

CHRYSANTHEMUM AND TOFU SALAD - *Ma Lan Tou*

SERVES 6

- ¼ cup light soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon rice vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 teaspoon ground white pepper
- ¼ cup Asian sesame oil
- 1 bunch chrysanthemum leaves, thick stems discarded, leaves finely chopped (about 2 cups)
- ½ bunch fresh cilantro, stems discarded and leaves coarsely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 scallions (green and white parts), finely chopped
- 1 pound firm tofu

Not to be confused with the Sichuanese dish *ma po tofu*, *ma lan tou* is a refreshing and easy-to-prepare cold salad that is frequently served as part of a selection of small plates at the start of a Shanghainese feast. Along with crumbled firm tofu, chrysanthemum leaves (known as *shungiku* leaves in Japanese, or *tong ho* in Cantonese) are the co-star of the dish. They impart a fragrant and mildly grassy note to this herbaceous salad, and are easily found in Asian groceries (particularly when in season, from spring to autumn). Excellent raw, young chrysanthemum greens are also a great addition to soups and the Japanese hot pot, *shabu shabu*.

Whisk the soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, sea salt, white pepper, and sesame oil together in a small bowl.

Combine the chrysanthemum leaves, cilantro, and scallions in a large bowl.

In another large bowl, crumble the tofu with your hands. Add the salad mixture to the tofu and toss to combine. Then add the dressing, toss, and let the salad marinate for about 15 minutes in the refrigerator to let the flavors mingle. Do not leave the dressed salad for more than an hour, or the greens will start to wilt. Serve the salad chilled.

TIP: This dish is for cilantro lovers. If you don't fall into that category, feel free to substitute flat-leaf parsley for the cilantro.

SWEET STICKY RICE BALLS IN SOUP - Yin-Yang Tong Yuan

SERVES 4 TO 6

- 6 ounces (1 cup) semisweet chocolate chips
- 1/3 cup heavy cream
- 3 tablespoons black sesame seeds
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 cups sweet glutinous rice flour
- ¼ cup rice flour
- ¼ cup rock sugar

Tong yuan, sweet stuffed rice balls, is a popular dish during holidays such as the Lantern Festival, when round, moon-shaped foods are eaten for auspiciousness, and at weddings and other celebrations. After all, yuan is a homophone for the Chinese word for “reunion,” symbolizing harmony and togetherness. When offered as a last course, these rice balls are frequently served in a sweet, clear soup. Traditional Chinese tong yuan are typically filled with ground black sesame, but at a recent LUCKYRICE wedding banquet at Shun Lee Palace in Manhattan, chef Susur Lee experimented with adding chocolate ganache to the balls instead, for yin and yang. This East-meets-West pairing is inspired by those delicious dumplings.

Put the chocolate chips in a mixing bowl. Heat the cream in a small saucepan until it is almost at a boil, and then pour it over the chocolate chips. Whisk together until the chocolate has melted and the mixture is smooth and glossy. Set aside for a few minutes to cool and firm up.

Using a mortar and pestle, grind the sesame seeds to a paste; you should have about 2 tablespoons. Heat the coconut oil in a small saucepan over low heat. Mix in the granulated sugar and ground sesame seeds until they are well combined. Cover and chill in the freezer while you make the dough.

For the dough, mix the two rice flours together in a bowl. Add 1 cup of water and knead for about 15 minutes, or until the dough is no longer sticky. Divide the ball of dough in half. On a flour-dusted surface, divide each piece in half and shape it into a cylinder about 2 inches thick. Cut the dough into 1-inch-wide segments.

To form the rice balls, take a segment of dough and press it with your thumb to create an indentation. Place a marble-size piece of the sesame stuffing in the hollow, and close the dough around it with your fingers. Roll the dough to create a round ball, and set it aside on a flour-dusted surface. Repeat until you have used half of the dough. Follow the same procedure with the chocolate mixture for the second half of the dough.

When you are ready to cook the rice balls, fill a large pot with water and bring it to a gentle boil (a furious boil will break open the rice balls). Immerse the rice balls in the water, and cook until they expand slightly and are almost translucent, about 15 minutes. Stir occasionally to keep the rice balls from sticking to the bottom of the pot.

Meanwhile, bring 6 cups of water to a gentle boil in a medium pot. Add the rock sugar and cook over medium heat until the liquid starts to simmer. You want to serve this dish hot, so hold the liquid at a simmer until the rice balls are ready to serve. To serve, add rice balls (2 chocolate and 2 sesame, or more if desired) to each bowl and fill with the sweet soup.

TIP: Uncooked rice balls can be covered with plastic wrap and frozen for up to a month or refrigerated for up to a week for a later use.

WHOLE STEAMED FISH

SERVES 4 AS PART OF A LARGER MEAL

1 1½-pound whole fish (such as sea bass or red snapper), cleaned and scaled
Kosher salt

2 to 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 scallions (green and white parts), thinly sliced
1 1-inch-knob fresh ginger, julienned
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon Shaoxing rice wine
Fresh cilantro leaves, for garnish

For the Chinese, as in many other cultures, fish plays a large role in festive celebrations. The Chinese word for fish (*yu*) is a homophone for the Chinese equivalents to “wish” and “abundance”—so serving fish symbolizes a wish for prosperity and abundance. Carp, in particular, is an important figure in Chinese mythology; legend has it that a carp could leap the falls of the Yellow River at Dragon Gate and be transformed into a mighty dragon. At banquets, fish is served whole—with both the head and the tail attached (and the head pointed toward the guest of honor)—thus connoting a good beginning and ending for the coming year. When a fish is served at a banquet, you know the meal is about to end, as it’s typically the last main dish served before the rice dish and dessert.

Rinse the fish and pat it dry. Put the fish on a heatproof plate. Set a steamer basket (can be bamboo, aluminum, or even a plate placed in a larger pot) over a pan of boiling water, and set the plate in the steamer. Sprinkle the kosher salt lightly over the fish. Cover the steamer or pot and cook for 10 to 12 minutes, until the fish is cooked through and the flesh flakes easily when pierced with the tip of a knife.

A few moments before the fish has finished cooking, heat the vegetable oil in a small saucepan over medium heat until it is hot but not smoking. As soon as the fish is done, drain off any cooking liquid from the plate, and sprinkle the scallions and ginger over the fish. Immediately pour the hot oil over the top; it will sizzle and slightly wilt the scallions.

Combine the soy sauce and rice wine in a small bowl, and drizzle the mixture over the fish. Garnish with cilantro leaves and serve immediately.

TIP: Even though whole fish is must-have banquet fare, it is also everyday fare and simple to steam it at home. The key is to avoid overcooking it. Here the hot oil mixed with soy sauce is poured over the steamed fish to “cook” the garnish.

SIGNATURE YEAR OF THE FIRE MONKEY COCKTAIL FOR 2016



Silk Journey

2oz Bombay Sapphire East Gin

0.75oz Fresh Lime juice

0.5oz Pomegranate syrup

2oz Oolong and mandarin tea

Shaken and served long over ice and topped with Ginger beer.

Garnish with large orange zest and potentially either candied ginger or pomegranate seeds.

