

Chinese-Style Red-Braised Hickory Bacon

Thick-cut hickory bacon is caramelized with rock sugar, then braised Chinese-style with Shaoxing wine, aromatics, and daikon radish until tender. The braised bacon is finished in the oven for caramelized edges, then combined with mushrooms and bamboo shoots in a thickened hong shao sauce. Served with blanched bok choy and jasmine rice.

Ingredients

Hickory bacon, 1/4" thick-cut	1.5 lbs.	Star anise	2-3 pieces
Rock sugar, crushed	4 Tbsp.	Cinnamon stick, 3"	1
Vegetable oil	3 Tbsp.	Dried red chilies, whole	2-3
Shaoxing rice wine	1 1/4 cups	Straw mushrooms, canned (15 oz.) . . .	1 can
Light soy sauce	2 1/2 Tbsp.	Bamboo shoots, canned (8 oz.)	1 can
Dark soy sauce	1 1/2 Tbsp.	Daikon radish, peeled	1-1.5 lbs.
Water OR chicken stock	2 1/2 cups	Baby bok choy	1-1.5 lbs.
Ginger, sliced 1/4" thick	5 slices	Cornstarch	2 1/2 Tbsp.
Scallions, white parts	3-4	Jasmine rice, uncooked	2 cups
		Scallion greens, sliced thin	1/4 cup

Directions

Crush **rock sugar** into smaller chunks; set aside in *Small Bowl #1* — Slice **ginger** and cut 3-4 **scallion whites** into 2-3" pieces; combine in *Small Bowl #2* (aromatics) — Lightly crack 2-3 **dried chilies** with side of knife; combine with 2-3 **star anise** and 1 **cinnamon stick** in *Small Bowl #3* (whole spices) — Drain and rinse **straw mushrooms** and **bamboo shoots**; if **bamboo shoots** are whole, slice into bite-size pieces; combine in *Medium Bowl #1* (vegetables) — Peel 1-1.5 lbs. **daikon radish** and cut into 1-1 1/2" chunks; set aside in *Medium Bowl #2* (daikon) — Cut 1/4 cup **scallion greens**; set aside in *Small Bowl #4* (garnish) — Combine 2 1/2 Tbsp. **cornstarch** with 3 Tbsp. cold water in *Small Bowl #5* (slurry) — Start cooking 2 cups **jasmine rice** according to package directions

1. Cut 1.5 lbs. thick-cut **hickory bacon** into 2" lengths. Pat **bacon** pieces completely dry with paper towels. **Bacon** should feel dry to the touch with no moisture remaining.
2. In a Dutch oven over medium-low heat, add 2 Tbsp. **vegetable oil** and 4 Tbsp. crushed **rock sugar** (*Small Bowl #1*). Heat without stirring, swirling the pot occasionally, until sugar melts and turns amber brown, about 3-5 minutes. Sugar is ready when it appears

Chinese-Style Red-Braised Hickory Bacon

uniformly amber brown (like honey) and bubbles actively, with a rich caramel aroma. Watch carefully to prevent burning—if edges darken too quickly, reduce heat slightly. Continue swirling until entire surface is amber brown.

