garlic.

2. Build the architecture of the seasoning bowls.

Divide the light soy sauce, chili oil, lard, sesame oil, black vinegar, ground Sichuan peppercorn, MSG, and sugar equally into the bottom of two empty serving bowls. Spoon two tablespoons of your steeped ginger-garlic water into each bowl, leaving the solid chunks behind, and give it a gentle swirl.

3. Employ the two boils method to cook the alkaline noodles.

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil and drop in your dried noodles. When the water surges up and boils vigorously again, pour in a quarter cup of cold water to calm the boil, then wait for it to return to a full boil once more. This traditional technique ensures the noodles cook to a perfect, bouncy al dente without turning mushy on the outside.

4. Blanch the greens and emulsify the sauce.

During the last thirty seconds of the noodles cooking time, drop your leafy greens directly into the pot. Before draining the noodles, use a ladle to scoop about a quarter cup of the hot, starchy noodle-boiling water and pour it directly into your prepared seasoning bowls to melt the lard and instantly bloom the spices.

5. Assemble, toss, and awaken the dish.

Lift the noodles and greens from the pot, shake off the excess water, and place them directly into the fragrant sauce. Top generously with the minced Zha Cai, crushed peanuts, and scallions, then toss the noodles vigorously from the bottom up until every strand is coated in the fiery, glossy red sauce.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Flash-heat store-bought chili crisp for an instant aromatic upgrade.**

If you are using a jar of commercial chili oil rather than homemade, heat two tablespoons of neutral oil until shimmering and pour it directly over the chili crisp in the serving bowl to reawaken its dormant volatile oils.

- **Do not substitute the rendered lard.**

Lard provides a velvety, lip-coating texture that softens the aggressive spice of the chili oil and acts as the bridge connecting the aqueous ingredients with the fats. If you must skip it for dietary reasons, substitute with extra toasted sesame oil, but know you are sacrificing a core pillar of the authentic dish.



Long Chaoshou

龙抄手

lóng chāo shǒu

It's 7:30 AM in Chengdu, and breakfast isn't a fiery bowl of chili oil—it's a restorative, delicate bowl of Long Chaoshou. The secret of authentic grandmother cooking lies here in the physics of the meat filling and the respect paid to a clean, white-pepper-laced chicken broth. It's a dish born of pragmatism and cold winter mornings, where the wontons fold like crossed arms, offering pure, unembellished comfort to wake up the soul.

INGREDIENTS

4 slices

fresh ginger
smashed

2 med

scallions
*white and light green parts only,
smashed*

1/3 cup	cold water	4 cup	chicken bone broth <i>heated to boiling</i>
1 lb	ground pork <i>ideally 70% lean and 30% fat</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt <i>divided among serving bowls</i>
1 large	egg	1/2 tsp	white pepper <i>finely ground, divided among serving bowls</i>
1 tbsp	light soy sauce	1 tsp	toasted sesame oil <i>divided among serving bowls</i>
1 tsp	toasted sesame oil	1/4 tsp	MSG <i>optional, divided among serving bowls</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	2 med	scallions <i>green parts only, finely chopped</i>
1/2 tsp	white pepper <i>finely ground</i>		
1 package	thin wonton wrappers <i>Shanghai-style preferred</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Extract the ginger and scallion essence.**

In a small bowl, cover the smashed ginger and scallion whites with the cold water. Massage them aggressively with your fingers until the water turns slightly cloudy and fragrant, then let it steep for 15 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whip the meat proteins into a tight emulsion.**

Place the ground pork in a mixing bowl with the egg, soy sauce, sesame oil, salt, and white pepper. Using your hand in a claw shape or a pair of chopsticks, stir the meat vigorously in exactly one direction—do not reverse your stirring motion.

- 2. Hydrate the pork with the aromatic water.**

As you continue stirring in that single direction, add the steeped ginger-scallion water one tablespoon at a time, discarding the solid aromatics. Keep stirring for 3 to 5 minutes until the liquid is fully absorbed and the meat transforms into a sticky, pale, bouncy paste.

1. Fold the wontons like crossed arms.

Place a wrapper in your palm like a diamond and dab exactly one teaspoon of meat in the center. Fold the bottom point up to the top to form a triangle, pressing out the air. Moisten the left corner, then bring the left and right corners downward to overlap under the meat belly, pressing firmly to seal.

2. Boil gently in a wide pot of water.

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil and drop the Chaoshou in gently, stirring once to prevent sticking. When the water returns to a furious boil, pour in a half cup of cold water to calm the surface tension, which prevents the delicate skins from tearing.

3. Assemble the bowls and serve immediately.

Divide the serving salt, white pepper, sesame oil, and MSG among your bowls. Ladle the boiling chicken broth over the seasonings, then gently drop 8 to 10 cooked wontons into each bowl, finishing with a sprinkle of chopped scallion greens.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The Wrapper Reality Check.**

Don't lose your mind trying to hand-roll paper-thin dough on a weeknight. Go to a local Asian market and buy 'Shanghai Style' wonton wrappers; they perfectly replicate the delicate, slippery texture of Chengdu street food.

● **The White Pepper Imperative.**

Do not substitute black pepper. Finely ground white pepper provides a specific, floral, earthy heat that wakes up the palate and is entirely non-negotiable for an authentic Sichuan clear soup.

● **Batch Cooking and Freezing.**

Fold a massive batch on a Sunday afternoon and freeze them on a parchment-lined baking sheet before transferring to a bag. You can boil them straight from frozen—just add an extra splash of cold water during the boil to ensure the pork cooks through without tearing the wrapper.



Juntun Guokui

军屯锅盔

jūntún guōkuī

On the streets of Chengdu, these laminated meat pies are slapped onto the inner walls of a coal-fired oil drum until the excess fat renders out and the pastry shatters on impact. For those of us cooking in an Ohio suburb without a modified tandoor, a cast-iron skillet and a hot oven do the exact same thermodynamic heavy lifting. The secret lies in a semi-fermented dough, a lard-based roux, and an unapologetic dose of freshly toasted Sichuan peppercorns—a grandmother-approved maneuver that brings unadulterated homeland flavor to a Tuesday morning.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/3 cup	all-purpose flour	1 tbsp	light soy sauce
1/2 tsp	instant dry yeast	1 tsp	toasted sesame oil
1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
3/4 cup	warm water <i>heated to around 100 degrees Fahrenheit</i>	1/4 tsp	white pepper
7 oz	ground pork <i>80/20 lean-to-fat ratio</i>	2 tbsp	lard <i>or neutral oil</i>
1 tbsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns	3 tbsp	all-purpose flour
2 tbsp	scallions <i>white parts only, finely minced</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>peeled and finely minced</i>	1/4 cup	white sesame seeds
		1/4 cup	neutral oil <i>for frying</i>

PREPARATION

- **Toast and grind the peppercorns.**

Place the whole Sichuan peppercorns in a dry skillet over medium-low heat for 2 to 3 minutes until they smoke lightly and release a citrusy aroma, then pulverize into a fine powder.

- **Mix the meat filling.**

Combine the ground pork, scallion whites, ginger, soy sauce, sesame oil, 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, white pepper, and 1 1/2 teaspoons of the fresh peppercorn powder, stirring vigorously in one direction until it forms a sticky paste.

- **Create the oil roux.**

Mix the lard, 3 tablespoons of flour, 1/2 teaspoon of kosher salt, and the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of peppercorn powder until it forms a smooth, spreadable paste.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Form the semi-fermented dough.

Whisk the 2 1/3 cups of flour, yeast, and 1/2 teaspoon salt, then add the warm water, mix into shaggy flakes, and knead for 5 to 7 minutes until smooth.

2. Rest the dough briefly.

Lightly coat the dough in oil, cover with a damp towel, and let it rest for exactly 20 to 30 minutes so the gluten relaxes without fully proofing.

3. Divide and stretch.

On an oiled surface, divide the dough into 6 equal portions and roll each into a 4-by-12-inch translucent rectangle.

4. Laminate and fill.

Smear a thin layer of the oil roux over the entire rectangle, then spread a spoonful of the meat filling over the top two-thirds.

5. Roll and flatten.

Starting from the meat-covered end, roll the dough down tightly into a cylinder, stand it upright, and press straight down with your palm to form a half-inch thick disc.

6. Garnish with sesame seeds.

Brush the top of each disc lightly with water and press it gently into a shallow plate of white sesame seeds.

7. Shallow fry to set the crust.

Heat a quarter-inch of neutral oil in a cast-iron skillet over medium-low heat and fry the discs seed-side down for 2 to 3 minutes per side until deeply golden.

8. Bake to shatter.

Transfer the fried guokui to a parchment-lined baking sheet and bake in a preheated 350°F oven for 15 to 18 minutes to render out the fat and cook the interior layers through.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Activate the flavor.**

Never buy pre-ground Sichuan peppercorns; toasting and grinding whole berries unlocks the compound that provides the dish's signature numbing tingle.

- **Emulsify the meat.**

Stirring the pork filling vigorously in one direction causes the proteins to bind, creating a cohesive paste that won't fall out of the pastry layers when you take a bite.

- **The weeknight freeze.**

These freeze beautifully after the final bake; on a chaotic morning, bypass the microwave and reheat them straight from frozen in a 350°F oven for 15 minutes.



San Zi Douhua

撒子豆花

sǎnzi dòuhuā

In Chengdu, breakfast isn't a sleepy affair; it's a glorious, visceral awakening of the senses. This legendary street bowl is a masterpiece of textures and violent contrasts: warm, quivering silken tofu buried under a slick of volatile chili oil, buzzing Sichuan pepper, earthy fermented black beans, and a brittle crown of deep-fried dough. For those who grew up far from the homeland, recreating that exact thrill doesn't require a stone mill or hours of labor. With a quick trip to the local Asian market and ten minutes on a Tuesday morning, this intensely comforting, grandmother-approved bowl is completely yours.

INGREDIENTS

14 oz	silken tofu <i>drained slightly</i>	1 tbsp	warm water
1 cup	sanzi <i>roughly broken into 2-inch pieces</i>	1 med clove	garlic <i>smashed</i>
2 tbsp	Chinese sesame paste	1 pinch	sugar
2 tsp	warm water	1 pinch	MSG
2 tbsp	light soy sauce	2 tbsp	zha cai <i>finely minced</i>
1 tbsp	fermented black bean paste	2 tbsp	roasted peanuts <i>crushed</i>
3 tbsp	Sichuan chili oil with flakes	2 tbsp	crispy fried soybeans
1 tsp	Sichuan pepper oil	2 tbsp	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>
1/2 tsp	toasted Sichuan peppercorn powder		

PREPARATION

- **Steep the garlic water.**

Combine the smashed garlic clove and 1 tablespoon of warm water in a small ramekin; let it sit for 5 minutes to extract the pungent oils, then discard the solid clove.

- **Thin the sesame paste.**

In a separate small dish, whisk the Chinese sesame paste with 2 teaspoons of warm water until smooth and pourable.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the flavor architecture.**

Divide the thinned sesame paste, soy sauce, fermented black bean paste, chili oil, Sichuan pepper oil, Sichuan pepper powder, garlic water, sugar, and MSG evenly between two serving bowls, stirring gently to form a thick, fragrant paste at the bottom of each.

1. Heat the tofu.

Place the silken tofu in a microwave-safe dish, cover loosely, and microwave on high for 2 to 3 minutes until piping hot and steaming.

2. Portion the curds.

Using a large, flat spoon, carefully scoop broad, delicate flakes of the hot tofu and slide them directly over the sauce base in the bowls. Do not mash the tofu; you want large, cloud-like curds.

3. Assemble the garnishes.

Top the hot tofu evenly with the minced zha cai, crushed peanuts, crispy soybeans, and chopped scallions.

4. Crown with crunch.

Right before serving, pile the crispy sanzhi high on top of the tofu to ensure they don't get soggy before hitting the table.

5. Fold and eat.

Use a spoon to gently fold the tofu, drawing the dark, spicy sauces from the bottom up and over the dough to create a perfect bite of heat, silk, and crunch.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The grandmother's secret to homemade douhua.**

If you want the absolute authentic texture, you can make your own douhua from scratch using a modern kitchen cheat. Heat 2 cups of single-ingredient soy milk until just simmering. In a bowl, dissolve 1/2 teaspoon of GDL (Glucono delta-lactone) in 1 tablespoon of warm water, pour the hot soy milk over it rapidly to mix, and cover immediately. Let it sit perfectly still for 15 minutes to set into the silkiest tofu imaginable.

● **Navigating the pickle aisle.**

While historic Chengdu institutions might use da tou cai (preserved turnip), zha cai (pickled mustard stems) is perfectly authentic and much easier to source in America. Sold in small red or green packets in the Asian market, it provides the exact salty, acidic crunch required to cut through the rich oils.

- **Sanzi substitutions.**

If your local market lacks proper bags of sanzi (fried dough twists), deep-frying sliced wonton wrappers or using heavily toasted, diced youtiao (Chinese crullers) will provide a highly acceptable, brittle wheat crunch.



Mianyang Mifen

绵阳米粉

mián-yáng mǐ-fěn

In the shadow of Chengdu's fiery reputation lies Mianyang, a city sustained by an ancient morning ritual of impossibly thin rice noodles bathed in a complex duality of broths. This is the authentic Dui Jiao method, a fierce collision of blistering red chili beef oil and restorative chicken bone broth. Recreating this street-side magic in an American kitchen comes down to a few brilliant, grandmother-approved tricks like overnight cold-water hydration for the noodles, tapping the canning aisle for soft yellow peas, and letting a pressure cooker collapse the spiced beef in under an hour. The result is an uncompromising, unapologetic bowl that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

8 oz	ultra-thin dried rice vermicelli <i>Taiwanese Hsinchu or Vietnamese Bun style</i>	1 med	cassia bark or cinnamon stick
4 cup	low-sodium chicken broth	1 whole	black cardamom pod <i>cracked open</i>
1 thick slice	fresh ginger <i>smashed</i>	1 tbsp	light soy sauce
1 lb	beef chuck <i>cut into 3/4-inch cubes</i>	1 tsp	dark soy sauce
1/4 cup	neutral cooking oil	1/2 tsp	five-spice powder
1 tbsp	beef tallow or pork lard	2 cup	water
3 tbsp	Pixian Doubanjiang <i>minced</i>	1 cup	dried kelp knots <i>rehydrated and boiled until tender</i>
6 large	dried Sichuan chilies <i>snipped into halves</i>	1/2 cup	canned chickpeas <i>boiled and easily mashed with a fork</i>
1 tbsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns	1/3 cup	Sichuan pickled mustard greens <i>finely chopped and briefly pan-fried</i>
2 whole	star anise	1/4 cup	cilantro <i>finely chopped</i>
		1/4 cup	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Soak the rice noodles overnight.**

In the morning or the night before, place the dried rice noodles in a large bowl and submerge them completely in cold tap water, leaving them on the counter to hydrate until pliable and opaque white.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Expel the moisture from the beef to prepare it for braising.

