

Reading Cooking Itinerary

Cooking Itinerary of the Classic Chinese Dish: Mapo Tofu

In the heart of China's Sichuan province lies the secret of a fiery and flavorful dish known as Mapo Tofu. A traditional dish with roots that go back centuries, Mapo Tofu is a unique blend of soft tofu, spicy chili and bean sauce, and minced meat, usually beef or pork.

The name "Mapo" has a fascinating origin. It's derived from "Ma" which means pockmarked, and "Po" meaning old woman. According to legends, this dish was invented by an elderly woman with a pockmarked face, hence the name "Pockmarked Grandma's Tofu".

Before diving into the cooking itinerary, let's prepare the ingredients:

- Soft tofu, cut into cubes
- Minced beef or pork
- Sichuan peppercorns
- Chili bean paste (Doubanjiang)
- Green onions, finely chopped
- Garlic and ginger, minced
- Soy sauce
- Cooking oil

Step-by-Step Cooking Instructions:

Preparation: Begin by preparing the tofu. It's vital to use soft tofu and not firm, as this gives the dish its characteristic melt-in-the-mouth texture. After cutting the tofu into cubes, set it aside.

Sichuan Peppercorns: These little spices are the soul of Mapo Tofu. First, toast them in a dry pan until they release their aroma. Afterward, grind them into a powder. This will be sprinkled over the dish later.

Cooking the Meat: In a wok or a large frying pan, heat some cooking oil. Add the minced meat and stir-fry until it's browned and crumbly.

Aromatics: Push the cooked meat to one side of the wok, and in the free space, add the minced garlic and ginger. Once they're fragrant, mix them with the meat.

The Essential Sauce: Add the chili bean paste (Doubanjiang) to the wok. This paste is the heart of the dish, providing both spice and depth of flavor. Stir well to coat the meat.

Tofu Time: Gently add the tofu cubes. Stir carefully to ensure the tofu is well-coated in the sauce but remains intact.

Final Touches: Pour in some soy sauce for added depth of flavor and a sprinkle of ground Sichuan peppercorns for that unique numbing sensation. Stir gently and let it simmer for a few minutes.

Serving: Transfer your Mapo Tofu to a serving dish, garnish with chopped green onions, and serve hot with steamed rice.

The magical journey of turning simple ingredients into a flavorful masterpiece like Mapo Tofu is a testament to the richness of Chinese cuisine.

Multiple Choice Questions:

1. Where does Mapo Tofu originate?

- a. Shanghai
- b. Sichuan
- c. Beijing
- d. Guangzhou

2. What does "Mapo" stand for?

- a. Spicy Grandma
- b. Soft Tofu Lady
- c. Pockmarked Grandma
- d. Delicious Tofu

3. Which meat is traditionally used in Mapo Tofu?

- a. Chicken
- b. Fish
- c. Beef or Pork
- d. Lamb

4. Which paste provides the main spice for the dish?

- a. Soybean paste
- b. Chili bean paste
- c. Tomato paste
- d. Garlic paste

5. How should the tofu be for Mapo Tofu?

- a. Fried
- b. Soft
- c. Hard
- d. Pureed

6. What are the Sichuan peppercorns used for?

- a. Aroma
- b. Color
- c. Numbing sensation
- d. Sweetness

7. Which step comes after cooking the meat?

- a. Adding soy sauce
- b. Toasting peppercorns
- c. Adding tofu
- d. Mixing in garlic and ginger

8. Which ingredient is toasted before being ground?

- a. Chili bean paste
- b. Green onions
- c. Soy sauce
- d. Sichuan peppercorns

9. Which ingredient gives depth of flavor along with the chili bean paste?

- a. Sugar
- b. Vinegar
- c. Soy sauce
- d. Salt

10. How is Mapo Tofu best served?

- a. Cold
- b. With noodles
- c. As a dessert
- d. Hot with steamed rice

Answers and Explanation:

1. B. Sichuan

The passage mentions that Mapo Tofu is from the heart of China's Sichuan province.

2. C. Pockmarked Grandma

"Ma" means pockmarked, and "Po" means old woman.

3. C. Beef or Pork

The dish is described as having minced beef or pork.

4. B. Chili bean paste

The chili bean paste, Doubanjiang, is the heart of the dish.

5. B. Soft

Soft tofu is used for its melt-in-the-mouth texture.

6. C. Numbing sensation

Ground Sichuan peppercorns give a unique numbing sensation.

7. D. Mixing in garlic and ginger

After cooking the meat, the aromatics, garlic, and ginger are added.

8. D. Sichuan peppercorns

The peppercorns are toasted in a dry pan.

9. C. Soy sauce

Soy sauce is added for extra depth of flavor.

10. D. Hot with steamed rice

The dish is served hot and is best accompanied by steamed rice.