

# Rice-Studded Pork Balls Are Appetizer Gems

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**E**very holiday dinner has a centerpiece, but it's often the side dishes and appetizers that are memorable.

That's particularly true in my extended Chinese American family, where potlucks are common. We may have sushi, guacamole and tortilla chips, little bagels with lox and cream cheese, hummus and pita, as well as Mom's Chinese dishes: barbecued chicken wings, lo mein, pot stickers and spring rolls.

## **EAST TO WEST**

*Joyce Jue*

Because I have a relatively small kitchen, I've evolved some firm ideas, from the host's perspective, about what these secondary dishes should — and shouldn't — involve.

For starters, they shouldn't require a lot of prepping, assembling or cooking. They should be easily transportable, arrive fully cooked, need minimal assembly, and require no more than a quick reheating — or none at all.

One of my favorite appetizers — Stuffed Pearl Balls — meets all these criteria. Small and juicy, they're little pork balls stuffed with spinach and pine nuts, then studded with pearly white sticky rice. They're easy to assemble and cook ahead, and they'll add a dramatic touch to any holiday gathering.

*Joyce Jue, who was born and raised in San Francisco's Chinatown, is the author of "Wok and Stir-Fry Cooking" and "Asian Appetizers" (Harlow & Ratner, 1991).*

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# EAST: Easy Holiday Appetizer

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## STUFFED PEARL BALLS

### INGREDIENTS:

- ☐ 1 cup glutinous rice
- ☐ 1½ pounds pork butt, finely chopped
- ☐ 1 tablespoon chopped green onion
- ☐ 1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger
- ☐ ½ teaspoon salt
- ☐ ½ teaspoon sugar *← 2 Tbl. cornstarch*
- ☐ Big pinch white pepper
- ☐ 1½ tablespoons soy sauce
- ☐ 1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
- ☐ Fresh spinach leaves, if using a bamboo steamer

### PINE NUT-SPINACH FILLING:

- ☐ ½ pound fresh spinach, blanched, squeezed dry
- ☐ 1 teaspoon dark soy sauce
- ☐ ½ teaspoon sugar
- ☐ 1 teaspoon Asian sesame oil
- ☐ 2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Rinse the rice until the water runs clear. Drain. Put rice

into a bowl and cover with cold water. Soak at least 2 hours, or preferably overnight. *cornstarch*

Combine the pork, green onion, ginger, salt, sugar, white pepper, soy sauce and sesame oil in a bowl; mix thoroughly. Set aside.

**The filling:** Coarsely chop the spinach. Place in a small bowl and add the soy sauce, sugar, sesame oil and pine nuts.

Moisten your hands with water. Take a heaping tablespoon of the meat mixture; flatten it into a disk. Place about ½ teaspoon of the filling in the middle and mold the pork around it into a well-packed ball, about 1½ inches in diameter. Repeat with remaining meat mixture and filling.

Drain rice thoroughly and transfer to a shallow dish. Roll each pork ball in the rice, then pat

gently to embed grains. Arrange balls, without crowding, in 2 heat-proof glass pie plates, or line bottom of 2 stackable bamboo steamer baskets with spinach leaves and set the balls on the leaves.

Pour boiling water into a wok until it comes about ½ inch from the bottom of the steamer rack or basket. Put the rack in the wok and place 1 pan of meatballs on it. Cover the wok and steam for 20 minutes. Steam the second plate after the first is done.

If using bamboo steamer baskets, stack them on the wok, cover, and steam for 20 minutes.

Serve hot, warm or at room temperature.

Makes 24 appetizers.

PER BALL: 80 calories, 6 g protein, 7 g carbohydrate, 4 g fat (1 g saturated), 15 mg cholesterol, 155 mg sodium, 0 g fiber.