Place a pressure cooker insert on sauté mode or a wok over medium-high heat. Add the neutral oil and tallow, then stir-fry the beef for 5 to 7 minutes until the water evaporates, the oil turns clear, and the meat begins to crisp and brown on the edges.

2. Bloom the aromatics to build the red base.

Push the beef to one side, add the Doubanjiang to the pooling oil, and fry for 1 to 2 minutes until the oil turns a brilliant glossy red. Toss in the peppercorns, dried chilies, star anise, cassia, and black cardamom, mixing everything until fragrant.

3. Pressure braise the beef saozhi.

Stir the soy sauces and five-spice powder into the beef, pour in the 2 cups of water, seal the lid, and cook on high pressure for 30 minutes followed by a quick release.

4. Prepare the clear soup.

While the beef cooks, bring the chicken broth and smashed ginger to a gentle simmer in a separate pot to create your restorative clear base.

5. Execute the ten-second noodle blanch.

Bring a large pot of water to an aggressive, rolling boil. Lower a single portion of drained, cold-soaked noodles into the water using a strainer, count to exactly ten seconds, then pull them out immediately and shake off the excess water.

6. Assemble the final bowl using the authentic Dui Jiao method.

Place the noodles in a deep serving bowl, ladle in one scoop of the simmering clear chicken broth, follow with a generous scoop of the vibrant red beef broth, and top meticulously with the kelp, mashed chickpeas, mustard greens, cilantro, and scallions.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not skip the cold water soak.**

Boiling dry ultra-thin noodles will turn them to mush. Hydrating them in cold water first allows for instantaneous gelatinization in the boiling water, preserving their structural integrity perfectly.

- **Respect the Maillard reaction on the beef.**

Frying the diced beef in oil until the surface is completely dry makes the meat highly porous, allowing it to act like a sponge for the intensely flavored red broth during the pressure braise.



Chengdu Fei Chang Fen

成都肥肠粉

Chéngdū Féicháng Fěn

A truly authentic bowl of Chengdu Fei Chang Fen isn't a monolithic stew; it's a meticulously layered architecture of flavor. Built on a foundation of numbingly spicy, sour, and fiercely savory seasonings, this morning street-stall staple relies on the resilient chew of thick sweet potato noodles and the rich, fatty depth of braised pork intestines. To the uninitiated, preparing offal sounds daunting, but by isolating the flour-scrubbing and pressure-cooking to a quiet weekend afternoon, you earn yourself a weeknight arsenal. When Tuesday rolls around, it takes just fifteen minutes of boiling and assembling to flood your kitchen with the exact, vaporous aroma of the Baijia Town docks.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	pork large intestine	6 tbsp	Baoning vinegar or Chinkiang black vinegar
1 lb	pork neck bones or leg bones		
1/2 cup	all-purpose flour	4 tbsp	light soy sauce
1/4 cup	white vinegar	6 tbsp	Sichuan red chili oil with sediment
2 tbsp	kosher salt		
2 med	scallions <i>knotted</i>	2 tsp	freshly ground Sichuan peppercorn powder
1 med	ginger	1 tsp	white pepper powder
piece	<i>smashed</i>	2 tsp	toasted sesame oil
3 large	garlic	1/2 tsp	sugar
cloves	<i>smashed</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
2	star anise	1/4 cup	crispy soybeans or roasted edamame
1 small	cassia bark or cinnamon stick	1/4 cup	pickled mustard greens <i>finely chopped</i>
piece			
1 tsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns	1/4 cup	fresh scallions <i>chopped</i>
2 tbsp	light soy sauce	1/4 cup	fresh cilantro <i>chopped</i>
1 tbsp	Shaoxing cooking wine	1/4 cup	Chinese celery or inner pale celery stalks <i>finely minced</i>
1 tbsp	Pixian Doubanjiang		
400 g	dried thick sweet potato noodles		

PREPARATION

- **Scrub the raw intestines with flour and salt.**

Place the intestines in a large bowl with the flour and 2 tablespoons of salt, massaging vigorously for 3 to 5 minutes to strip away the biological mucus, then rinse thoroughly under cold running water.

- **Wash the offal with vinegar and turn the tubes inside out.**

Massage the intestines with white vinegar, then carefully push the tube back through itself to expose the inner fat layer; peel away the thick globular fat and lymph nodes under running water, leaving just a thin layer of fat before reversing it back.

- **Blanch the cleaned intestines and pork bones to remove impurities.**

Submerge the meats in a large pot of cold water with the Shaoxing wine, bring to a rolling boil for 5 minutes, skim the grey foam, and rinse the meats clean.

- **Pressure cook the broth into a rich, gelatinous stock.**

Throw the blanched meats, ginger, scallions, garlic, star anise, cassia, whole peppercorns, 2 tablespoons of soy sauce, and Doubanjiang into an electric pressure cooker, cover with 6 to 8 cups of water, and cook on High for 35 minutes.

- **Cool, portion, and store for weeknight deployment.**

Once the pressure releases naturally and the meats are cool enough to handle, slice the intestines into bite-sized rings and store them alongside the strained broth in the refrigerator for up to 5 days.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Soak the sweet potato noodles in hot tap water.**

As soon as you enter the kitchen, submerge the dried thick noodles for 10 to 15 minutes to drastically reduce boiling time and guarantee that flawless, bouncy chew.

2. **Bring the reserved pork bone broth to a rapid simmer.**

Place your weekend-prepped broth and sliced intestines into a saucepan and get it bubbling.

3. **Construct the flavor architecture in the bottom of each serving bowl.**

While the soup heats, meticulously divide the black vinegar, 4 tablespoons of soy sauce, chili oil, ground Sichuan peppercorn, white pepper, sesame oil, sugar, and the remaining salt equally among four bowls.

1. Boil the noodles until they offer an elastic resistance to the tooth.

Drop the soaked noodles into a separate pot of boiling water for 3 to 5 minutes, then use a slotted spoon to transfer them directly into your prepared bowls.

2. Marry the noodles and the flavor base with the boiling broth.

Ladle the scalding hot bone broth and intestines over the noodles, letting the heat instantly volatilize the raw vinegar and chili oil into a pungent, room-filling vapor.

3. Garnish aggressively and serve immediately.

Shower each bowl with the crispy soybeans, pickled mustard greens, scallions, cilantro, and minced celery, tearing off pieces of flaky flatbread to dunk straight into the crimson oil.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The sweet potato starch epiphany.**

Unlike wheat pasta, thick sweet potato noodles retain an incredibly resilient chewiness even when submerged in scalding broth; ensure you buy the thick variety, not thin vermicelli, so they don't disintegrate into mush.

● **Embrace the offal.**

Do not shy away from the pork intestines; their specific textural chew and the rich fat they contribute to the broth are the fundamental, grandmother-approved soul of this dish.

● **The Mao Jiezi tradition.**

If you can source pork small intestines, cut them into 8-inch lengths and tie a simple overhand knot in the center of each before braising to create 'Mao Jiezi'—knots that burst with savory soup when bitten.



Tian Shui Mian

甜水面

tián shuǐ miàn

The air in Chengdu at dawn smells of roasted chilies, sweet soy, and toasted sesame. Tian Shui Mian is the pinnacle of that morning street food culture, a dish defined entirely by a magical, slow-simmered elixir called Fuzhi Jiangyou. Brew a batch of this spiced, syrupy soy sauce on a Sunday and keep it in the fridge. Come Wednesday night, you can boil a pack of udon, spoon this dark gold over the top with a dollop of chili oil, and be transported instantly to the homeland.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup light soy sauce

1/2 cup dark brown sugar
packed

2 tbsp	water	2 tsp	Chinese sesame paste <i>or creamy peanut butter</i>
2 whole	star anise	2 med	garlic clove <i>smashed into a paste</i>
1 small	cinnamon stick	2 tbsp	warm water
1 tsp	fennel seeds	1/2 tsp	toasted sesame oil
1 whole	Chinese black cardamom <i>cracked slightly</i>	1/2 tsp	Sichuan peppercorn <i>freshly ground</i>
1 small piece	fresh ginger <i>cut into 2 slices</i>	1 pinch	MSG <i>optional</i>
2 small pieces	dried sand ginger <i>optional</i>	2 tbsp	unsalted roasted peanuts <i>crushed</i>
1 lb	thick udon noodles <i>fresh or frozen</i>	2 tsp	white sesame seeds <i>toasted</i>
3 tbsp	Sichuan chili oil with flakes		

PREPARATION

- **Prepare the garlic water.**

Mix the smashed garlic paste with two tablespoons of warm water and let it sit for at least five minutes to extract the sharp allicin flavor smoothly.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Brew the sweet aromatic soy sauce.**

Combine the soy sauce, brown sugar, two tablespoons of water, star anise, cinnamon, fennel, black cardamom, ginger slices, and sand ginger in a small saucepan over medium heat until the sugar dissolves.

- 2. Simmer the elixir to a syrup.**

Reduce the heat to your absolute lowest setting and simmer uncovered for 25 to 35 minutes, looking for the liquid to reduce by roughly a third and coat the back of a spoon like maple syrup.

1. Strain and store the gold.

Remove from the heat, let it cool slightly so it thickens, and strain it through a fine-mesh sieve into a glass jar while discarding the spent spices.

2. Boil the noodles.

Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil and cook the udon according to the package directions, pulling them when perfectly chewy and heated through.

3. Assemble the flavor matrix a la minute.

Drain the noodles vigorously, portion them into individual bowls, and immediately top each with a tablespoon of your sweet soy sauce, the chili oil, sesame paste, garlic water, sesame oil, Sichuan peppercorn powder, and MSG.

4. Garnish and serve immediately.

Top the bowls with the crushed peanuts and toasted sesame seeds, leaving the diner to vigorously toss everything until the thick strands are glistening in the dark, spicy sauce.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The grandma secret to weeknight speed.**

The true secret to everyday Sichuan cooking is maintaining a pantry arsenal; keep this sweet aromatic soy sauce in your fridge, and you can throw this meal together in five minutes.

● **Making authentic stick noodles from scratch.**

If you have an hour on a weekend, mix 300 grams of all-purpose flour with 150 grams of water and a pinch of salt, knead until extremely stiff, rest, and roll into quarter-inch thick sticks before boiling for six to eight minutes.

● **Peanut butter is a culturally acceptable hack.**

While traditional recipes use Chinese sesame paste, blending it with or substituting creamy peanut butter adds a luxurious body that clings perfectly to thick noodles.



Tang You Guo Zi

糖油果子

táng yóu guǒ zi

If you have ever walked the morning streets of Chengdu, you know the hypnotic allure of these golden, caramelized orbs. Known to locals as Swan Eggs, these shatteringly crisp, hollow spheres of glutinous rice are fried directly in a bubbling wok of dark sugar and oil. It sounds like a volatile affair, but a pragmatic pinch of baking powder and a spoonful of regular rice flour ensures they puff beautifully in a low-temperature fry without exploding into a dangerous mess. Tossed in toasted sesame and skewered, it is a brilliant piece of street-food magic that tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cup	Mochiko sweet rice flour	1 tsp	neutral oil
1/3 cup	white rice flour	3 cup	neutral oil
2 tbsp	granulated sugar	1/2 cup	dark brown sugar <i>loosely packed</i>
1 tsp	baking powder	1/4 cup	toasted white sesame seeds
1/2 cup	warm water		

PREPARATION

- **Set up a landing station for the hot fried dough.**

Place a wide bowl containing your toasted sesame seeds right next to the stove so you can immediately toss the sticky, caramelized orbs before they cool.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the dry dough ingredients together in a large bowl.**

Combine the sweet rice flour, regular rice flour, granulated sugar, and baking powder, forming a well in the center.

- 2. Hydrate and knead the dough until smooth.**

Pour the warm water into the well, stirring with chopsticks until shaggy clumps form, then add the one teaspoon of oil and knead by hand until it feels like soft, pliable clay.

- 3. Let the dough rest.**

Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and leave at room temperature for 30 minutes to allow the starches to hydrate evenly.

- 4. Roll the dough into small spheres.**

Pinch off pieces and roll them between your palms to form smooth balls the size of a quail egg, placing them on a damp paper towel so they do not stick.

1. Submerge the dough balls in barely warm oil.

Pour the three cups of frying oil into a heavy skillet or wok over medium-low heat, immediately adding the dough balls before the oil gets hot so they can safely expand without bursting.

2. Allow the balls to puff and float.

Do not stir immediately; let the temperature rise gently until the baking powder activates and the balls float to the surface, which takes about five to seven minutes.

3. Sprinkle the brown sugar directly into the frying oil.

It looks wrong, but trust the process; push the balls around gently so they do not stick together, then scatter the sugar into the oil where it will melt and sink.

4. Stir continuously to caramelize the exterior.

Keep the heat medium-low and keep the balls moving, forcing the hot oil and melted sugar to coat them evenly until they turn a deep amber and tap with a crisp, hollow sound.

5. Toss the hot orbs in sesame seeds and skewer.

Scoop them out with a spider strainer, immediately drop them into a wide bowl of the sesame seeds to coat, and thread them onto bamboo skewers once cool enough to handle.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Never drop the dough into hot oil.**

Frying glutinous rice is tricky because trapped moisture rapidly turns to steam; starting in warm oil allows the crust to form slowly while the steam escapes safely.

● **Do not skip the regular rice flour or baking powder.**

The baking powder creates internal aeration, giving the steam room to expand, while the regular rice flour provides the structural strength to hold the hollow shape.

- **Leftover oil can be saved and reused.**

Let the oil cool completely in the pot; the remaining caramelized sugar will harden into a puck at the bottom, allowing you to pour off the clean oil for your next stir-fry.



Zigong Dan Dan Mian

自贡担担面

zìgòng dāndān miàn

They know what you've been eating in the diaspora—that cloying, soupy, peanut-butter-drowned imposter masquerading as Dan Dan Mian in strip malls across America. This is the antidote. Born from the calloused shoulders of nineteenth-century salt miners in Zigong, the authentic bowl is fiercely dry-tossed, complex, and electric. It relies on a meticulous architecture of flavor: deeply caramelized compound soy sauce, sharp black vinegar, and pork fried so hard in its own fat it crackles. By keeping the sauce and meat prepped in the fridge, a first-generation kid in an Ohio kitchen can summon the true, unvarnished soul of Sichuan in the time it takes to boil a handful of noodles.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	brewed soy sauce	1 tsp	dark soy sauce
3 tbsp	water	1 tsp	fresh ginger <i>minced</i>
1/3 cup	dark brown sugar	1 lb	fresh thin alkaline noodles
2 tbsp	rock sugar or white sugar	1 cup	leafy greens <i>pea shoots or baby bok choy</i>
2 med	scallions <i>tied into a knot</i>	1/2 cup	Sichuan chili oil <i>with sediment</i>
3 med	fresh ginger <i>sliced</i>	4 tsp	Chinkingiang black vinegar
2 small	star anise	2 tbsp	Chinese sesame paste <i>diluted with warm water until pourable</i>
1 med	cassia bark or cinnamon stick	2 med	garlic <i>finely grated</i>
2 small	dried bay leaves	1 tsp	ground Sichuan peppercorn
1/2 tsp	fennel seeds	4 tbsp	scallions <i>finely chopped</i>
1/2 lb	fatty ground pork	4 tbsp	roasted peanuts <i>crushed</i>
1 tbsp	neutral oil		
1/2 cup	Yibin Sui Mi Ya Cai		
1 tbsp	Shaoxing rice wine		

PREPARATION

- **Brew the compound soy sauce.**

Combine the brewed soy sauce, water, brown sugar, rock sugar, knotted scallions, sliced ginger, star anise, cassia, bay leaves, and fennel in a small saucepan over medium heat.

