

Popo's Pot Stickers

By vrunka

Food52 Editors' Comments: WHO: Vrunka is a librarian, gardener, pie enthusiast, and kitchen mischief-maker living in Portland, OR. WHAT: Her grandmother's potstickers: the gold standard of dumplings. HOW: Mix together your pork and seasonings, then work in a mixture of egg, soy sauce, sesame oil, and cornstarch. Shape into dumplings. Pan-fry. WHY WE LOVE IT: Popo has figured out a way to work an extreme amount of flavor into each dumpling; each little packet is singing with garlic, chili, ginger, and intense porkiness. We love the classic, foolproof fry/steam method used in cooking these. They freeze beautifully, so make a big batch -- and enlist the whole family to help.

My mother's mother, a feisty Chinese woman in horn-rimmed glasses and a hand-knit cardigan, lived with our family for several years during my childhood. We called her Popo -- the Cantonese name for grandmother -- and she was a legendary cook. She would cook elaborate multi-course dinners for us every night, shooing us kids out of the kitchen if we got in her way. The one time she would accept help from her grandchildren was when she embarked on her pot sticker project, a half-day affair which would take over most of the kitchen and dining room table. She would make hundreds of little pot stickers -- guo tie in Cantonese -- and pack them for freezing, for the family to eat over the next few months until we ran out and she did it all over again. During these epic days, she would sit down her small army of pot sticker stuffers and carefully demonstrate just the right amount of filling to put in and how to crimp the edges. My uncoordinated little fingers always made misshapen, overflowing dumplings, but Popo would just laugh and show me one of her impossibly perfect creations. Because we had a language barrier between us, it was always such a great opportunity to interact with her without the stress of words. And the pot stickers themselves? They continue to be the gold standard against which all other dumplings are measured. They're full of zippy flavor with tons of ginger and garlic. In fact, I credit these pot stickers with getting me over my childhood aversion to ginger. I use Sichuan peppercorns in mine just because I like the added spiciness, but Popo would just use white pepper.

Makes about 50

- 1 pound ground pork
- 2 tablespoons ginger, minced
- 1 cup cilantro, minced
- 4 to 5 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup green chives, minced (or green onions)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons ground Sichuan peppercorns (or white pepper)
- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1 package round gyoza/pot sticker wrappers

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine pork with ginger, cilantro, garlic, chives, salt, and pepper. In another bowl, whisk together egg, sesame oil, soy sauce, and cornstarch. Mix this into the pork mixture with your hands, making sure it's well combined.
2. Make sure your wrappers are completely defrosted before starting. Have a small dish of water nearby. Put one wrapper at a time on a clean working surface and place a scant teaspoon of filling in the middle. Using your fingers, dampen the edge of the wrapper and fold it into a half-moon. Push the edges together tightly; you may also decoratively crimp the edges if you like. Repeat until finished (with or without child labor!).
3. Dumplings can be fried, baked or boiled, but the traditional Cantonese method for cooking pot stickers is a hybrid of frying and steaming. Heat a large non-stick skillet on medium high and lightly coat the bottom with oil. Place about 20 or so pot stickers in a tight circle, flat side-down. Allow them to sizzle in the pan for about 1 minute then add about a half cup of water. Cover immediately, as it will splatter. Reduce heat to medium-low and cook until you can see the moisture inside the dumplings boiling, about 10 minutes. Remove lid and increase heat to medium high. Allow the water to boil off and the bottoms to brown, about 5 minutes. Gently unstick the stickers with a spatula. Invert a plate over the pan then flip the whole circle of pot stickers onto the plate, browned side-up. Popo would serve these with a simple dipping sauce of equal parts soy sauce and vinegar, but they're great plain, too.
4. You can freeze any extras before cooking them. You can use the same method to cook them from frozen, but it might take about 5 minutes longer.