

April Spice Club:

Sichuan Peppercorns



Sichuan (or Szechuan) peppercorns are a key ingredient in Sichuan cuisine, renowned for their unique flavor and numbing sensation. Despite their given name, they are not true peppercorns, but rather the dried husks of the prickly ash tree's fruit.

These “peppercorns” impart a complex flavor profile characterized by citrusy notes, floral undertones, and a distinct tingling sensation on the palate. This sensation, known as "ma," complements the heat of chili peppers commonly used in Sichuan cuisine, creating a balance of flavors and textures.

Featured in iconic Sichuan dishes such as mapo tofu and Kung Pao chicken, their aromatic and numbing qualities are used to add depth and dimension to stir-fries, braises, and sauces. Beyond Sichuan cuisine, Sichuan peppercorns have gained notoriety in global culinary circles for their ability to add a unique and adventurous twist to dishes. Whether used sparingly to enhance flavor or as a focal point in Sichuan-style hot pots, these peppercorns offer a sensory journey unlike any other.

Embrace the tantalizing allure of Sichuan peppercorns and embark on a culinary adventure that stimulates the senses and ignites the palate with each flavorful bite.

Ma Po Tofu

Martin Yan, Food & Wine

Serves 4 | Active time: 20 mins., with prep beforehand

“Have all your ingredients prepped and ready before you start to stir-fry, because once you start cooking, it goes very fast and you won't have time to chop anything.

The marinade and sauce can be made a day in advance and kept in an airtight container in the refrigerator.”

Marinade

1 Tbsp oyster sauce
1 tsp cornstarch
½ lb. ground pork or beef

Sauce

⅓ cup chicken broth
2 Tbsp soy sauce
1 ½ tsp chili garlic sauce
1 tsp black bean garlic sauce
1 tsp cornstarch
½ tsp ground toasted Sichuan peppercorns*

**Toast the Sichuan peppercorns:* Add to a dry skillet over medium heat and stir for about one minute, until fragrant. Cool, then grind and use.

Make the marinade: Place oyster sauce and cornstarch in a large bowl and whisk to combine. Add pork and mix well. Let stand for 10 minutes.

Make the sauce: Combine chicken broth, soy sauce, chili garlic sauce, black bean garlic sauce, cornstarch, and Sichuan peppercorns in a bowl; whisk to combine and set aside.

Make the ma po tofu: Heat a wok over high heat until hot. Add oil, swirling to coat sides. Add garlic and chili pepper, and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 10 seconds. Add pork and stir-fry until cooked, about 2 minutes. Add tofu and sauce and cook, stirring gently, until tofu is heated through and sauce boils and thickens, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a serving bowl and garnish with green onions.

Chinese Sichuan Cold Noodles

Jeeca, *The Foodie Takes Flight*

Serves 2 | Cook time: 20 mins. | Total time: 42 mins.

“Fragrant, aromatic, and really refreshing – these Sichuan-style cold noodles are great to serve with your favorite main or enjoyed as a refreshing meal.”

Dressing

1 ½ Tbsp soy sauce
1 tsp dark soy sauce
1 Tbsp black vinegar
1 tsp sugar
1 Tbsp chili oil or chili sauce
1 tsp minced garlic
1 tsp ground Sichuan pepper*
1 Tbsp sesame oil
¼ cup warm water
Pinch of salt
¼ tsp five spice powder

Noodles

227 g fresh noodles of choice, 2 servings
(author used wheat noodles)
sesame oil

**Toast the Sichuan peppercorns:* Add to a dry skillet over medium heat and stir for about one minute, until fragrant. Cool, then grind and use.

For the dressing, mix everything in a bowl, adjusting to taste. Set aside.

Cook the noodles until still very chewy. Drain the noodles from the water. Run the noodles through cold running water. Set aside on a strainer to drain any excess water.

You can drizzle some oil over the noodles and then mix well to coat the noodles. This is to prevent the noodles from sticking together.

In a large bowl, add the cooled noodles. Add your toppings and mix-ins of choice. Pour over the dressing. Mix well and enjoy!

Suggested Reading on Chinese and Japanese Cuisine

Sawako Okochi & Aaron Israel, *Love Japan: Recipes from our
Japanese American Kitchen*

Meera Sodha, *East: 120 Vegan and Vegetarian Recipes from Bangalore to Beijing*

Rosheen Kaul, *Chinese-ish: Home Cooking Not Quite Authentic 100% Delicious*

J. Kenji López-Alt, *The Wok: Recipes and Techniques*

Kevin Pang & Jeffrey Pang, *A Very Chinese Cookbook: 100 Recipes from
China & Not China (But Still Really Chinese)*

Corinne Trang, *Noodles Every Day: Delicious Asian Recipes
from Ramen to Rice Sticks*

Kelly Kwok, *The Asian Slow Cooker: Exotic Favorites for your Crockpot*

Enjoy authentic & local Chinese and Japanese Cuisine:

Sichuan Kitchen (Portland)

Li's Place (Freeport)

Norimoto Bakery (Portland)

Lily's Food Cart (Freeport)

Watami (Brunswick)

Little Tokyo (Brunswick)