- **Reduce to a syrup.**

Bring to a gentle simmer, then drop the heat to the absolute minimum, letting it slowly reduce by a third for 15 to 20 minutes until glossy; strain and cool.

- **Dry-fry the pork saozi.**

Heat a wok or heavy skillet over medium-high heat with the neutral oil, then add the ground pork, smashing it apart rapidly.

- **Push past the moisture.**

Cook until the water completely evaporates and the pork begins to crackle and fry in its own rendered fat, turning a deep, crispy golden brown.

- **Build the aromatics.**

Deglaze with the minced ginger and Shaoxing wine, stir in the dark soy sauce for color, and finally toss in the Sui Mi Ya Cai, frying for another minute until intensely fragrant.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Build the foundation.**

In the bottom of four empty, warm serving bowls, evenly divide the prepared compound soy sauce, chili oil, black vinegar, diluted sesame paste, grated garlic, and ground Sichuan peppercorn.

- 2. Boil the noodles and greens.**

Drop the fresh alkaline noodles into a large pot of rolling boiling water, adding the leafy greens during the final thirty seconds to quickly blanch.

- 3. Emulsify the sauce.**

Steal two tablespoons of the starchy noodle cooking water and whisk it vigorously into each bowl's sauce base to create a cohesive, creamy emulsion.

- 4. Plate and garnish.**

Drain the noodles and greens thoroughly, shaking off all excess water, and fold them directly into the waiting bowls.

- 5. Crown the bowl.**

Top the pristine noodles with a generous mound of the crispy pork saozi, finishing with crushed peanuts and chopped scallions.

1. Toss vigorously before eating.

Serve the bowls unmixed; the diner must ruthlessly toss the noodles to coat every single strand in the fierce, dry sauce matrix before taking a bite.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not drown the noodles.**

Authentic Zigong Dan Dan Mian is a dry-tossed dish; resist any urge to add broth or treat it like a soup.

● **Accept no substitutes for Ya Cai.**

Yibin Sui Mi Ya Cai provides a complex, earthy tang that cannot be replicated by generic pickled mustard greens or cabbage.

● **Control the sesame paste.**

The Chinese sesame paste is a background emulsifier, not the star of the show; it should subtly bind the chili oil, never overwhelming it.

● **Rely on the compound soy sauce.**

The sweetness and depth come entirely from the Fuzhi Jiangyou, so never add raw sugar directly to the final bowl.



Jiachangcai: The Weeknight Wok

The beating heart of everyday Sichuan family cooking. Pragmatic, deeply flavorful dishes relying on potent flavor bases, optimized for swift execution on a standard stove.

Forget the banquet halls and the ceremonial whole fish. Jiachangcai is the real pulse of Sichuan—the bruised, battered wok hitting the residential burner at six o'clock after a long shift. It's pragmatic, ruthless, and unapologetically bold. This is food built on the dark, funky backbone of fermented Pixian doubanjiang and the numbing hum of tribute pepper. It's what actual families eat when there are mouths to feed and exactly thirty minutes to pull it all together.

There is no pageantry here, just pure, engineered comfort. From the blistered snap of dry-fried green beans to the fatty, garlicky salvation of twice-cooked pork, these are the indispensable survival rations of the Sichuanese weeknight. Unfussy, lightning-fast, and devastatingly good.





Yan Jian Rou

盐煎肉

yán jiān ròu

If you grew up in a Chinese-American household, the smell of fermented chili bean paste hitting hot pork fat is the smell of a Tuesday night. This is the infinitely faster, lesser-known sister to Twice-Cooked Pork. By skipping the boiling step and frying the pork raw, you unlock a deeply savory, caramelized flavor in exactly ten minutes of active cooking. There are no fancy restaurant tricks here—no deep fryers, no rare spices. Just pork, leeks, and the magical alchemy of Sichuan fermented pastes doing exactly what they were meant to do.

INGREDIENTS

10 oz	skinless pork belly <i>placed in freezer for 30 minutes, then sliced into 1/8-inch thick rectangles</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	Pixian doubanjiang <i>roughly chopped</i>
2	med leeks <i>trimmed, halved, washed, and cut on a steep bias into 1 1/2-inch pieces; white and green parts separated</i>	1 tbsp	fermented black beans <i>rinsed and roughly chopped</i>
1 tsp	kosher salt	1 tsp	Shaoxing wine
2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 tsp	dark soy sauce
		1/2 tsp	white sugar

PREPARATION

- **Chill the pork for precise slicing.**

Place the pork belly in the freezer for 30 to 40 minutes before cutting. Firming up the fat makes it vastly easier for a home knife to achieve the required paper-thin slices.

- **Separate the leeks by cooking time.**

Keep the dense white and light green parts of the leeks in a separate pile from the dark green leaves. They cook at different rates and must enter the wok sequentially to avoid burning.

- **Stage your ingredients.**

Wok cooking waits for no one. Once the oil is hot, the entire dish is finished in under five minutes. Have all your aromatics chopped and your wet seasonings measured before you turn on the stove.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the wok.**

Place a carbon steel wok or a large, heavy skillet over high heat. Let it sit until a wisp of pale smoke appears, then add the neutral oil, swirling it to coat the lower half of the wok.

1. Render the fat.

Immediately add the sliced pork and spread it out. Sprinkle the kosher salt evenly over the meat and reduce the heat slightly to medium-high. Stir-fry steadily. The salt draws out moisture, allowing the meat to brown and the fat to render into a clear pool. Keep frying until the edges of the pork are tinged with a crispy golden brown, about 3 to 5 minutes.

2. Bloom the ferments.

Use your spatula to push the crispy pork up the sides of the wok, creating a clearing where the rendered fat has pooled. Lower the heat to medium. Drop the doubanjiang and fermented black beans directly into the hot fat. Stir constantly for 30 seconds until the oil turns a brilliant, deep ruby red and the kitchen smells intensely savory.

3. Combine and season.

Push the pork back into the center of the wok, tossing it in the red oil to coat completely. Pour in the sugar, dark soy sauce, and Shaoxing wine. Toss rapidly for 15 seconds to let the sugar melt and the alcohol evaporate.

4. Wilt the aromatics.

Add the dense white and light green parts of the leeks. Stir-fry for 60 seconds until they just begin to soften and lose their raw bite. Finally, toss in the flimsy dark green leafy parts for an additional 15 to 30 seconds until vibrant and slightly wilted, then immediately remove from the heat and serve.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Remove the pork skin.**

Do not leave the skin on the pork belly. Because this dish uses a fast, raw fry instead of a long boil, any skin left on the meat will seize up and become impossibly leathery.

- **Trust the minimal ingredient list.**

Resist the urge to add sesame oil, fresh chilies, or Sichuan peppercorns. Authentic homestyle Yan Jian Rou relies entirely on the pure, savory depth of fermented pastes. Cluttering it with extra spices masks the flavor.



Jia Chang Dou Fu

家常豆腐

jiā cháng dòu fǔ

Forget the fiery, numbing spectacle of Mapo Tofu for a minute. If you grew up in a Sichuan household, this is the tofu dish that actually means home. "Jia Chang" literally translates to "home-style," and this recipe is the ultimate grandmother-approved workhorse. It relies on a magical technique historically called "Bear's Paw Tofu": simply shallow-frying firm tofu until it develops a golden, wrinkled skin, creating a sponge that drinks up an incredibly savory, mildly spicy sauce. Armed with a flexible matrix of crunchy vegetables and the deep, fermented umami of authentic Pixian chili bean paste, it bridges the gap between the homeland and a Tuesday night in the American suburbs.

INGREDIENTS

14 oz	firm tofu <i>drained and patted completely dry</i>	2 med	scallions <i>sliced diagonally into 1-inch pieces, white and green parts separated</i>
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	2 tbsp	Pixian Doubanjiang <i>finely chopped</i>
4 oz	pork belly <i>thinly sliced into 1-inch pieces</i>	1 tbsp	light soy sauce
1/2 cup	dried wood ear mushrooms <i>soaked in warm water for 15 minutes, trimmed, and torn into bite-sized pieces</i>	1/2 tsp	dark soy sauce
1 med	green or red bell pepper <i>cut into 1-inch irregular chunks</i>	1 tsp	Shaoxing wine
3 large cloves	garlic <i>thinly sliced</i>	1/2 tsp	sugar
1 inch	fresh ginger <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>	3/4 cup	chicken stock or water
		1 tsp	cornstarch <i>mixed with 1 tbsp cold water</i>
		1 tsp	toasted sesame oil

PREPARATION

- **Prep-ahead weeknight strategy.**

Frying the tofu is the only time-consuming step. Fry it in bulk on a Sunday; it holds perfectly in the fridge for up to four days, turning this dish into a 15-minute, single-pan operation on a busy Tuesday.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Slice and dry the tofu.**

Cut the block in half lengthwise, then into 1/2-inch thick triangles. Pat them completely dry with paper towels to prevent oil splatter and ensure a solid sear.

- 2. Shallow-fry the tofu to build the crust.**

Heat the neutral oil in a large flat non-stick or cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Slide the tofu in and let it fry undisturbed for 3 to 4 minutes per side until a tough, wrinkled, golden-brown skin forms, then remove to a paper-towel-lined plate.

1. Render the pork fat.

Leaving about 1 tablespoon of oil in the pan, reduce the heat to medium and stir-fry the pork belly for 2 minutes until it browns slightly and releases its fat.

2. Bloom the chili paste.

Push the pork to the side, add the chopped Doubanjiang to the center, and stir for 30 to 45 seconds until the oil turns a brilliant ruby red and smells deeply roasted.

3. Fry the aromatics.

Toss in the garlic, ginger, and scallion whites, frying for another 15 seconds until highly fragrant.

4. Braise everything together.

Add the mushrooms, bell peppers, Shaoxing wine, light and dark soy sauces, sugar, and stock. Return the fried tofu to the pan, bring to a lively simmer, turn the heat to medium-low, and braise uncovered for 3 to 4 minutes so the tofu acts like a sponge.

5. Bind the sauce and serve.

Stir the cornstarch slurry and pour it slowly around the edges of the pan, gently pushing the ingredients until the sauce turns into a glossy gravy. Off the heat, toss in the scallion greens, drizzle with sesame oil, and serve immediately with steamed rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Equipment reality check.**

While traditional chefs use jet-engine burners and carbon steel woks, shallow-frying the tofu in a large non-stick or cast-iron skillet maximizes surface contact and guarantees a golden crust without wasting gallons of oil.

● **The pantry prerequisite.**

The soul of this dish relies entirely on Pixian Doubanjiang. Do not substitute generic chili garlic sauce; look specifically for the word "Pixian" at your local Asian market for that required deep, fermented umami.



Ma Yi Shang Shu

蚂蚁上树

mǎ yǐ shàng shù

This isn't a stir-fry; it's a brilliant, rapid braise built for the weeknight grind. Taking its name from the way tiny morsels of crisped pork cling to the noodles like ants on a branch, it's a masterclass in how Sichuan home cooks transform two dirt-cheap pantry staples into something deeply savory, slightly spicy, and outrageously comforting. The secret to keeping the noodles from turning into a gummy disaster lies in soaking them just until pliable, rendering the pork fat down to a crisp, and letting the sweet potato threads drink up a bubbling broth laced with funky, fermented chili bean paste.

INGREDIENTS

4 oz	sweet potato vermicelli <i>soaked in warm tap water for 20 minutes, drained, and snipped in half</i>	3 small	garlic clove <i>finely minced</i>
4 oz	ground fatty pork	2 med	scallion <i>whites and greens separated, finely sliced</i>
1 tsp	Shaoxing rice wine	1 tbsp	Pixian Doubanjiang
1/8 tsp	salt	1 cup	unsalted chicken stock
2 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 tbsp	light soy sauce
1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>finely minced</i>	1/2 tsp	dark soy sauce
		1/2 tsp	sugar

PREPARATION

- **Hydrate the sweet potato noodles in warm tap water for twenty minutes.**
Do not boil them. They should bend easily but still retain a slightly firm center. Drain them thoroughly in a colander.
- **Marinate the ground pork with the Shaoxing wine and salt.**
Have all of your minced aromatics chopped and staged by the stove before you fire up the wok; the cooking process moves fast.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the wok until smoking and condition it with neutral oil.**
Swirling the cold oil into a smoking hot wok coats the carbon steel, creating a non-stick polymer layer that will prevent the starchy noodles from turning into a gummy nightmare later.

- 1. Vigorously fry the ground pork until the fat renders and the meat crisps into tiny granules.**
Use your spatula to break the pork up aggressively. Cook for about three to four minutes until the moisture evaporates and the meat takes on a browned, crispy texture.
- 2. Push the meat aside and fry the chili bean paste until the oil bleeds red.**
Drop the Doubanjiang into the center of the wok and fry it in the rendered pork fat for thirty seconds until fragrant, then toss in the minced ginger, garlic, and scallion whites.
- 3. Build the braising liquid with the chicken stock, soy sauces, and sugar.**
Pour the stock directly into the wok along with the light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, and sugar. Bring the entire mixture to a rolling boil.
- 4. Drop the drained noodles into the bubbling broth to simmer and absorb the liquid.**
Lower the heat to medium-low and toss gently. Let the noodles act like a sponge for three to five minutes until the sauce reduces to a slick, starch-thickened glaze that glues the crispy pork right to the noodles.
- 5. Turn off the heat and fold in the sliced scallion greens.**
Serve immediately alongside steamed white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sweet potato vermicelli is the authentic choice over mung bean glass noodles.**
True sweet potato noodles are thicker, slightly darker, and boast a superior chewy texture that holds up to braising without turning to mush. If you must use mung bean noodles, watch your soaking and cooking times closely.
- **Pixian Doubanjiang is entirely non-negotiable.**
This fermented broad bean and chili paste is the soul of the dish. It provides the signature red oil, the salty funk, and the earthy backbone that defines true Sichuan cooking.



