



麻婆豆腐

Old Pockmarked Granny's Tofu

Ingredients

1 cake firm tofu (bean curd)	2 Tbsp. (30 ml.) cooking oil
3-4 cloves garlic	2-3 hot whole chili peppers (dried)
1 scallion (spring onion), or a small bunch of cilantro (coriander) or parsley for garnish	½ tsp. (1.5 g.) black pepper
1 tsp. (6 g.) cornstarch	1 Tbsp. (15 ml.) sesame oil
2 tsp. (10 ml.) cold water	1 tsp. (4 g.) sugar
	2 Tbsp. (30 ml.) soy sauce

In China, this recipe calls for chilies and black pepper, but if you prefer things hotter, use whatever type of pepper you like.

Slice the tofu into cubes about one inch (2.5 cm.) on all sides. Crush the garlic and cut the scallion (or cilantro or parsley) into small pieces. Mix the cornstarch and water to form a paste, removing any lumps. Then heat the wok and add the cooking oil. When it begins to smoke, add the garlic and the whole chili peppers. (Cutting them up will make the dish considerably spicier). Fry briefly for about 10 seconds and then add the sugar and soy sauce. Fry for another 10 seconds and add the tofu.

Make sure the tofu is coated with the mixture, and then let it sit over a medium flame for 2-3 minutes until it is heated through. Do not move it excessively. Add the black pepper, sesame oil and cornstarch paste and mix well. Remove from the wok, garnish and serve.

Note: Adding ground pork to this dish makes it particularly flavorful. Use about 1/8 lb. of ground pork and stir-fry it with the garlic and chili peppers.

Signs of the Times

陳麻婆豆腐

"Old Pockmarked Granny Chen's Bean Curd."

For more than a century, a sign hung over the entrance of a Beijing restaurant called "Old Pockmarked Granny Chen's Bean Curd Restaurant." In 1966, however, some of the establishment's employees argued that because Granny Chen had been a capitalist, a socialist enterprise should not use her name.

Nobody dared argue, so they pulled the sign down and hacked it to pieces with cleavers. To avoid any vestiges of capitalism, they then changed the name of the signature dish to "numbing and spicy bean curd," which sounded quite close to the original name in Chinese. After the Cultural Revolution, however, the names of both the restaurant and its most famous dish were restored, and the establishment still does business in Beijing's western district today.