

TASTE THE WORLD ~ RECIPES

Szechuan-style whole snapper with wood ear fungus

Poh Ling Yeow (Australia/Malaysia) – host of ABC TV’s “Poh’s Kitchen”

Serves 2 or 4–6 as a shared meal

INGREDIENTS

1 x 1kg whole red snapper
or any white fleshed fish, cleaned
4 cups (1 litre) peanut
or vegetable oil
2 spring onions, finely sliced
Coriander sprigs, to garnish
Steamed jasmine rice, to serve

MARINADE

1 tablespoon shaoxing rice wine
1 tablespoon finely chopped ginger
½ teaspoon salt

SAUCE

2–3 tablespoons peanut or
vegetable oil
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
2 tablespoons finely chopped ginger
3 spring onions, finely sliced on
the diagonal
2 tablespoons toban jiang
(chilli bean paste)
15g wood ear fungus, soaked in cool
water for 15 minutes, woody parts
discarded, finely shredded
1 tablespoon shaoxing rice wine
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
2 teaspoons sugar
1 tablespoon Chinese black vinegar
1 ½ cups (375ml) water
1 tablespoon cornflour

Toban jiang or chilli bean paste is one of those ingredients that magically transforms a dish. It injects a certain depth of flavour into a dish with very little effort. The combination of the salty, spicy chilli bean paste, the acidity of the black vinegar, the crunch of the wood ear fungus with that classic Chinese trinity of garlic, ginger and spring onions makes for an intriguingly delicious sauce to go with fish. If you’re still a little afraid of deep frying a whole fish, you can use fillets, using the same method.

METHOD

At two centimetre intervals, score the fish with a knife diagonally right through to the bone.

To make the marinade, mix the shaoxing, ginger and the salt. Place the fish in a dish and massage thoroughly with the marinade. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside in a cool place for 30 minutes.

To make the sauce, heat the oil in a frying pan to medium-high. Add the garlic, ginger, spring onions and sauté for a few seconds until fragrant, before adding the toban jiang. Stir-fry for a few seconds, then add the wood ear fungus, shaoxing, soy sauce, sugar and black vinegar. Cook for another few seconds, then add the water. Scoop out a couple of tablespoons of the sauce and mix with the cornflour until there are no lumps. Add the cornflour mixture to the wok and stir while bringing to the boil. Turn the heat down and season further with salt if required. Transfer the sauce to a small saucepan, cover and set aside.

To cook the fish, fill the wok with the oil and heat to medium-high. To test if the oil is ready, insert a wooden spoon or chopstick into the oil. If the oil bubbles up from the wood, it is ready. Pat the fish thoroughly dry with some paper towels, as any moisture will cause severe spitting. Hold the fish by its tail and slide in gently. If the fish isn’t completely immersed, use a Chinese cooking ladle to gently baste the fish with oil until it is cooked. It should take eight to ten minutes, but if in doubt, remove the fish from the oil, make a small incision at the thickest part of the fish and check whether the flesh resting on the bone is cooked. Drain the fish on a paper towel. Transfer the fish to a plate and sprinkle on the spring onions.

Meanwhile, reheat the sauce and immediately pour over fish. Garnish with the sprigs of coriander and serve with steamed jasmine rice.