Qing Jiao Rou Si

青椒肉丝

qīngjiāo ròusī

If there is a single dish that defines the Tuesday night kitchen of a Sichuanese grandmother, it's this one. For decades, American takeout joints mutated it into a sad, watery, beef-and-bell-pepper tragedy. But real Qing Jiao Rou Si is a masterclass in the physics of the wok. It's about velvety strips of pork sliced with the grain so they don't disintegrate, and thin-skinned peppers blistered dry so they keep their snap. It's fast, deeply comforting, and demands zero specialized equipment—just a little respect for the technique.

INGREDIENTS

8 oz	pork loin <i>trimmed of excess fat</i>	8 oz	Anaheim or Cubanelle peppers <i>stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1/8-inch matchsticks</i>
4 tsp	light soy sauce <i>divided</i>	3 large	garlic <i>thinly sliced</i>
1 tsp	Shaoxing wine	1 small	fresh ginger <i>peeled and julienned</i>
1/2 tsp	salt <i>divided</i>	1 tsp	dark soy sauce
1/4 tsp	ground white pepper	1 tbsp	oyster sauce
1 large	egg white	1/2 tsp	sugar
1 1/2 tbsp	cornstarch <i>divided</i>	2 tbsp	water
4 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Freeze and slice the pork.**

Place the pork in the freezer for 15 minutes to firm it up. Locate the grain of the meat and slice exactly parallel to it into 1/8-inch slabs, then stack and slice into fine shreds to prevent the delicate meat from turning to mush.

- **Velvet the meat.**

In a bowl, aggressively massage 1 tsp light soy sauce, the Shaoxing wine, 1/4 tsp salt, and the white pepper into the pork. Knead in the egg white, followed by 1 tbsp cornstarch. Fold in 1 tbsp of the oil to lubricate the shreds, and let sit for 15 minutes.

- **Mix the bowl sauce.**

Whisk the remaining 3 tsp light soy sauce, dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, sugar, remaining 1/4 tsp salt, remaining 1/2 tsp cornstarch, and water in a small bowl until smooth.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Awaken the peppers.**

Heat a dry, large wok or skillet over medium heat without any oil. Toss the peppers continuously for 2 to 3 minutes until slightly softened and vividly green, driving off their raw, watery edge, then remove to a plate.

2. **Condition the wok.**

Wipe the wok clean and crank the heat to high until it lightly smokes. Pour in 2 tablespoons of cold oil, swirl to coat the surface, and immediately drop in the marinated pork.

3. **Slide and fry.**

Do not stir immediately. Let the meat sit for 3 to 5 seconds so the starch coating sets, then use a spatula or chopsticks to rapidly separate the shreds. Stir-fry vigorously for 30 to 45 seconds just until the pork turns opaque, then remove it from the wok.

4. **Bring it all together.**

Lower the heat to medium and add 1 tablespoon of oil. Toss in the ginger and garlic, cooking for 10 seconds until deeply fragrant.

5. **Glaze and serve.**

Return the pork and peppers to the wok. Give your bowl sauce a quick stir, pour it over the top, and crank the heat to high. Toss rapidly for 15 to 20 seconds until the sauce violently bubbles, thickens, and clings to every shred. Serve immediately over steamed white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Ditch the bell peppers.**

Standard green bell peppers are too thick and watery for this dish. Anaheim, Cubanelle, or even Shishito peppers have the right thin-skinned snap and mild bite to replicate the authentic Sichuan Erjingtiao pepper.

- **Trust the physics.**

The technique of heating the wok dry before adding cold oil (re guo liang you) creates a temporary non-stick polymer layer. It is the sole reason your lean, starchy pork won't fuse to the metal pan.



Ji Mi Ya Cai

鸡米芽菜

jī mǐ yá cài

In the canon of Sichuan home cooking, there are dishes so intensely savory they are affectionately known as 'rice killers.' This is the undisputed king. It takes a humble chicken breast, minced to the exact size of rice grains, and marries it to the deep, earthy funk of double-fermented Yibin mustard greens. The homeland secret doesn't demand a commercial wok burner, but rather a little patience: dry-toasting the preserved greens to awaken their aroma, and dropping in a tiny spoonful of sweet wheat paste to bridge the lean meat and the aggressive pickle. It is fast, ruthlessly efficient, and tastes exactly the way it should.

INGREDIENTS

10 oz	boneless skinless chicken breast <i>minced into rice-sized cubes</i>	1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>minced</i>
2 tsp	Shaoxing cooking wine	3 med	garlic <i>minced</i>
2 tsp	light soy sauce <i>divided</i>	2 med	Jalapeno pepper <i>finely diced</i>
1 tsp	cornstarch	2 small	Thai bird's eye chilies <i>finely diced</i>
1/4 tsp	ground white pepper	3 med	scallions <i>finely sliced</i>
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>	1 tsp	Tianmianjiang
3 1/2 oz	Suimi Yacai	1/2 tsp	sugar
		1/2 tsp	toasted sesame oil

PREPARATION

- **Master the knife work.**

To achieve the authentic 'Ji Mi' texture, slice the chicken breast horizontally into thin slabs, cut those into strips, and then cross-cut into tiny, rice-sized cubes.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Marinate the chicken.**

Massage the minced chicken with the Shaoxing wine, half the light soy sauce, cornstarch, and white pepper until the liquids are absorbed, then fold in one tablespoon of neutral oil to prevent clumping in the wok.

- 2. Awaken the preserved greens.**

Heat a dry wok or large skillet over medium heat and toast the yacai for 60 to 90 seconds until the excess moisture evaporates and the kitchen fills with an earthy, savory aroma, then set aside.

1. Flash-fry the chicken.

Wipe the wok clean, crank the heat to high, and heat the remaining two tablespoons of oil until just smoking before tossing in the chicken and stirring rapidly until pale and opaque.

2. Build the flavor base.

Push the meat to the side, drop the ginger and garlic into the center of the wok to sizzle briefly, then toss everything together with the toasted yacai, Tianmianjiang, sugar, and the remaining light soy sauce.

3. Finish with fresh heat.

Dump in the diced chilies and scallions, tossing for about 30 seconds so they soften slightly but retain their bright crunch, then turn off the heat, stir in the sesame oil, and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Source the right mustard greens.**

Suimi Yacai is a deeply savory, double-fermented mustard green from Yibin, typically sold in small, flat packets in the pickle aisle of Asian grocers. Do not substitute with standard crunchy zhacai.

● **The flavor bridge.**

Tianmianjiang, or sweet wheat paste, is essential here. It rounds out the aggressive saltiness of the preserved greens and glazes the chicken with an earthy sweetness.



Suanni Bairou

蒜泥白肉

suànní báiròu

This isn't the gloppy takeout concoction masquerading under the name 'garlic sauce.' True Suanni Bairou is an uncompromising masterclass in Sichuan pragmatism. It takes a humble block of boiled pork belly and transforms it through sheer grandmotherly genius: a cold water start, a patient steep to keep the fat bouncing, and a razor-thin slicing job. But the soul of the dish lies in the mud—a sticky, aggressive paste of mechanically pounded garlic drowning in sweetened, spiced soy sauce and roasted chili oil. It is practical, deeply comforting, and tastes exactly like the homeland.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	skin-on pork belly <i>left whole as a rectangular block</i>	8 clove	fresh garlic <i>peeled</i>
4 slice	fresh ginger <i>smashed lightly</i>	1 pinch	kosher salt
2 whole	scallions <i>tied into a knot</i>	1 tsp	toasted sesame oil
1 tsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns	3 tbsp	Fuzhi Jiangyou <i>see preparation</i>
2 tbsp	Shaoxing rice wine	3 tbsp	Sichuan chili oil with sediment
1/2 med	English cucumber <i>shaved into long ribbons</i>	1 tsp	black rice vinegar

PREPARATION

- **Brew the Fuzhi Jiangyou ahead of time.**

Combine 1 cup high-quality light soy sauce, 1/2 cup water, 1/2 cup packed dark brown sugar, 1 cinnamon stick, 2 dried bay leaves, and 1 star anise in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, immediately reduce to the lowest simmer, and cook uncovered for 30 to 40 minutes until it slightly reduces and coats the back of a spoon. Strain and store in a jar in the fridge. It lasts for months.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Poach the pork from a cold start.**

Place the pork belly in a medium pot with the ginger, scallion knot, Sichuan peppercorns, and Shaoxing wine. Cover with cool tap water by about an inch, place over medium-high heat, bring to a rolling boil, and skim off any gray foam.

- 2. Execute the grandmother steep.**

Cover the pot, reduce the heat to medium-low, and simmer gently for 20 minutes until a chopstick pierces the thickest part of the meat with slight resistance. Turn off the heat entirely, leave the lid on, and let the pork steep in the hot broth for another 20 to 30 minutes to ensure bouncy, juicy meat.

1. Chill and slice the pork belly.

Remove the pork from the broth, pat it dry, and throw it in the freezer for 15 to 20 minutes. Firming up the fat makes it effortless to slice the meat across the grain as thinly as humanly possible with a standard chef's knife.

2. Pound the garlic into mud.

Place the peeled garlic cloves in a mortar and pestle with a pinch of salt to act as an abrasive. Pound relentlessly until the garlic breaks down into a sticky, fragrant paste—do not just chop it.

3. Assemble the heavy dressing.

Transfer the garlic paste to a small bowl and stir in the sesame oil to mellow the bite and prevent oxidation. Add the Fuzhi Jiangyou, the red chili oil making sure to scoop up the crunchy sediment, and the black rice vinegar, stirring well to combine.

4. Plate and serve.

Arrange the cucumber ribbons in a mound in the center of a serving platter. Drape the translucent slices of pork belly over the cucumber in overlapping layers, and right before serving, spoon the heavy, aromatic dressing generously over the pork so the garlic and chili flakes cling to the meat.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The garlic must be pounded, never minced.**

Chopping creates pungent pieces, but pounding crushes the cell walls entirely, triggering the release of allicin to maximize the aromatic heat and create the sticky binder for the dressing.

● **Keep your pantry stocked.**

This dish transitions from a weekend project to a 20-minute weeknight staple if you keep jars of Fuzhi Jiangyou and roasted chili oil ready in the fridge.



Mapo Tofu

麻婆豆腐

má pō dòu fǔ

Mapo Tofu is often deeply misunderstood in America—reduced to a heavy takeout afterthought or a bland vegetarian concession. In reality, it is a brilliantly balanced, working-class masterpiece born on the margins of 19th-century Chengdu. This recipe is the real deal, relying on the quiet secrets of Sichuan grandmothers rather than restaurant-grade jet burners. A gentle saltwater bath keeps the tofu perfectly intact, patient frying turns the minced meat into a crispy, savory garnish, and a traditional three-stage thickening process ensures the fiery, umami-rich sauce clings to every single cube without weeping

into a watery puddle on your plate. It is flawless, uncompromising homeland comfort, perfectly calibrated for a Tuesday night in an Ohio suburb.

INGREDIENTS

14 oz	medium-firm or soft tofu <i>cut into 3/4-inch cubes</i>	1 tsp	Sichuan chili flakes
4 oz	ground beef or ground pork	1 tsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns
3 med clove	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	1 cup	unsalted chicken stock
1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>finely minced</i>	1 tbsp	Shaoxing cooking wine
2 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced, whites and greens separated</i>	1 tsp	light soy sauce
2 tbsp	Pixian doubanjiang <i>minced to a fine paste on a cutting board</i>	1/2 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	fermented black beans <i>rinsed and lightly crushed</i>	1 tbsp	cornstarch
		3 tbsp	cold water <i>mixed thoroughly with the cornstarch to form a slurry</i>
		3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil

PREPARATION

- **Toast and grind the Sichuan peppercorns before you begin.**

In a dry skillet over medium-low heat, toast the whole peppercorns for 1 to 2 minutes until intensely fragrant and beginning to release tiny oils. Let them cool, then crush them into a fine powder using a mortar and pestle or a dedicated spice grinder.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Give the tofu a gentle saltwater bath to season it and tighten its proteins.

Bring a pot of water to a gentle simmer, add a teaspoon of salt, gently slide in the tofu cubes, and let them steep for 2 to 3 minutes over low heat before turning off the stove and leaving them in the hot water until needed.

2. Fry the ground meat in oil over medium heat until it is deeply browned and completely devoid of moisture.

It will release water and look grey at first; keep going until the liquid evaporates, the oil turns clear again, and the meat begins to sizzle and crisp.

3. Push the meat to the edges and slowly fry the minced doubanjiang in the center until the oil turns a brilliant, glossy red.

Keep the heat at medium-low to avoid burning the starches in the paste, frying for about 60 seconds before stirring in the garlic, ginger, scallion whites, fermented black beans, and chili flakes for another 30 seconds.

4. Build the braising liquid and gently slide the resting tofu into the skillet.

Pour in the Shaoxing wine, chicken stock, soy sauce, and sugar, bring to a gentle simmer, then use a slotted spoon to drain the resting tofu and add it to the sauce, simmering over low heat for 4 to 5 minutes without aggressively stirring.

5. Thicken the sauce in three distinct additions to prevent the tofu from weeping water later on your plate.

Give the slurry a stir. Drizzle one-third into the bubbling pan and swirl gently; wait 30 seconds for the simmer to return, add the next third; wait another 30 seconds and add the final third until the sauce is lush and clinging tightly to every surface.

6. Turn off the heat, scatter the scallion greens over the top, and generously dust with the freshly ground Sichuan peppercorns.

Transfer carefully to a serving dish and serve immediately with massive amounts of steamed white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not substitute the Pixian doubanjiang.**

This fermented broad bean paste is the absolute soul of the dish, providing the deep red color and profound umami. Always mince it finely on a cutting board before cooking to release maximum flavor and avoid biting into large, salty bean skins.

- **Vegetarian cooks can perfectly mimic the meat's crispy texture with dried shiitake mushrooms.**

Rehydrate a half cup of dried shiitake mushrooms, mince them finely, and fry them exactly as you would the beef until they are browned and chewy. You can also use the mushroom soaking liquid in place of the chicken stock.

- **A standard American skillet works just fine.**

Mapo Tofu is primarily a braised dish rather than a high-heat dry stir-fry. A 12-inch non-stick or cast-iron skillet provides excellent surface area for reducing the sauce and is completely grandmother-approved for a weeknight.



Fan Qie Chao Dan

番茄炒蛋

fān-qié chǎo dàn

This is the taste of a Tuesday night in Chengdu, translated flawlessly for a suburban Ohio weeknight. It is the ultimate homestyle dish—the very first thing a Chinese kid learns to cook, and the one they crave most when they leave home. There is no need for restaurant-grade firepower or obscure pantry items. Just tomatoes peeled down to their luxurious essence, eggs ruthlessly aerated with a splash of water for impossible fluffiness, and enough oil to make the magic happen. Pure, deeply comforting, and utterly foolproof.

