

Stir Fry

The West has taken to Asian cooking in a big way, with many people choosing to eat at Asian restaurants or to cook Chinese, Thai and Malaysian recipes at home. The stir fry is a technique that involves the use of a wok. It's a term normally used in Britain and has become as traditional there as fish and chips. It produces dishes quickly and they are very tasty if prepared correctly. They're healthy too, as long as one uses just a little vegetable or corn oil.

In addition to China, the wok is a traditional cooking implement in countries such as Malaysia, India, the Philippines and Indonesia. The Western equivalent is usually smaller and not as easy to stir and toss in, which is the basis for the technique. The Chinese domestic cook will cook on a much higher flame and will have a round bottomed wok as opposed to the flat bottomed that has been adapted for Western kitchens. There are several different materials to choose from, including cast iron, stainless steel, aluminum and carbon steel. Western kitchens very often contain a non-stick Teflon coated wok, which is not as well suited to cooking at high temperatures. The wok should be cleaned immediately after the stir fry is cooked, taking care to remove food residue and to oil it.

The idea behind traditional wok cooking is to cook a balanced blend of ingredients. After a little oil is put in to the hot wok, seasoning is added and this is often garlic and ginger. Meat must be seared quickly to capture the flavor, followed by vegetables and rice or noodles. Liquid can then be introduced, such as soy sauce, wine or vinegar. Other ingredients can be mixed in toward the end of cooking, such as cornstarch, sugar or salt. Fish and vegetarian dishes are also suitable for a stir fry. Vegetables should be in thin strips and cooked quickly to give a crispy texture and to keep their flavor.

Rice or egg noodles are the usual accompaniment to a stir fry meal. Mushroom or egg fried rice are tasty variations. Sauces help the flavor along and the most popular are curry, chili and sweet and sour sauces. Prawns in chili sauce are delicious. Stir fried vegetables can include pak choi, broccoli, onion, peppers and aubergines. Meat dishes can be combined with cashew nuts and lychees go well in sweet and sour dishes.