

Sichuan Stir-Fried Pork in Garlic Sauce

From America's Test Kitchen episode: *Asian Takeout Favorites*.

Serves 4 to 6

If Chinese black vinegar is unavailable, substitute 2 teaspoons of balsamic vinegar and 2 teaspoons of rice vinegar. If Asian broad-bean chili paste is unavailable, substitute 2 teaspoons of Asian chili-garlic paste or Sriracha sauce. Serve with steamed white rice.

INGREDIENTS

SAUCE

- 1/2** cup low-sodium chicken broth
- 2** tablespoons sugar
- 2** tablespoons soy sauce
- 4** teaspoons Chinese black vinegar
- 1** tablespoon toasted sesame oil
- 1** tablespoon Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
- 2** teaspoons ketchup
- 2** teaspoons fish sauce
- 2** teaspoons cornstarch

PORK

- 12** ounces boneless country-style pork ribs, trimmed
- 1** teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2** cup cold water
- 2** teaspoons Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
- 2** teaspoons cornstarch

STIR-FRY

- 4** garlic cloves, minced
- 2** scallions, white parts minced, green parts sliced thin
- 2** tablespoons Asian broad-bean chili paste
- 4** tablespoons vegetable oil
- 6** ounces shiitake mushrooms, stemmed and sliced thin
- 2** celery ribs, cut on bias into 1/4-inch slices

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. FOR THE SAUCE:** Whisk all ingredients together in bowl; set aside.
- 2. FOR THE PORK:** Cut pork into 2-inch lengths, then cut each length into 1/4-inch matchsticks. Combine pork with baking soda and water in bowl. Let sit at room temperature for 15 minutes.
- 3.** Rinse pork in cold water. Drain well and pat dry with paper towels. Whisk rice wine and cornstarch in bowl. Add pork and toss to coat.
- 4. FOR THE STIR-FRY:** Combine garlic, scallion whites, and chili paste in bowl.
- 5.** Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over high heat until just smoking. Add mushrooms and cook, stirring frequently, until tender, 2 to 4 minutes. Add celery and continue to cook until celery is crisp-tender, 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer vegetables to separate bowl.
- 6.** Add remaining 3 tablespoons oil to now-empty skillet and place over medium-low heat. Add garlic-scallion mixture and cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Transfer 1 tablespoon garlic-scallion oil to small bowl and set aside. Add pork to skillet and cook, stirring frequently, until no longer pink, 3 to 5 minutes. Whisk sauce mixture to recombine and add to skillet. Increase heat to high and cook, stirring constantly, until sauce is thickened and pork is cooked through, 1 to 2 minutes. Return vegetables to skillet and toss to combine. Transfer to serving platter, sprinkle with scallion greens and reserved garlic-scallion oil, and serve.

TECHNIQUE

THE OTHER MEAT TENDERIZER

Meat soaked in a solution of baking soda and water? We admit it sounds pretty unappetizing, but there's a good reason we worked this step into our recipe for Sichuan Stir-Fried Pork in Garlic Sauce: Simply put, alkaline baking soda makes the meat more tender by raising its pH. As this happens, enzymes in the meat called calpains become more active and cut the meat's muscle fibers. The tenderizing effect is twofold: First, as the meat's fibers break down, its texture softens. Second, since the meat's looser consistency retains water better, it's less likely to contract and expel moisture when heated, ensuring that the meat stays juicy throughout. The succulent results are well worth it. And don't worry; the baking soda solution gets washed off before cooking.

TECHNIQUE

PICK THE RIGHT PORK

Pork loin, the usual stir-fry choice, is lean and dry. Instead, we use boneless country-style spareribs, which are fattier (they're cut from the blade end of the loin) and more tender.

COUNTRY-STYLE RIBS

These well-marbled slabs contain flavorful dark meat.



America's Test Kitchen is a 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just

outside of Boston. It is the home of *Cook's Country* and *Cook's Illustrated* magazines and is the workday destination for more than three dozen test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand how and why they work and arrive at the best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of brands that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to *America's Test Kitchen* (www.americastestkitchen.com) on public television.