INGREDIENTS

4 large	large eggs	2 med	scallions <i>trimmed, whites thinly sliced and greens chopped</i>
2 tbsp	cold water <i>divided</i>	4 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>
3/4 tsp	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	1 tsp	white sugar
3 med	med tomatoes <i>scored with an X on the bottom</i>	1 tsp	cornstarch

PREPARATION

- **Blanch and peel the tomatoes.**

Bring a small pot of water to a boil. Submerge the scored tomatoes for sixty seconds, or until you see the skins begin to curl away from the base. Remove them with a slotted spoon and immediately run under cold water. Peel away and discard the papery skins, remove the hard core, and chop the tomatoes into 1-inch wedges.

- **Hydrate and aerate the eggs.**

Crack the eggs into a mixing bowl with one tablespoon of the cold water and a quarter teaspoon of the salt. Using chopsticks or a whisk, beat the eggs ruthlessly until the yolks and whites are completely homogenous and the surface is capped with a fine, frothy foam. The added water turns to steam in the hot wok, guaranteeing a tender curd.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Scramble the eggs in hot oil.**

Heat a wok or large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until a bead of water instantly vaporizes on contact. Add three tablespoons of the oil and swirl to coat. Immediately pour in the frothy egg mixture, which should aggressively sizzle and puff up. Wait three seconds for the bottom to set, then gently push the cooked edges toward the center to let the raw egg run underneath. When the eggs are eighty percent set—formed into large, fluffy curds but still glossy and slightly wet—slide them out of the pan and back into their bowl. Do not overcook them.

2. **Coax out the tomato gravy.**

Return the empty wok to the heat and add the remaining tablespoon of oil. Toss in the scallion whites and let them sizzle for ten seconds until fragrant. Add the chopped tomatoes. Stir-fry aggressively, using the back of your spatula to gently press and mash the tomatoes against the side of the pan to coax out their juices. Sprinkle in the sugar and let everything collapse into a rich, bubbling, chunky sauce.

3. **Marry the eggs and the sauce.**

Pour the resting eggs and any accumulated liquid back into the bubbling tomatoes. Gently fold the eggs into the sauce so they absorb the vibrant red juices without breaking apart into mush. Season with the remaining half teaspoon of salt.

4. **Thicken the gravy and serve.**

Stir the cornstarch and remaining tablespoon of cold water together to form a slurry, then drizzle it into the wok. Toss gently for fifteen seconds until the sauce turns glossy and velvety, clinging perfectly to the eggs. Turn off the heat, scatter the scallion greens over the top, and serve immediately alongside steaming bowls of white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the oil.**

Do not try to skimp on the cooking oil. Egg proteins bind tightly when subjected to heat without adequate lipid lubrication, resulting in tough, rubbery curds. The generous amount of oil ensures the eggs remain separated, impossibly tender, and capable of absorbing the vibrant tomato gravy.

- **Adapt for winter tomatoes.**

If you are forced to use pale, mealy supermarket tomatoes in the dead of an American winter, rely on Roma tomatoes for their meatier texture. If they lack natural juice, add two tablespoons of chicken broth or water to the wok during the reduction phase to help build the sauce.



Cangying Guanzi: The Weekend Fly Restaurant

Unapologetic, punchy flavors and communal street food inspired by Chengdu's famous 'fly restaurants'.

There is a universal truth in Chengdu: the dingier the awning, the better the food. These are the cangying guanzi—the 'fly restaurants.' They are cramped, unapologetic joints where the plastic stools wobble, the air hangs heavy with toasted chili, and the flavors punch you square in the mouth. It is not about linen napkins or delicate plating. It is about cold beer, a roaring fire under a bubbling vat of huoguo, and chili-dusted lamb skewers passed around a loud, crowded table.

Recreating this in a suburban American dining room isn't about faking the grime; it's about resurrecting the unapologetic soul of those nights. These dishes—from a towering, ruby-red mountain of La Zi Ji to the cold, numbing perfection of Fuqi Feipian—are built for the weekend. Gather your people, crack open the beer, and let the mala do the talking.





La Zi Ji

辣子鸡

là zǐ jī

If there is one dish that captures the chaotic, unapologetic spirit of a Sichuan hole-in-the-wall, it's La Zi Ji. It arrives at the table looking like a threat—a literal mountain of fire-engine-red chilies obscuring tiny, shatteringly crisp nuggets of chicken. Restaurants use massive vats of oil to deep-fry the bird twice. This version borrows a brilliant shallow-fry technique from modern Chinese home cooks, delivering that grandmother-approved crunch on a Tuesday night in Ohio without destroying your kitchen. Grab a cold beer before you start; you're going to need it.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	boneless skinless chicken thighs <i>cut into 3/4-inch cubes</i>	2 tbsp	whole red Sichuan peppercorns
1 tbsp	light soy sauce	1 med	fresh ginger <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>
1 tbsp	Shaoxing cooking wine	4 med	garlic <i>peeled and thinly sliced</i>
1/2 tsp	salt	4 med	scallions <i>chopped, white and dark green parts separated</i>
1/4 tsp	ground white pepper	1/2 tsp	white sugar
1 large	egg white	1 tbsp	toasted white sesame seeds
2 tbsp	cornstarch	1 tsp	toasted sesame oil
1/3 cup	neutral cooking oil	1 tsp	white rice vinegar
1 1/2 cup	dried red chilies <i>snipped in half, majority of loose seeds discarded</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Prepare the chilies.**

Using kitchen scissors, snip the dried chilies in half and shake them vigorously in a colander over the sink to remove the loose seeds, which will burn and turn the oil bitter if left in the wok.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Marinate the chicken.**

Place the cubed chicken in a bowl with the soy sauce, Shaoxing wine, salt, and white pepper, massaging the liquids into the meat with your hands until fully absorbed. Add the egg white and cornstarch, massaging again until every piece is coated in a thin, tacky batter, then let it sit at room temperature for 15 to 30 minutes.

1. Shallow-fry the chicken.

Heat a wide, flat-bottomed wok or large skillet over medium-high heat and add the neutral oil. Once the oil is shimmering hot, carefully spread the marinated chicken into a single, even layer.

2. Sear undisturbed.

Do not touch the chicken for 3 to 4 minutes to allow a deep, golden-brown crust to form. Once the bottom is crispy, use a spatula to flip the pieces and stir-fry for another 3 to 4 minutes until browned all over and cooked through, then use a slotted spoon to transfer the chicken to a paper-towel-lined plate.

3. Bloom the spices over medium-low heat.

Pour off most of the oil from the pan, leaving exactly 2 tablespoons in the wok, and turn the heat down to medium-low. Add the Sichuan peppercorns and toast for 30 seconds until fragrant, then add the de-seeded dried chilies and stir constantly for 1 to 2 minutes until the oil takes on a reddish-orange hue and the chilies darken slightly.

4. Add the aromatics.

Stir in the sliced ginger, garlic, and the white parts of the scallions, cooking for 30 seconds until deeply aromatic.

5. Bring it all together.

Crank the heat to high, dump the crispy chicken back into the wok, and toss vigorously so the spicy, numbing oil coats the meat. Sprinkle in the sugar, sesame seeds, sesame oil, and the dark green scallion tops, tossing for 15 seconds, and finish with a drizzle of white vinegar down the hot side of the wok to create a burst of bright steam.

6. Serve immediately.

Transfer the entire contents of the wok to a large platter and remind your guests to hunt for the chicken and leave the chilies.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The hide-and-seek rule.**

You do not eat the chilies in this dish. They are there strictly to perfume the oil, so use your chopsticks to dig through the mountain of red peppers to find the savory nuggets of chicken.

- **The science of Ma La.**

The signature flavor of Chongqing is Ma La—Ma meaning numbing, and La meaning spicy. If your lips feel like they're buzzing with static electricity, congratulate yourself; you successfully sourced good quality Sichuan peppercorns.

- **Why sugar?**

Authentic Sichuan recipes almost always feature a tiny amount of sugar in fiercely spicy dishes to mask the natural bitterness of toasted chilies and round out the sharp spikes of capsaicin.

- **Save the leftover chilies.**

Don't throw away the glorious, oil-soaked dried chilies left on the platter. Blitz them in a spice grinder with a pinch of salt to create a phenomenal custom chili flake for your eggs or noodles.



Jianyi Sichuan Huoguo

简易四川火锅

jiǎnyì sìchuān huǒguō

To recreate the unapologetic, sweat-inducing glory of a Chengdu fly restaurant in an American suburb, you don't need a massive commercial kitchen or a highly guarded, fifty-spice proprietary blend. You just need to understand the primal alchemy of hot oil and stacked fermentation. This is the grandmother-approved, weeknight-friendly blueprint that relies on a low-and-slow extraction of beef tallow, fiery broad bean paste, and the complex, balancing sweetness of fermented glutinous rice. It is practical, it is honest, and when that bubbling red broth hits the table, it tastes exactly like home.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup	beef tallow	1/2 tsp	salt
1/4 cup	Pixian doubanjiang <i>minced finely</i>	1 tbsp	chicken bouillon powder
2 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>minced</i>	1 med	fresh ginger <i>cut into 5 thin slices</i>
1 tbsp	fermented black beans <i>roughly chopped</i>	3 med	scallions <i>cut into 2-inch lengths</i>
2 tsp	rock sugar <i>crushed</i>	4 tbsp	toasted sesame oil
2 tbsp	ground spicy dried chilies	2 tbsp	garlic <i>freshly minced</i>
1 tbsp	ground mild red chili	1 lb	thinly sliced fatty beef or lamb
1 tbsp	whole red Sichuan peppercorns	1 med	napa cabbage <i>chopped into large pieces</i>
3 tbsp	fermented glutinous rice	1 med	daikon radish <i>peeled and sliced thinly</i>
1 tbsp	Shaoxing wine	8 oz	enoki mushrooms <i>roots trimmed</i>
8 cup	beef stock <i>unsalted</i>		

PREPARATION

- **Prepare all dipping ingredients before starting the broth.**

Hot pot moves quickly once the broth is boiling. Have your meats, vegetables, and dipping sauces plated and arranged around the table in advance.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Melt the beef tallow in a heavy-bottomed pot over medium-low heat.**

A wok or deep Dutch oven works best. If you cannot find beef tallow, substitute half a cup of neutral oil melted with two tablespoons of butter to mimic the required richness.

- 1. Fry the minced doubanjiang in the warm fat for seven to eight minutes, stirring continuously.**

This is the most critical technique in Sichuan home cooking. Keep the heat strictly at medium-low. You are looking for the paste to darken and separate into a slightly sandy texture while the oil turns a brilliant, clear crimson. Do not let it burn.

- 2. Stir the minced ginger, fermented black beans, and rock sugar into the bubbling red oil.**

Continue to fry for about three minutes, stirring constantly, until the ginger begins to look slightly dehydrated and its raw bite mellows.

- 3. Add the ground chili powders and whole Sichuan peppercorns, frying for exactly one minute.**

The kitchen will immediately smell intensely fragrant. Watch the heat carefully to ensure the dry spices do not scorch and turn bitter.

- 4. Stir in the fermented glutinous rice and Shaoxing wine, cooking for one final minute.**

The alcohol will rapidly evaporate, leaving behind a complex enzymatic sweetness that balances the fierce heat of the chilies. You have now created a professional-grade hot pot base.

- 5. Pour in the beef stock, adding the fresh ginger slices, scallion segments, salt, and chicken bouillon powder.**

Bring the entire pot to a rolling boil over medium-high heat, then transfer it to a portable tabletop burner.

- 6. Provide each guest with a small bowl containing a few tablespoons of sesame oil and minced garlic for dipping.**

This austere oil plate is the canonical accompaniment in Chengdu. It rapidly cools the boiling-hot food, protects the stomach lining from the spice, and provides a nutty, savory finish. Instruct guests to cook denser ingredients first, quickly dipping thinly sliced meats just until they change color.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **A tabletop burner is highly recommended for the authentic communal experience.**

If you do not have a portable induction or butane burner, you can cook the ingredients in batches on the stove and transfer them to a serving bowl, though the communal, simmering aspect will be lost.



Ya Qian Yang Rou

牙签羊肉

yáqiān yángròu

In the gritty, neon-lit back alleys of Chengdu, the cangying guanzi (fly restaurants) serve unapologetic, aggressively delicious food meant to be devoured over cold beer. Toothpick lamb is the crown jewel of this culture. A brilliant miniaturization of massive Xinjiang cumin skewers, it's a tactile, messy, entirely addictive dish that delivers the numbing, spicy jolt of the homeland to an American weeknight. The grandmother-approved secrets to doing this right? Soak the toothpicks in boiling water so they don't incinerate, and toss the freshly fried meat with the dry spices off the heat so they bloom instead of burning.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	boneless lamb shoulder <i>trimmed of silver skin and cut into 3/4-inch cubes</i>	1 1/2 tsp	whole red Sichuan peppercorns
1/2 small	yellow onion <i>roughly chopped</i>	1 tbsp	Chinese chili flakes
2 tbsp	water	1 tbsp	white sesame seeds <i>toasted</i>
1 tbsp	Shaoxing rice wine	1/2 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	light soy sauce	1/4 tsp	MSG
1/2 tsp	baking soda	70 med	bamboo toothpicks
1/2 tsp	salt	1 cup	neutral oil
1 1/2 tbsp	whole cumin seeds	2 tbsp	Sichuan chili oil
		1 handful	fresh cilantro <i>roughly torn into large pieces</i>

PREPARATION

- **Hydrate the toothpicks so they don't incinerate.**

Place your bamboo toothpicks in a heat-proof bowl and cover them with boiling water for at least 30 minutes prior to threading the meat.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Extract the onion juice to kill the gamey flavor.**

In a small bowl, crush the chopped onion with the water, squeezing it to release the juices. Discard the onion solids, keeping only the infused onion water.

- 2. Velvet the meat so it survives a hard fry.**

Place the lamb cubes in a mixing bowl with the onion water, Shaoxing wine, light soy sauce, salt, and baking soda. Vigorously stir the meat in one direction with your hand for about two minutes until it absorbs the liquid and becomes sticky, then let it marinate at room temperature for 20 minutes.

1. Toast and grind the dry spices.

Place a dry skillet over medium heat and toast the cumin seeds and Sichuan peppercorns for 2 to 3 minutes, shaking constantly, until highly fragrant. Crush them into a coarse powder using a mortar and pestle, then combine in a large mixing bowl with the chili flakes, sesame seeds, sugar, and MSG.

2. Thread the lamb.

Drain the soaked toothpicks and pat them dry. Thread a single cube of marinated lamb squarely onto the center of each stick so both ends protrude.

3. Flash-fry the skewers.

Heat the neutral oil in a wok or heavy skillet over medium-high heat to 375°F. Working in two batches to avoid crowding, drop the lamb into the oil and fry for 2 to 3 minutes, agitating gently, until the meat is deeply browned and the fat crisps up.

4. Execute the off-heat spice toss.

Aggressively scoop the hot lamb out of the oil with a slotted spoon and drop it directly into the bowl of dry spices. Drizzle the chili oil over the top and toss vigorously so the residual heat blooms the spices into a heavy crust. Fold in the cilantro and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **A note on MSG.**

It is entirely optional, but a pinch of MSG is the authentic heartbeat of the fly restaurant experience. Don't be afraid of it.



