

Taiwanese Popcorn Chicken With Fried Basil

By Sue Li

YIELD 4 to 6 servings

TIME 30 minutes, plus 1 hour marinating

This spiced fried chicken is a staple in the night markets of Taiwan. You can order the chicken in cutlet form or small bites like these, which are served in paper bags with wooden skewers. This recipe uses a few spices that cannot be skipped: five-spice powder and white pepper. The Sichuan peppercorns are a bonus, adding a little numbing tingle. If you can't find Sichuan peppercorns, use black peppercorns instead. You won't get the same tingly feeling, but the chicken will be just as good. This fried chicken recipe happens to be gluten-free thanks to the tapioca flour, which imparts the dish's signature crunch.

INGREDIENTS

1 ½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, cut into 1-inch pieces
2 tablespoons soy sauce
2 teaspoons granulated sugar
1 ½ teaspoons Chinese five-spice powder
1 teaspoon ground white pepper
4 teaspoons kosher salt
6 cups vegetable oil
1 tablespoon Sichuan peppercorns or whole black peppercorns
1 cup/115 grams tapioca flour
1 cup fresh basil leaves

PREPARATION

Step 1

In a large bowl, season chicken thighs with soy sauce, sugar, five-spice powder, white pepper and 2 teaspoons salt. Set aside to marinate about 1 hour at room temperature, or refrigerate it overnight.

Step 2

When ready to cook, fit a medium pot with a cooking thermometer and heat vegetable oil over medium to 350 degrees. Coarsely grind the peppercorns in a spice grinder or mortar and pestle and mix with the remaining 2 teaspoons kosher salt. Set aside.

Step 3

Wet your hands and toss marinated chicken with tapioca flour and about 1 tablespoon water until the tapioca flour looks like small beads and clings to the chicken. (Adding a little moisture to your chicken helps the tapioca flour form small beads that will also stick to the chicken and give it a very crunchy crust.)

Step 4

Working in batches, add the battered chicken to the hot oil and fry until golden brown and crisp, 5 to 7 minutes. With a slotted spoon or spider, transfer fried chicken to a paper towel-lined plate and season each batch with peppercorn mixture.

Step 5

Fry basil leaves until translucent and crisp, 1 to 2 minutes, then scatter over the fried chicken. Serve with leftover peppercorn mixture for sprinkling to taste.