3. Carefully add **bacon** pieces to the caramelized sugar (sugar may sputter—stand back). Increase heat to medium and cook, turning pieces gently with tongs, until well-coated with caramel and lightly browned, about *3-4 minutes*. **Bacon** is ready when pieces appear evenly coated with caramel glaze, edges show light golden brown color, and caramel has adhered to the surface.
4. Add **ginger** and **scallion whites** (*Small Bowl #2*), then deglaze with $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups **Shaoxing wine**. Cook for *2 minutes*, stirring constantly to scrape up caramelized bits from bottom of pot, until liquid has reduced slightly and aromatics are fragrant. The bottom of the pot should appear clean with no stuck-on caramel remaining.
5. Add $2\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp. **light soy sauce**, $1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp. **dark soy sauce**, **star anise**, **cinnamon stick**, and **dried chilies** (*Small Bowl #3*). Add **daikon radish** chunks (*Medium Bowl #2*), then add $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups **water** or **stock**. Liquid should come about halfway up the **bacon** pieces (approximately to the midpoint of the pieces when viewed from the side). If needed, add additional **water** or **stock** to reach this level.
6. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer for *25-30 minutes*, stirring occasionally, until **bacon** is tender and **daikon radish** is soft and translucent. **Bacon** is done when pieces feel tender when pierced with a fork (fork should slide in easily), meat appears slightly shrunken from edges, and braising liquid has reduced and darkened. **Daikon radish** is done when chunks appear translucent around edges, feel tender when pierced with a fork (fork should slide in easily), and have absorbed the braising liquid color. Check liquid level at *15 minutes*; add **water** if liquid drops below halfway up the **bacon** pieces to prevent scorching. Continue simmering until pieces feel tender when pierced with a fork.
7. While **bacon** simmers, prepare **bok choy**: Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil. Halve or quarter 1-1.5 lbs. **baby bok choy** lengthwise depending on size (small heads in half, larger heads in quarters). Blanch in boiling water for *2 minutes* until bright green and tender-crisp. **Bok choy** is done when leaves appear bright green (not dull), stems feel tender-crisp when pierced with a knife (not mushy), and leaves have wilted slightly. Drain and immediately shock in ice water until completely cool, about *1 minute*. Drain again and arrange on serving platter. Set aside.
8. After *25-30 minutes*, **bacon** should be tender (pieces feel tender when pierced with a fork) and **daikon radish** should be soft and translucent. Using a slotted spoon, transfer **bacon** pieces and **daikon radish** chunks to *Large Bowl #1*, leaving braising liquid in pot. Remove and discard **ginger**, **scallion whites**, **star anise**, **cinnamon stick**, and **chilies** from liquid. Strain liquid through a fine-mesh strainer if needed to remove any remaining aromatics.
9. Preheat oven to 420°F . Place a wire rack on a rimmed baking sheet and set aside.
10. Increase heat under Dutch oven with braising liquid to medium-high. Boil uncovered, stirring occasionally, until liquid reduces slightly, about *3-5 minutes*. Liquid should appear slightly thickened but still fluid. Reserve *half* of the reduced liquid to *Medium Bowl #3* (reserved sauce) for later use.

Chinese-Style Red-Braised Hickory Bacon

11. Stir **cornstarch slurry** (*Small Bowl #5*) to recombine (cornstarch settles quickly), then slowly drizzle into remaining liquid in Dutch oven while stirring constantly with a whisk or fork. Cook for *1-2 minutes* until sauce thickens to a glossy, coating consistency. Sauce is ready when it appears glossy and smooth, coats the back of a spoon thickly (leaving a clear trail when you draw your finger through it), and has the consistency of thick gravy. If sauce becomes too thick, add a splash of **water** or **stock** and stir to thin. If too thin, mix another $\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp. **cornstarch** with 1 Tbsp. cold **water** and add gradually.
12. Arrange **bacon** pieces (*Large Bowl #1*) in a single layer on the prepared wire rack. Bake at 420°F for *5-7 minutes*, until edges are caramelized and slightly crispy. **Bacon** is done when edges appear dark golden brown and slightly crispy, surface appears glossy, and pieces feel firm but not hard when gently pressed. Set **daikon radish** chunks aside (they will be added back to the pot later).
13. While **bacon** bakes, add **straw mushrooms** and **bamboo shoots** (*Medium Bowl #1*) to the thickened sauce in the Dutch oven. Add some of the reserved sauce (*Medium Bowl #3*) so the mixture is saucy but not soupy. Heat over medium heat for *5 minutes*, stirring occasionally, until **mushrooms** and **bamboo shoots** appear heated through (steam rises from the surface) and have absorbed some of the sauce color.
14. Add the finished **bacon** pieces and **daikon radish** chunks to the pot with **mushrooms** and **bamboo shoots**. Gently stir to combine and heat through, about *1 minute*. Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.
15. To serve: Dish can be served either portioned directly, or with a bed of blanched **bok choy** and cooked **jasmine rice**. Garnish with **scallion greens** (*Small Bowl #4*). Serve immediately while warm.

Yield

- Serves 4-6 as main course
- Makes about 1.5 lbs. braised **bacon** with accompaniments

Equipment Required

- Dutch oven (5-6 quart)
- Large pot (for blanching bok choy)
- Wire rack and rimmed baking sheet
- Large slotted spoon
- Fine-mesh strainer (optional, for removing aromatics)
- Small prep bowls (5)
- Medium prep bowls (3)
- Large prep bowls (1)
- Sharp knife
- Cutting board
- Paper towels
- Ice bath (bowl with ice water)
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Whisk or fork (for slurry)
- Tongs (for turning **bacon**)
- Serving platters and bowls