Fuqi Feipian

夫妻肺片

fūqī fèipiàn

In 1930s Chengdu, a husband and wife took butchers' discarded scraps, braised them into submission, and dressed them in an inferno of red chili oil and complex soy sauce. They called it 'Husband and Wife Waste Pieces.' Today, it's the undisputed king of Sichuan cold appetizers. The secret to this fly restaurant classic isn't expensive meat. It's a patient, aromatic white braise and the iron discipline to let the proteins chill completely overnight so you can slice them thin enough to see through. Weeknight assembly takes ten minutes, provided you put in the work on Sunday.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	boneless beef shank	1 tbsp	rock sugar
1/2 lb	honeycomb beef tripe <i>cleaned thoroughly</i>	1/2 tsp	fennel seeds
2 med	scallions <i>cut into 2-inch segments</i>	1/4 cup	Sichuan red chili oil <i>well mixed with sediment</i>
1 med	fresh ginger <i>cut into thick slices</i>	2 tsp	Chinking vinegar
3 tbsp	Shaoxing wine	1 tsp	sesame oil
3 med	star anise	3 small	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>
2 med	cassia bark	1/2 tsp	toasted Sichuan peppercorn powder
1 med	black cardamom pod <i>smashed open</i>	1/4 tsp	sugar
3 med	dried sand ginger	1/3 cup	Chinese celery <i>thinly sliced on a bias</i>
1 tbsp	Sichuan peppercorns	1/4 cup	roasted peanuts <i>roughly crushed</i>
1 tbsp	salt	1 tbsp	white sesame seeds <i>toasted</i>
1 cup	light soy sauce	1 small	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>
3 tbsp	brown sugar		

PREPARATION

- **Simmer the composite soy sauce.**

In a small saucepan, combine the light soy sauce, brown sugar, rock sugar, 1 star anise, 1 piece of cassia bark, and the fennel seeds. Simmer uncovered over low heat for 40 minutes until it reduces by a third and turns syrupy, then strain and store.

- **Blanch the proteins.**

Place the beef shank and honeycomb tripe in a large pot of cold water. Bring to a boil, cook for 5 minutes to release impurities, then drain and rinse under cold water.

- **Execute the white braise.**

Transfer the cleaned meat to a pressure cooker. Add the scallions, ginger slices, Shaoxing wine, remaining 2 star anise, remaining piece of cassia bark, black cardamom, sand ginger, whole Sichuan peppercorns, salt, and roughly 4 cups of water to just cover the meat. Cook on high pressure for 40 minutes, then let the pressure release naturally.

- **Chill the meat overnight.**

The true secret to this dish is patience. Transfer the meat and its braising liquid to a large container, cool to room temperature, then refrigerate overnight. This solidifies the gelatin so you can achieve the mandatory paper-thin slices. Reserve a quarter cup of the braising liquid for tomorrow's dressing.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Slice the chilled meats.**

Pull the cold, firm beef shank and tripe from the fridge. Using your sharpest chef's knife, slice the beef shank against the grain into translucent, paper-thin pieces. Lay the honeycomb tripe flat and slice it at a 30-degree bias into thin strips.

- 2. Whisk the dressing.**

In a small bowl, combine the reserved braising liquid, red chili oil, 2 tablespoons of your composite soy sauce, black vinegar, sesame oil, minced garlic, ground Sichuan peppercorn, and a pinch of sugar. Mix vigorously.

- 3. Assemble and dress.**

Scatter the sliced Chinese celery across the bottom of a wide platter. Fan the beef and tripe beautifully over the top. Pour the dressing generously over the meat, ensuring every single piece gleams with the red oil.

- 4. Garnish and rest.**

Scatter the crushed peanuts, toasted sesame seeds, and fresh cilantro heavily over the top. Let the plate sit at room temperature for ten minutes before serving so the chilled meat can relax and drink in the sauces.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The chili oil shortcut.**

A 48-hour steeped homemade red oil is the undisputed soul of a fly restaurant. If you absolutely must, elevate a premium jarred chili crisp by gently heating it with freshly ground Sichuan peppercorns and a dash of sesame oil—but know that you're cutting corners on history.

- **Celery substitutions.**

Chinese celery is grassy and delicate. If your market only carries standard Western celery, use the pale, tender inner hearts and their leaves to mimic the intended crunch.



Shui Zhu Niu Rou

水煮牛肉

shuǐ zhǔ niú ròu

In the unapologetic 'Fly Restaurants' of Sichuan, cooks don't rely on expensive cuts of meat; they rely on brilliant, unwavering technique. The secret that transforms this from a generic spicy stew into a violently aromatic masterpiece comes down to two grandmother-approved moves: a rigorous velveting process that forces the beef to drink up ginger-scallion water before sealing it in starch, and a bespoke garnish of hand-chopped, dry-toasted chilies known as Dao Kou La Jiao. We are keeping the canonical flavors exactly as they should be, using accessible ingredients to yield an explosive, slippery, and fiery bowl of pure comfort on a weeknight.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	beef flank steak <i>sliced 1/8-inch thick against the grain</i>	2 cup	Napa cabbage <i>roughly chopped</i>
2 med	fresh ginger <i>slices, smashed</i>	2 med	celery <i>sliced diagonally into thin pieces</i>
1 med	scallion <i>white part only, smashed</i>	1 cup	mung bean sprouts
1/4 cup	warm water	3 tbsp	Pixian Doubanjiang <i>minced finely</i>
3/4 tsp	kosher salt <i>divided</i>	1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>minced</i>
2 tbsp	light soy sauce <i>divided</i>	1 tbsp	garlic <i>minced</i>
1 large	egg <i>white only</i>	3 cup	low-sodium chicken stock
2 tbsp	sweet potato starch	1 tsp	sugar
10 tbsp	neutral oil <i>divided</i>	1/2 tsp	ground white pepper
20 med	dried Chinese red chilies <i>stems snipped</i>	4 med	garlic <i>cloves, finely minced</i>
1 tbsp	whole red Sichuan peppercorns	2 med	scallions <i>thinly sliced</i>
		1/4 cup	fresh cilantro <i>roughly chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Steep the aromatics for the ginger-scallion water.**

Soak the smashed ginger slices and smashed scallion white in the warm water for 10 minutes to extract their aromatic oils, creating the hydrating liquid essential for the beef.

- **Hydrate and velvet the beef.**

Place the thinly sliced beef into a medium bowl. Add 1/2 teaspoon of salt, 1 tablespoon of soy sauce, and 1 tablespoon of the ginger-scallion water. Vigorously massage the meat in one direction until the liquid is entirely absorbed. Add 2 more tablespoons of the ginger-scallion water and massage again until tacky. Mix in the egg white until coated, fold in the sweet potato starch until a slick paste forms, and seal with 1 tablespoon of neutral oil. Set aside for 20 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Toast the chilies and peppercorns to create the Dao Kou La Jiao.**

Place a wok over low heat with 1 teaspoon of oil. Toss in the dried chilies and Sichuan peppercorns, stirring continuously for 1 to 2 minutes until brittle and aromatic. Do not let them turn black. Transfer to a cutting board to cool, then roughly chop into a coarse, flaky powder.

- 2. Quickly stir-fry the vegetable base.**

Wipe out the wok and heat 1 tablespoon of oil over high heat. Toss in the Napa cabbage, celery, and bean sprouts with a pinch of salt. Stir-fry for 1 to 2 minutes just to remove the raw bite without letting them get soggy. Transfer to the bottom of a large, deep serving bowl.

- 3. Build the fiery red broth.**

Return the wok to medium-low heat with 3 tablespoons of oil and the minced Pixian Doubanjiang. Fry slowly for about 2 minutes until the oil bleeds into a vibrant red. Add the minced ginger and garlic, cooking for 30 seconds until fragrant. Pour in the chicken stock, remaining soy sauce, sugar, and white pepper, then bring to a rolling boil.

- 4. Gently poach the velveted beef.**

Reduce the heat so the broth is just simmering. Carefully drop the velveted beef slices in piece by piece. Do not stir immediately. Let sit untouched for 30 seconds to set the starch, then gently push the back of your spatula through the meat to separate. Simmer for 1 to 2 minutes until the beef turns opaque, then pour the beef and broth directly over the waiting vegetables.

1. Execute the hot oil pour.

Pile your chopped Dao Kou La Jiao directly in the center of the beef, flanked by the finely minced garlic and sliced scallions. Heat 1/4 cup of neutral oil in the cleaned wok over high heat until it begins to lightly smoke. Swiftly pour the smoking hot oil directly over the garlic and spices to violently release the volatile aromas, garnish with cilantro, and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Seek out sweet potato starch.**

While cornstarch works in a pinch, taking a trip to the Asian market for sweet potato starch will radically elevate the texture, creating a hearty, resilient barrier around the beef that won't wash off in the boiling broth.

● **Prep the spice mix ahead of time.**

The Dao Kou La Jiao can be made in large batches on a Sunday and kept in an airtight jar, reducing the active cooking time of this dish to under fifteen minutes.

● **Taste before salting.**

Pixian Doubanjiang is heavily salted, so traditional native cooks warn to taste the broth before adding any extra salt, as the combination of the marinade, bean paste, and soy sauce is usually enough.



Leshan Bobo Ji

乐山钵钵鸡

lè shān bō bō jī

If you wander the humid streets of Leshan, you will inevitably stumble upon a working-class "fly restaurant" packed with locals clustered around massive clay pots, cold beers in hand, pulling bamboo skewers dripping with red oil. This is Bobo Ji. Often misunderstood as a hot pot by the uninitiated, this masterpiece is actually a cold-soaked dish where blanched meats and crunchy vegetables are plunged into a rich, sweet-and-spicy chicken broth capped with a heavy slick of chili oil and toasted sesame seeds. It requires no specialized equipment, just an understanding of the physics of a cold emulsion: as you pull the skewer from the broth, the thickened oil clings to the food, coating

every bite with a massive hit of numbing Sichuan spice and savory chicken fat. It is the ultimate casual, communal feast, easily recreated on an American weeknight with everyday Asian market staples and a little patience.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs	6 oz	firm tofu <i>cubed</i>
4 cup	water	1/3 cup	neutral cooking oil
3 med slices	fresh ginger	2 tbsp	Pixian Doubanjiang <i>minced</i>
2 med	scallions <i>cut into 2-inch pieces</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	Korean gochugaru
1 tbsp	Shaoxing cooking wine	1 1/2 tbsp	crushed red pepper
1 small head	broccoli <i>cut into bite-sized florets</i>	1 tbsp	whole red Sichuan peppercorns <i>lightly crushed</i>
1 med	potato <i>peeled and sliced into very thin half-moons</i>	3 tbsp	light soy sauce
1/2 lb	lotus root <i>sliced thin</i>	1 tbsp	Chinkiang black vinegar
1 cup	dried wood ear mushrooms <i>rehydrated in warm water for 20 minutes</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	sugar
		1 tsp	chicken bouillon powder
		1/4 cup	toasted white sesame seeds

PREPARATION

- **Soak your bamboo skewers.**

Submerge about thirty 6-to-8-inch bamboo skewers in cold water for twenty minutes to prevent splintering while you prep the rest of the ingredients.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Poach the chicken to yield both the meat and the base broth.**

In a medium pot, combine the chicken thighs, water, ginger, scallions, and Shaoxing wine. Bring to a boil, skim the foam, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 25 minutes. Remove the chicken to cool, strain the broth into a large serving bowl, and let it cool completely to room temperature.

2. **Build the fragrant red chili oil.**

Heat the neutral oil in a small saucepan over medium-low heat, add the minced Doubanjiang, and fry for 2 minutes until the oil turns a rich red. Stir in the Sichuan peppercorns, gochugaru, and crushed red pepper for 30 seconds to toast the spices, then immediately remove from heat.

3. **Season the cold broth to create the signature flavor profile.**

Pour the hot chili oil directly into the cooled chicken broth. Whisk in the soy sauce, black vinegar, sugar, chicken bouillon powder, and toasted sesame seeds, creating an aggressively seasoned, sweet, spicy, and numbing emulsion.

4. **Blanch the vegetables and shock them cold.**

Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a boil. Separately blanch the wood ear mushrooms (3 minutes), lotus root (2 minutes), broccoli (1 to 2 minutes), and potatoes (1 to 2 minutes), immediately transferring each finished batch to an ice bath to lock in their crisp textures.

5. **Assemble the skewers.**

Remove the bones from the cooled chicken and cut the meat and skin into bite-sized pieces. Thread the chicken, tofu, and blanched vegetables onto bamboo skewers, keeping it to two or three pieces per skewer to mimic the authentic street-food experience.

1. Execute the cold soak.

Submerge all the loaded skewers into the room-temperature red oil broth, ensuring they are fully covered. Let them soak for at least 30 minutes at room temperature, allowing the deeply savory liquid to penetrate the ingredients via osmosis before pulling them out to eat.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not rush the cooling of the broth.**

Pouring warm broth over the skewers will overcook the carefully blanched vegetables, destroying the snappy texture that defines a proper Bobo Ji.

- **The sesame seeds are not a garnish.**

The massive handful of toasted sesame seeds is critical to the dish's flavor delivery system. As you pull a skewer out, the thickened oil and seeds cling to the food, ensuring every bite is fully coated in the seasoning.



Ming Ting Nao Hua Dou Fu

明婷脑花豆腐

míng-tíng nǎo-huā dòu-fu

In Chengdu, the real culinary temples aren't draped in white linen; they're the cramped, chaotic "fly restaurants" where explosive flavor is the only god. Ming Ting is the undisputed king of these alleys, and this is their masterpiece. By swapping the minced meat of classic Mapo Tofu for pig brain, they achieved a flawless textural mirroring—the rich, custard-like organ melting seamlessly into the silken tofu. Laced with the sharp, lactic bite of pickled chilies to cut the fat, this is nose-to-tail Sichuan cooking at its absolute apex. Don't apologize for the offal. Treat it with the respect it deserves, and you'll be rewarded with a profoundly comforting bowl of pure heritage.

INGREDIENTS

14 oz	silken tofu <i>cut into 1-inch cubes</i>	1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>finely minced</i>
2 whole	pig brains <i>thawed if frozen</i>	3 med	garlic cloves <i>finely minced</i>
1/2 tsp	salt	1 cup	unscented chicken broth
1 tsp	dark soy sauce	1 tsp	light soy sauce
2 tbsp	rapeseed oil	1/2 tsp	sugar
1 tbsp	lard	1 1/2 tbsp	potato starch <i>mixed thoroughly with 3 tbsp cold water</i>
1 1/2 tbsp	Pixian doubanjiang <i>finely minced</i>	1 tsp	Sichuan peppercorn powder <i>freshly ground</i>
1 tbsp	Sichuan pickled chilies <i>finely minced</i>	2 med	scallions <i>finely sliced green parts only</i>

PREPARATION

- **Soak the brains in cold water to draw out the blood and carefully peel away the vascular membrane.**

Let them sit for 10 minutes, then use your fingertips or a toothpick to catch the thin spiderweb-like membrane containing the red blood vessels, rolling and peeling it away slowly like a ripe peach.

