



Crispy Orange Beef

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 16: Ultimate Chinese

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Traditionally, this dish is made by frying multiple batches of lightly battered beef in about 8 cups of oil. We simplify the recipe by replacing the batter with a coating of cornstarch and freezing the dredged pieces of beef for easier handling as well as decreasing the oil to 3 cups. Our sauce uses orange pith as well as zest to add complex bitter notes. By caramelizing the orange peel before building the sauce, we mimic the flavor of the dried tangerine peels that are typically used.

Serves 4

Use a vegetable peeler on the oranges and make sure that your strips contain some pith. Do not use low-sodium soy sauce. Serve this dish with steamed rice.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2** pounds beef flap meat, trimmed
- 3** tablespoons soy sauce
- 6** tablespoons cornstarch
- 10** (3-inch) strips orange peel, sliced thin lengthwise (1/4 cup), plus 1/4 cup juice (2 oranges)
- 3** tablespoons molasses
- 2** tablespoons dry sherry
- 1** tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 1/2** teaspoons toasted sesame oil
- 3** cups vegetable oil
- 1** jalapeño chile, stemmed, seeded, and sliced thin lengthwise
- 3** garlic cloves, minced
- 2** tablespoons grated fresh ginger
- 1/2** teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2** scallions, sliced thin on bias

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Cut beef along grain into 2½- to 3-inch-wide lengths. Slice each piece against grain into ½-inch-thick slices. Cut each slice lengthwise into ½-inch-wide strips. Toss beef with 1 tablespoon soy sauce in bowl. Add cornstarch and toss until evenly coated. Spread beef in single layer on wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet. Transfer sheet to freezer until meat is very firm but not completely frozen, about 45 minutes.
2. Whisk remaining 2 tablespoons soy sauce, orange juice, molasses, sherry, vinegar, and sesame oil together in bowl.

3. Line second rimmed baking sheet with triple layer of paper towels. Heat vegetable oil in large Dutch oven over medium heat until oil registers 375 degrees. Carefully add one-third of beef and fry, stirring occasionally to keep beef from sticking together, until golden brown, about 1½ minutes. Using spider, transfer meat to paper towel-lined sheet. Return oil to 375 degrees and repeat twice more with remaining beef. After frying, reserve 2 tablespoons frying oil.

4. Heat reserved oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add orange peel and jalapeño and cook, stirring occasionally, until about half of orange peel is golden brown, 1½ to 2 minutes. Add garlic, ginger, and pepper flakes; cook, stirring frequently, until garlic is beginning to brown, about 45 seconds. Add soy sauce mixture and cook, scraping up any browned bits, until slightly thickened, about 45 seconds. Add beef and scallions and toss. Transfer to platter and serve immediately.

TECHNIQUE

TURNING ORANGE INTO TANGERINE

Traditionally, crispy orange beef is made with dried -tangerine peels, which have a pungent and complex flavor but can be tricky to find. We mimic this flavor by leaving some bitter pith on orange peel that we brown in oil.

PURPOSELY PITHY: Leaving some pith on fresh orange peel helps to mimic the flavor of dried tangerine peel.



TECHNIQUE

DEEP-FRIED DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN GREASY

The most common misconception about deep-frying battered foods is that the results are always greasy. But this doesn't have to be the case at all. When battered foods are deep-fried in hot oil, water in the batter and near the exterior of the meat turns to vapor and exits. Once the water exits, there is space for a small amount of oil to take its place. The amount of oil absorbed is directly proportional to the amount of water lost. The more water out the more oil in.

But our Crispy Orange Beef seemed to take in even less oil than we expected: When we weighed the fry oil before and after cooking, we found that the entire 1½ pounds of beef absorbed only ½ ounce, or 2 tablespoons, of oil. How was this possible? It all comes down to the meat's coating. Instead of dipping the beef in the traditional batter for this recipe—a moist mixture of egg white and cornstarch—we simply dredged it in dry cornstarch. Since cornstarch has virtually no moisture to lose on its own, this meant that all the moisture lost during frying was coming from the beef alone. (With battered beef, both the coating and the meat lose moisture.) The upshot: Less moisture was lost, so less oil was absorbed.

ONLY 2 TABLESPOONS: Our beef absorbs very little oil.



TECHNIQUE

A BETTER CUT FOR FRYING

To prevent beef from folding over on itself while frying, cut flap meat steaks into 3-inch-wide lengths, then into 1/2-inch-thick slices, and the slices into 1/2-inch-wide strips.