Mise en Place

- Small Bowl #1 — caramelization: 4 Tbsp. crushed **rock sugar**
- Small Bowl #2 — aromatics: 5 slices **ginger**, 3-4 **scallion whites** cut into 2-3" pieces
- Small Bowl #3 — whole spices: 2-3 **star anise**, 1 **cinnamon stick**, 2-3 cracked **dried chilies**
- Small Bowl #4 — garnish: 1/4 cup sliced **scallion greens**
- Small Bowl #5 — slurry: 2 1/2 Tbsp. **cornstarch** with 3 Tbsp. cold water (stir before using)
- Medium Bowl #1 — vegetables: 1 can drained **straw mushrooms**, 1 can drained and sliced **bamboo shoots** (about 3 cups combined)
- Medium Bowl #2 — daikon: 1-1.5 lbs. peeled and cut **daikon radish** chunks (about 3-4 cups)
- Medium Bowl #3 — reserved sauce: set aside for reserved braising liquid (about 1 cup)
- Large Bowl #1 — holding: set aside for cooked **bacon** and **daikon radish** temporarily (about 3-4 cups after braising)
- Start **jasmine rice** cooking when beginning step 1 (timing should align with braising)

Ingredient Tips

- Ultra-thick **hickory bacon** (1/4") is essential — thinner bacon will dry out
- **Rock sugar** creates a cleaner, glossier finish than granulated; if unavailable, use brown sugar
- Quality **Shaoxing rice wine** should have minimal salt content (check label)
- **Dark soy sauce** provides color; don't substitute with regular soy sauce
- Canned **straw mushrooms** have better texture than fresh for braising
- Canned **bamboo shoots** work perfectly; rinse well to remove tinny flavor
- **Daikon radish** should be firm and heavy for its size; avoid spongy or hollow-feeling radishes
- **Baby bok choy** (5-6" heads) are ideal; regular bok choy works if quartered
- **Jasmine rice** absorbs sauce better than other long-grain varieties

Preparation Tips

- Pat **bacon** completely dry before caramelization to prevent splattering; any moisture will cause dangerous sputtering
- Don't stir sugar while melting — swirl pot instead to prevent crystallization; sugar should appear uniformly amber brown
- Watch caramelization carefully — amber color develops quickly and can burn; reduce heat if edges darken too fast
- Braising liquid should stay at a gentle simmer, not a rolling boil; adjust heat to maintain steady, gentle bubbles
- Check liquid level during braising; add **water** if it drops below halfway up the **bacon** to prevent scorching
- **Daikon radish** will become translucent and tender during braising; it absorbs the braising liquid beautifully and adds a sweet, mild flavor
- Reduce braising liquid only briefly before adding slurry; the thickening agent allows for shorter reduction time
- Reserve half the sauce before thickening to adjust consistency later when adding vegetables
- Arrange **bacon** in single layer on wire rack for even browning in oven; edges should crisp without burning
- Oven temperature of 420°F provides quick caramelization; watch carefully to prevent burning

Chinese-Style Red-Braised Hickory Bacon

- Add reserved sauce to vegetables as needed to achieve saucy but not soupy consistency
- Cornstarch slurry must be stirred before adding to prevent lumps; drizzle slowly while stirring constantly
- Remove whole spices before finishing to prevent biting into them; strain if needed
- Shocking **bok choy** in ice water preserves bright green color and stops cooking immediately

Make Ahead & Storage

- Complete braising up to *24 hours* ahead; refrigerate **bacon** and **daikon radish** in its liquid
- Reheat gently before reducing liquid and finishing in oven
- Do not finish in oven ahead — texture deteriorates when reheated
- Blanch **bok choy** up to *4 hours* ahead; refrigerate after shocking
- Leftover braised **bacon** and **daikon radish** keep *3-4 days* refrigerated

- Reheat leftovers gently in a covered pan over low heat, or in oven at *350°F* for *10 minutes*
- Not recommended for freezing — texture of canned vegetables suffers

Serving Suggestions

- Serve either portioned directly, or with a bed of blanched **bok choy** and **jasmine rice**
- For family-style service, present the saucy main in a large serving bowl
- Arrange blanched **bok choy** as a bed on individual plates or serving platter
- Spoon the saucy main over **rice** and **bok choy**
- Excellent as part of larger Chinese meal with 2-3 other dishes
- Pairs well with simple stir-fried greens or cucumber salad
- Garnish generously with fresh **scallion greens** for color and brightness
- Serve immediately while **bacon** is warm and edges are crispy