- **Blanch the cleaned brains in simmering water with a slice of ginger to set the proteins.**

Simmer for 3 to 5 minutes until opaque, skimming off any scum, then carefully remove, cool, and cut into 1-inch chunks.

- **Steep the tofu cubes in hot water seasoned with the salt and dark soy sauce.**

Slide the cubes into the hot seasoned water for 2 minutes to remove the raw bean taste and slightly firm up the protein structure before draining.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the rapeseed oil and lard in a wok until melted and fry the aromatics.**
Add the minced ginger and garlic over medium-low heat, stirring for 15 seconds until deeply fragrant.
- 2. Fry the doubanjiang and pickled chilies slowly until the oil bleeds a brilliant crimson.**
Patience is key here; let the oils turn red from the doubanjiang before tossing in the pickled chilies to release their distinct sour-spicy aroma.
- 3. Build the braising liquid with the chicken broth, light soy sauce, and sugar.**
Pour in the liquids and sugar, turning the heat up to medium-high to bring the mixture to a lively simmer.
- 4. Gently braise the brains and tofu without stirring violently.**
Slide the blanched ingredients into the wok, using the back of your ladle to gently push them from the edges toward the center, letting it bubble for 3 to 4 minutes to absorb the flavors.
- 5. Bind the sauce using the traditional three-stage thickening method.**
Drizzle one-third of your starch slurry around the edges and gently push to incorporate. Wait 30 seconds for the tofu to release its water, add the second third, wait another 30 seconds, and finish with the final third until the sauce perfectly hugs the proteins.
- 6. Turn off the heat and garnish heavily before serving.**
Slide the dish into a deep serving bowl, dust generously with freshly ground Sichuan peppercorn powder to toast it in the residual heat, scatter the scallions, and serve immediately with copious amounts of steamed white rice.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The weeknight brain hack.**

Peeling the membrane requires patience and cannot be rushed. Buy the brains on Sunday, clean and blanch them, and store them in an airtight container in the fridge. Come Tuesday night, you'll have this fly restaurant classic on the table faster than the rice cooker finishes its cycle.

- **The secret of the Paojiao.**

The inclusion of Sichuan pickled chilies is what separates Ming Ting's dish from standard Mapo Tofu. The lactic acid cuts the profound animal richness of the pork brain, elevating the dish into a masterclass in flavor balancing.

- **Never compromise on the main ingredient.**

In Chengdu, organ meats aren't fear-factor foods; they are true delicacies prized for their unparalleled textures. Mastering the brain prep unlocks an authentic piece of culinary heritage that you simply can't buy in a standard American takeout box.



Grandma's Hands: Doughs, Broths, and Comfort

The tactile, soothing, and gentle side of Sichuan cuisine.

Forget the fire and brimstone for a minute. There is a quieter side to Sichuan—a gentle, flour-dusted world far removed from the relentless swagger of chili oil and *málà*. This is the food of lazy Sunday afternoons and dimly lit kitchens, where grandmothers fold pork and chive *jiaozi* by muscle memory and ladle out crystal-clear bowls of restorative yang chun mian.

It is the tactile, soothing work of shaping dough and simmering bones. Whether it is the warm, street-side nostalgia of a dan hong gao pastry or the icy relief of summer bingfen, these are the unapologetic comforts of the homeland. No pretense, no performing for the tourists. Just the quiet, essential business of taking care of your own.





Laozao Fenzi Dan

醪糟粉子蛋

láo zāo fěn zǐ dàn

If you ask a child of a Sichuanese household what comfort tastes like, they won't point to a fiery bowl of mapo tofu, they will point to this. It is a sweet, warming, gently alcoholic broth filled with chewy, rustic rice dumplings and a perfectly poached egg with a runny yolk. The magic lies in the unpretentious technique of pinching irregular dough fragments directly into the pot, and the golden rule of never boiling the fermented rice. It is the ultimate homeland remedy, practical and deeply restorative, proving you are never more than a few pantry staples away from true home.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup	glutinous rice flour	4 tbsp	dark brown sugar
4 tbsp	warm water	1 tbsp	dried goji berries
3 tbsp	water	2 large	eggs
4 cup	water	5 tbsp	fermented sweet rice

PREPARATION

- **Mix the dumpling dough.**

Place the glutinous rice flour in a medium bowl, pour in the warm water, and mix to slightly cook the starches. Gradually add the room temperature water, kneading gently until the mixture forms a smooth, pliable dough ball that feels like soft play-dough.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Prepare the sweet broth.**

In a medium saucepan, bring the 4 cups of water to a gentle boil and stir in the dark brown sugar until completely dissolved.

- 2. Poach the eggs undisturbed.**

Lower the heat to a very gentle simmer with tiny bubbles, hold the eggs close to the surface, and gently crack them in. Let them poach untouched for about 3 minutes until the whites are mostly set but the yolk remains soft, then carefully scoop them into your serving bowls.

- 3. Pinch the dumplings into the boiling broth.**

Turn the heat to medium-high to bring the broth to a rolling boil. Hold the dough ball in your hand and rapidly pinch off thumbnail-sized, irregular pieces, flicking them directly into the pot.

1. Boil the dumplings until they float.

Give the broth a gentle stir and boil for 2 to 3 minutes until the dumplings become slightly translucent and float to the surface, then toss in the goji berries.

2. Stir in the fermented rice off the heat.

Turn the heat to the absolute lowest setting, gently stir in the fermented sweet rice for 30 seconds, then turn the heat completely off to prevent the sweet alcohol from evaporating and turning sour.

3. Assemble and serve.

Ladle the hot broth, plump rice grains, and chewy dumplings over the waiting poached eggs.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Source the right flour.**

Look for glutinous or sweet rice flour, often sold in clear bags with green text, rather than regular rice flour.

● **Do not save cooked dough.**

Pinch only as much dough as you plan to eat in one sitting, as cooked dumplings will disintegrate and turn the broth to sludge if left overnight.



Chengdu Dan Hong Gao

成都蛋烘糕

chéng-dū dàn-hōng-gāo

To understand a rainy afternoon in Chengdu is to understand the smell of yeasty dough and caramelized sugar drifting from a vendor's tricycle cart. For generations, Dan Hong Gao—a palm-sized, yeast-leavened pancake folded around anything from crushed peanuts to spicy pickled beans—has been the ultimate edible nostalgia for kids growing up in Sichuan. The architecture of this street food relies on an entirely dry pan and a dual-leavening trick of yeast and baking soda, creating a flawless golden exterior and a spongy, porous honeycomb

interior. By mixing the batter the night before and letting the fridge do the slow work of fermentation, this century-old vendor secret translates effortlessly to a chaotic Tuesday morning in America.

INGREDIENTS

1 large	large egg <i>room temperature</i>	2 tbsp	roasted unsalted peanuts <i>crushed</i>
3/4 cup	all-purpose flour	1 tbsp	toasted white sesame seeds
1/3 cup	warm water	1 tbsp	granulated white sugar
2 tbsp	granulated white sugar	1/4 cup	ground pork
1 tbsp	dark brown sugar	1 small	garlic <i>minced</i>
1/2 tsp	active dry yeast	1 tsp	Pixian doubanjiang
1/4 tsp	baking soda	1/4 cup	pickled sour long beans <i>finely chopped</i>
1 pinch	salt		

PREPARATION

- **Prepare the sweet classic filling.**

Toss the crushed peanuts, toasted sesame seeds, and one tablespoon of white sugar together in a small bowl.

- **Prepare the savory spicy filling.**

Brown the ground pork in a skillet over medium heat until the fat renders, then stir in the minced garlic, Pixian doubanjiang, and sour long beans, cooking until fragrant and heated through.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Mix the batter the night before.

In a medium bowl, whisk the warm water, dark brown sugar, and two tablespoons of white sugar until mostly dissolved, then whisk in the yeast. Add the egg and whisk until thoroughly combined, followed by the flour, baking soda, and salt. Whisk vigorously until you have a smooth, ribbony batter with no lumps, then cover tightly and refrigerate overnight for 8 to 12 hours.

2. Awaken the batter.

In the morning, remove the batter from the fridge. It should look slightly puffed with tiny bubbles on the surface; give it a gentle stir to deflate any massive air pockets.

3. Preheat a dry skillet.

Place a high-quality, completely dry non-stick skillet over medium-low heat for a solid two minutes. Do not add oil or butter under any circumstances, as fat will fry the batter and ruin the flawless golden skin.

4. Swirl the pancake.

Pour about two tablespoons of batter directly into the center of the preheated pan, immediately pick up the skillet, and use your wrist to swirl it gently to form a thin-edged, four-inch circle.

5. Bake until the honeycomb sets.

Watch closely for 45 to 60 seconds until the batter bubbles rapidly. When the bubbles pop and the glossy wet surface turns matte and dry, the pancake is done; do not flip it.

6. Fill, fold, and serve.

While the pancake is still in the pan, spoon your chosen filling right down the center, use a spatula to fold the pancake in half, and lightly press the edges so the warm, sticky interior seals together before serving immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The dual-leavening trick.**

Yeast provides the fundamental sourdough-like architecture, but baking soda is the street vendor's secret weapon. It reacts instantly with the dark brown sugar's acidity in the hot pan, creating a sudden burst of carbon dioxide that forms the pancake's signature porous honeycomb interior.

- **Troubleshooting leopard spots.**

If your pancake looks mottled with dark spots, your pan either had residual oil in it or was heated unevenly. Wipe the skillet completely clean with a dry paper towel between pancakes.

- **Controlling the heat.**

If the bottom is burning before the top has a chance to dry and set, your pan is too hot or the batter is slightly too watery. Lower the heat slightly or whisk a tiny dusting of extra flour into your bowl.



Su Rou Tang

酥肉汤

sū ròu tāng

If you ask a local in Sichuan what tastes like home, they won't point you to a fiery bowl of chili oil; they'll point to this. Born from rural outdoor village banquets, this soup relies on a brilliant culinary trick: strips of pork are massaged with toasted Sichuan peppercorns, battered in coarse sweet potato starch, and double-fried into a shatteringly crisp armor. The real magic happens when that pork is plunged into a delicate, ginger-laced winter melon broth. The crust hydrates, transforming into a silky, savory envelope that clings to the juicy meat inside, offering bursts of citrusy numbness with every bite.

The secret to making this restorative bowl work on a busy Tuesday is to fry a large batch of the pork on a Sunday. It freezes perfectly, meaning true comfort is never more than ten minutes away.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	boneless pork shoulder <i>cut into 1/2-inch thick, 2-inch long strips</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 tbsp	whole Sichuan peppercorns	2 tbsp	water
1 tbsp	Shaoxing wine	1 qt	neutral oil <i>for frying</i>
1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>finely minced</i>	4 cup	light chicken broth
1 tsp	kosher salt	1 lb	winter melon <i>skin removed, seeds scooped out, and cut into 1-inch cubes</i>
1/2 tsp	white pepper <i>finely ground</i>	1 med piece	fresh ginger <i>smashed</i>
1 cup	coarse sweet potato starch	2 med	scallions <i>white and green parts separated</i>
3 large	eggs	1 tsp	toasted sesame oil

PREPARATION

- **Peel the dark green waxy skin from the winter melon and scoop out the soft, seed-filled pith.**

The remaining firm, stark white flesh will act as a sponge to absorb the flavorful broth.

- **Finely mince one tablespoon of ginger for the pork marinade, and smash a second piece for the broth.**

Smashing the ginger with the flat side of a knife releases its aromatic oils instantly into the soup base.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Toast the Sichuan peppercorns until fragrant and coarsely crush them.

Heat a dry skillet over medium-low and toss the peppercorns for 2 to 3 minutes until they release a wisp of smoke. Cool them, then use a rolling pin or mortar and pestle to crack them into rustic shards that will provide distinct bursts of citrusy numbness. Do not grind them to a fine dust.

2. Massage the crushed peppercorns, Shaoxing wine, minced ginger, salt, and white pepper into the pork strips.

Work the aromatics aggressively into the meat with your hands until the liquid is fully absorbed, then let it rest at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes.

3. Whisk the eggs, sweet potato starch, and salt together until the batter falls in a slow, thick ribbon.

Sweet potato starch feels stubborn at first, but keep stirring. If the mixture is entirely too stiff, add water a tablespoon at a time until it resembles the consistency of thick Greek yogurt. Toss the marinated pork into the bowl, coating every piece heavily.

4. Fry the battered pork in 320°F oil for 4 to 5 minutes until cooked through and pale golden.

Lower the strips into the hot oil one by one, letting excess batter drip off first. Work in batches to avoid crowding the pan, then remove the pork to a wire rack or paper towel-lined baking sheet.

5. Increase the oil temperature to 360°F and flash-fry the pork for 45 to 60 seconds.

This brief second fry forcefully expels excess oil and creates a deep golden-brown, armor-like crust. Drain the crispy pork well. At this point, the meat can be eaten as a snack or frozen for later use.

6. Boil the chicken broth, smashed ginger, scallion whites, and winter melon until the melon is semi-translucent.

Bring the liquid to a rolling boil first, letting the aromatics infuse for 5 minutes, then add the winter melon. Cover and simmer over medium heat for 10 to 15 minutes until the melon is easily pierced with a fork.

- 1. Drop the fried pork into the simmering soup for three to five minutes before finishing with sesame oil and scallion greens.**

Do not overboil. The goal is for the sweet potato starch crust to hydrate and become slippery on the outside while retaining a slight chew. Adjust seasoning, stir in the sesame oil, and serve immediately in a large communal bowl.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Never substitute sweet potato starch with cornstarch for this recipe.**
Cornstarch dissolves immediately in boiling broth, turning the soup into a cloudy gravy and leaving the meat naked. Coarse sweet potato starch is essential; it undergoes a textural transformation, clinging to the meat and becoming pleasantly silky and chewy.
- **Fry the pork in large batches ahead of time.**
Deep-frying on a weeknight is a hassle. Once double-fried, the pork freezes perfectly in zip-top bags. Toss the frozen pieces directly into the boiling soup for an effortless weeknight meal.
- **Zucchini makes a passable substitute for winter melon in a pinch.**
Cut it into similar chunks, but reduce the simmering time. Zucchini cooks much faster and only needs 3 to 4 minutes before adding the pork.



Zha Cai Rou Si Tang Mian

榨菜肉丝汤面

zhà cài ròu sī tāng miàn

It is the ultimate working-class hero bowl, born not of three-day bone broths, but of clever weeknight alchemy. The magic relies entirely on the interplay of velvety pork and the potent umami of zha cai—Sichuan preserved mustard stems. The secret a grandmother knew, and the reason her soup tasted so much better than the dorm room version, comes down to violently emulsifying the pork juices and pickled greens right in a roaring wok with boiling water. This isn't restaurant food; it's the quiet, deeply savory comfort of a late-night Chinese kitchen, achievable in fifteen minutes on an American stovetop.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 lb	lean pork <i>sliced into thin matchsticks</i>	1 inch	fresh ginger <i>peeled and cut into fine matchsticks</i>
2 tsp	light soy sauce <i>divided</i>	3 clove	garlic <i>smashed and minced</i>
1 tsp	Shaoxing wine	2 med	scallions <i>white and green parts separated and finely sliced</i>
1/4 tsp	white pepper	1/4 tsp	sugar
1 tsp	cornstarch	4 cup	boiling water
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil <i>divided</i>	2 portion	fresh thin wheat noodles
4 oz	whole Fuling preserved mustard stem <i>sliced thinly into matchsticks, soaked in cold water for 10 minutes, and squeezed fiercely dry</i>	1 cup	leafy greens <i>washed</i>
		1 tsp	toasted sesame oil

PREPARATION

- **Soak and fiercely squeeze the mustard greens.**

Zha Cai is fiercely salty straight out of the package. Soaking for 5 to 10 minutes removes the harsh industrial brine, and squeezing it violently dry ensures it will fry properly.

- **Massage the pork with marinade to velvet the meat.**

Combine the sliced pork, 1 teaspoon light soy sauce, Shaoxing wine, and white pepper, massaging until the liquid is absorbed. Mix in the cornstarch to create a barrier, then fold in 1 tablespoon of neutral oil to prevent clumping. Let sit for 10 minutes.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Boil the noodles and greens in a separate pot.

Never boil noodles directly in your final soup, or the starch will turn the broth to sludge. Boil the noodles according to package directions, tossing in the greens for the final 30 seconds, then drain and divide between two large serving bowls.

2. Sear the velveting pork in a smoking hot wok.

Heat a wok or heavy-bottomed saucepan over high heat until smoking, add 2 tablespoons of neutral oil, and sauté the pork for 90 seconds until it just loses its pink color.

3. Bloom the aromatics and dry-fry the mustard greens.

Toss in the minced garlic, ginger matchsticks, and scallion whites for 15 seconds until aromatic. Add the squeezed-dry mustard greens and stir-fry aggressively for 1 to 2 minutes until the moisture sizzles away and it smells intensely savory.

4. Violently emulsify the broth with boiling water.

Pour the 4 cups of boiling water directly into the roaring hot wok to immediately boil and lift the browned bits, pork juices, and starch into a cloudy, milky broth.

5. Season the soup and simmer rapidly.

Add the remaining 1 teaspoon of light soy sauce and the sugar, lower the heat to medium, and simmer rapidly for 3 to 5 minutes to allow the flavors to marry.

6. Assemble the bowls and serve immediately.

Ladle the hot soup, pork, and mustard greens generously over the waiting noodles, finishing with a few drops of toasted sesame oil and the reserved scallion greens.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Always use boiling water for the wok emulsion.**

Cold water will just yield meat washed in water. Boiling water hitting a smoking hot wok guarantees an immediate emulsion, suspending the fats to create a rich, opaque broth in minutes.

- **Do not skip the white pepper.**

White pepper provides an authentic, floral warmth essential to Sichuan comfort soups that sharp black pepper simply cannot replicate.



Fanqie Jian Dan Tang

番茄煎蛋汤

fānqié jiāndàn tāng

It is a quiet truth of the Chinese table that dinner is never complete without soup, but not the gloppy, cornstarch-heavy bowls you find at the local takeout joint. Authentic Sichuan comfort lies in Fanqie Jian Dan Tang, a humble palate cleanser built on a trick of grandmotherly thermodynamics. By frying eggs in hot oil until they are aggressively bubbled and caramelized, then shocking the roaring wok with violently boiling water, the fat and liquid instantly emulsify into a rich, milky-white broth that tastes as though it simmered for hours. This is the unadulterated taste of the homeland, requiring zero special equipment and yielding pure, restorative perfection in ten minutes.

INGREDIENTS

3 large	ripe tomatoes <i>scored, blanched, peeled, cored, and roughly chopped</i>	1 tbsp	fresh ginger <i>peeled and finely julienned</i>
3 large	eggs <i>beaten vigorously</i>	4 cup	boiling water
1/4 tsp	kosher salt	1/4 tsp	ground white pepper
3 tbsp	neutral cooking oil	1 med	scallion <i>green parts only, finely chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Blanch and peel the tomatoes.**

Score a shallow X on the bottom of each tomato, submerge them in a bowl of boiling water for one to two minutes, then rinse under cold water to slip the skins right off before coring and chopping.

- **Beat the eggs.**

Crack the eggs into a bowl with the salt and beat them vigorously with a fork or chopsticks until no streaks of egg white remain.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Fry the eggs until aggressively puffed and golden.**

Heat a wok or heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat until it begins to lightly smoke, add the oil, and pour in the eggs to fry undisturbed for 30 seconds before flipping and chopping into large chunks with your spatula.

- 2. Sauté the aromatics and tomatoes.**

Push the eggs to one side of the wok, drop the ginger into the residual oil to sizzle for 10 seconds, then add the chopped tomatoes and press down lightly so they release their juices and break down into a chunky sauce.

1. Shock the wok with boiling water to create the emulsion.

Ensure the stove is on maximum heat and carefully pour the boiling water directly into the pan, standing back as it sputters and the liquid instantly transforms into a rich, cloudy white broth.

2. Simmer to meld the flavors.

Let the soup maintain a rolling boil for 3 to 4 minutes to allow the spongy eggs to soak up the tomato broth, then stir in the white pepper and taste for salt.

3. Garnish and serve.

Turn off the heat, ladle the hot soup into a large communal bowl, and finish with the chopped scallions.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the thermodynamics.**

You absolutely must use boiling water to create the broth; cold water drops the pan's temperature, causes the oil to separate, and results in a greasy, clear soup instead of the coveted milky emulsion.

● **Peeling is non-negotiable.**

Do not skip peeling the tomatoes, as their skins turn tough and stringy when boiled, completely ruining the silken comfort of the dish.

● **Make it a meal.**

Turn this side soup into a main course by dropping a handful of dried thin wheat noodles directly into the boiling broth during the final minutes of cooking.



Qing Tang Mian

清汤面

qīng tāng miàn

Forget the blistering chili oil and numbing peppercorns for a minute. If you grew up in a Sichuanese home, true comfort doesn't scream—it whispers through a steaming bowl of clear broth noodles. This is grandma magic at its finest: no eight-hour master stock, just a brilliant, instant emulsion of rendered pork lard, light soy sauce, and sharp scallions brought to life by boiling noodle water. It's an unapologetic, ten-minute bowl of pure nostalgia that demands nothing more than what's already in your pantry and respects the hustle of a Tuesday night.

INGREDIENTS

1 tsp	pork lard	2 tbsp	scallions <i>finely chopped, white and green parts</i>
1 tbsp	light soy sauce	1 tsp	neutral oil
1 pinch	salt	1 large	egg
1/4 tsp	white pepper	3 oz	thin dried Chinese wheat noodles
1 pinch	MSG	1 small	baby bok choy or spinach <i>washed and stems trimmed</i>
1/2 tsp	Chinese black vinegar	handful	

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Build the flavor bowl.**

While your noodle water heats, add the lard, light soy sauce, salt, white pepper, MSG, black vinegar, and scallions to a large, empty serving bowl.

2. **Fry the egg.**

Heat a small skillet over medium-high with a dab of oil or extra lard, and fry the egg until the whites are golden and crispy at the edges but the yolk remains soft, then set aside.

3. **Boil the noodles.**

Bring a medium pot of water to a rolling boil, drop in the noodles, and stir immediately with chopsticks so they don't clump.

4. **Bloom the broth.**

About 30 seconds before the noodles finish their 3 to 4 minute boil, ladle 1 1/2 cup of the actively boiling, starchy cooking water directly into your serving bowl to melt the lard and gently cook the raw scallions.

5. **Blanch the greens.**

Toss the greens into the boiling pot for the final 15 seconds.

1. **Combine and serve.**

Use tongs to transfer the noodles and greens straight from the pot into your waiting broth, crown the bowl with your crispy fried egg, and eat immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the lard.**

Pork fat is the undisputed soul of this dish, providing a luxurious mouthfeel and porky fragrance that boxed chicken stock or sesame oil simply cannot replicate.

- **Use the noodle water.**

Skipping stock and using the starchy noodle cooking water isn't just faster—it's historically accurate and provides the exact starch needed to emulsify the fat and soy sauce.



Chuantong Shougong Bingfen

传统手工冰粉

chuántǒng shǒugōng bīngfěn

If you grew up in a Chinese-American household, you probably remember the suffocating heat of late-summer afternoons, miraculously cured by a bowl of something cold, jiggly, and deeply sweet. In Sichuan, where the food is notoriously fiery, traditional Bingfen is the ultimate antidote. You can buy the soulless instant powder anywhere, but true Bingfen is made by hand—coaxing natural fruit pectins out of tiny shoofly seeds until you whip millions of air bubbles into an impossibly light, bouncy jelly. It is brilliant, simple kitchen chemistry that tastes exactly like a bustling street corner in Chengdu.

INGREDIENTS

5 g	Mrs. Wages Pickling Lime	3 tbsp	laozao
200 g	water <i>room temperature</i>	2 tbsp	peanuts <i>crushed</i>
50 g	raw Bingfen seeds	1 tbsp	white sesame seeds <i>toasted</i>
1500 g	water <i>boiled and completely cooled</i>	2 tbsp	hawthorn flakes <i>crumbled</i>
1/2 cup	dark brown sugar	2 tbsp	raisins
1/2 cup	light brown sugar	1/2 cup	watermelon <i>cubed</i>
1/2 cup	water		

PREPARATION

- **Prepare the lime water coagulant.**

Mix the pickling lime into 200g of room temperature water and let it sit undisturbed for at least 30 minutes to separate the clear liquid from the chalky sediment.

- **Simmer the brown sugar syrup.**

Combine the dark brown sugar, light brown sugar, and half a cup of water in a small saucepan, simmering over medium-low heat until it reduces into a thick, glossy syrup, then chill.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Wrap the seeds tightly in a breathable cloth.**

Place the Bingfen seeds into the center of a fine cheesecloth or muslin herb bag and tie it securely, leaving just a little slack for the seeds to move.

2. **Scrub the bag in the water like you are washing dirty laundry.**

Submerge the bag in the 1500g of cool mineral water and vigorously massage, squeeze, and scrub it for 8 to 10 minutes until the water becomes highly viscous and filled with millions of tiny air bubbles.

1. Introduce the coagulant to set the jelly.

Carefully pour only the clear lime liquid into your bowl of thickened pectin water, discarding any white sediment, and stir gently in one direction for thirty seconds.

2. Chill the jelly until firmly set.

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and place it in the refrigerator for two to four hours.

3. Assemble the bowls the real way.

Carve out shallow, jagged layers of the set jelly, drizzle generously with the cold brown sugar syrup, and top with fermented rice, hawthorn flakes, crushed peanuts, sesame seeds, raisins, and watermelon.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Use mineral or boiled tap water, never distilled.**

The pectin absolutely requires the natural calcium minerals found in hard tap or mineral water to form a gel structure.

● **Do not let any chalky lime sediment into the jelly.**

If the white precipitate at the bottom of your lime water slips into the bowl, the dessert will become cloudy, bitter, and gritty.



Qing Tang Shui Jiao

清汤水饺

qīng tāng shuǐ jiǎo

Sichuan cuisine is famous for its fiery, loud, chili-oil-drenched swagger, but its soul is equally defined by quiet, comforting bowls like this. There is no six-hour bone stock here, just the brilliant, grandmother-approved efficiency of "bowl seasoning"—building an instant, deeply savory broth right in the serving bowl using rich pork lard, dried seaweed, and the starchy cooking water from the dumplings themselves. It is pure, simple, weeknight alchemy that tastes exactly like a home kitchen in Chengdu.

INGREDIENTS

1/3 cup	boiling water	1 tsp	toasted sesame oil
1 small piece	fresh ginger <i>smashed (about 1 inch)</i>	1 pack	Shanghai-style dumpling wrappers <i>white and round</i>
5 med	scallion <i>1 smashed, 4 finely chopped</i>	2 tsp	rendered pork lard
1 tsp	Sichuan peppercorns	4 tsp	dried baby shrimp
1 lb	ground pork <i>preferably 70 percent lean</i>	1/4 cup	dried seaweed <i>torn into bite-sized pieces</i>
2 tbsp	light soy sauce <i>divided</i>	1 tsp	black vinegar <i>optional</i>
1 tsp	salt	1/2 tsp	ground white pepper
1/2 tsp	sugar	1/4 cup	cilantro <i>chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Brew the ginger-peppercorn infusion.**

In a small bowl, steep the smashed ginger, smashed scallion, and Sichuan peppercorns in the boiling water for 15 minutes. Strain, discard the solids, and let the liquid cool to room temperature; this infused water is the secret to a bouncy, juicy pork filling.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whip the pork filling in a single direction.**

Place the ground pork in a large bowl with 1 tablespoon of the soy sauce, salt, sugar, and sesame oil. Stir vigorously with chopsticks in one continuous circular direction while slowly drizzling in the cooled ginger-peppercorn water until the meat is pale, sticky, and aerated.

1. Fold the dumplings into simple half-moons.

Place a teaspoon of filling in the center of a wrapper, wet the top edge with water, and fold it over, pressing firmly to seal. Authentic Sichuan home-style dumplings do not require intricate pleating, just a tight seal.

2. Assemble the bowl seasonings.

While a large pot of water comes to a boil, divide the pork lard, dried baby shrimp, torn seaweed, remaining soy sauce, black vinegar, white pepper, and chopped scallions equally among four serving bowls. Do not skip the lard; it is the grandmother's secret to the broth's richness.

3. Boil the dumplings and temper the water.

Drop the dumplings into the boiling water and stir gently with the back of a ladle. When the water returns to a rolling boil, add half a cup of cold water to calm the pot, ensuring the pork cooks through without blowing out the wrappers.

4. Create the instant broth and serve.

Just as the dumplings float and plump up on the second boil, ladle about 3/4 cup of the starchy cooking water directly from the pot into each prepared serving bowl to melt the lard and bloom the seaweed. Transfer the cooked dumplings into the bowls with a slotted spoon and garnish with cilantro.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Avoid the temptation to add vegetables to the filling.**

Authentic Sichuan Qing Tang Shui Jiao relies entirely on the aerated pure pork mixture for its signature texture; adding cabbage or chives turns it into a Northern dumpling.

● **Use the right wrappers.**

Seek out Shanghai-style dumpling wrappers, which are white, round, and moderately thin. Avoid yellow, square wonton wrappers, which contain egg and belong to a different culinary category entirely.