

## Ken's Year of the Snake 2025 Chinese New Year recipes

### Steamed fish Cantonese Style

Fish was a must-have for our Chinese New Year dinner. Why? Because in Chinese, the word for "fish" (yú) sounds like "surplus" – a symbol of abundance. Steaming fish is a great southern Chinese tradition and it is my favourite method of cooking fish as it preserves the purest taste of the fish. Because it is such a gentle cooking technique, nothing masks the fresh taste of the fish, which remains moist and tender at the same time, and you can savour the combination of the other ingredients. Always ask your fishmonger for the freshest possible fish.

#### Serves 4

450 g (1 lb)	firm white fish fillets, such as cod or sole or salmon fillets, or a whole fish such as sole or turbot
1 teaspoon	coarse sea salt or plain salt
1½ tablespoons	fresh ginger, finely shredded

#### Garnish

3 tablespoons	spring onions, finely shredded
1 tablespoon	light soy sauce
2 teaspoons	dark soy sauce
1 tablespoon	groundnut or vegetable oil
2 teaspoons	sesame oil
Fresh coriander sprigs	

If you are using a whole fish, remove the gills. Pat the fish or fish fillets dry with kitchen paper. Rub with the salt on both sides, and then set aside for 30 minutes. This helps the flesh to firm up and draws out any excess moisture.

Next set up a steamer or put a rack into a wok or deep pan and fill it with 5 cm (2 inches) of water. Bring the water to the boil over a high heat. Put the fish on a heat proof plate and scatter the ginger evenly over the top. Put the plate of fish into the steamer or onto the rack. Cover the pan tightly and gently steam the fish until it is just cooked. Flat fish will take about 5 minutes to cook. Thicker fish or fillets such as sea bass will take 12-14 minutes.

Remove the plate of cooked fish and sprinkle on the spring onions and light and dark soy sauces. Heat the two oils together in a small saucepan. When they are hot and smoking pour the hot oil on top of the fish, garnish with the coriander sprigs. Serve at once.

## Lionhead Pork Meatball Casserole

Lion's head meatballs is a dish that symbolizes family unity so it is a must for Chinese New Year. This dish has a fanciful name and is very popular in eastern as well as other parts of China. The meatballs are said to resemble a lion's head and the cabbage leaves its mane. It is a hearty and delicious dish. The secret of its distinctive texture may be found in the combination of cold water and egg white with fatty minced pork, the result being a light and fluffy meatball. In China, the mixing is done by hand with the cook throwing the meat against the side of a bowl to tenderize and fluff the meat. This dish can be prepared ahead of time and reheated so perfect for a New Year's dinner.

### Serves 4

450 g (1 lb)	Chinese cabbage (Chinese leaves), stalks separated and cut into
5 cm (2 in) strips	
175 g (6 oz)	fresh or tinned water chestnuts, peeled if fresh, coarsely
chopped	
450 g (1 lb)	fatty minced pork
1	egg white
4 tablespoons	cold water
2 tablespoons	light soy sauce
1 tablespoon	dark soy sauce
2 tablespoons	Shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry
1½ tablespoons	sugar
2 teaspoons	salt
½ teaspoon	freshly ground black pepper
	cornflour, for dusting
3-4 tablespoons	groundnut or vegetable oil
2 teaspoons	groundnut or vegetable oil
4	garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
450 ml (15 fl oz)	Chicken Stock

Prepare the Chinese leaves and water chestnuts. Mix pork with the egg white and cold water by hand. The mixture should be light and fluffy. Do not use a blender as it would make the mixture too dense. Then add the water chestnuts, soy sauces, Shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry, sugar, salt and pepper and mix for another 30 seconds.

Divide the mixture into six equal parts and roll each part into a large meatball. Dust the each meatball with cornflour. Heat a wok until over high heat until it is hot. Add the oil, and when it is very hot and slightly smoking, add the meatballs, turn the heat down and slowly brown the meatballs. Remove the meatballs and drain on kitchen paper.

Clean the wok and re-heat it over high heat until it is hot. Then add the 2 teaspoons oil, and when it is very hot and slightly smoking, add the garlic cloves and stir-fry for 10 seconds. Then add the Chinese leaves and stir-fry for 20 seconds. Then add the chicken stock and continue to cook for 2 minutes until the leaves are soft. Transfer the mixture to a heavy casserole. Lay the meatballs on top of the leaves, bring the mixture to a boil, then turn the heat to very low, cover and simmer on low heat for 1½ hours.

Arrange the cabbage (Chinese leaves) on a platter, lay the meatballs on top, pour the sauce over the dish and serve at once.

### **Lettuce with Oyster Sauce**

Vegetables at Chinese New Year symbolizes spring and wealth Here is lettuce prepared in a very familiar Chinese way -- blanched and served with oyster sauce. My mum often made it for Chinese New Year because it was simple, quickly prepared and tasty.

#### **Serves 2-4**

750 g (1½ lb)	Iceberg or Cos lettuce
3 tablespoons	oyster sauce
1 tablespoon	groundnut or vegetable oil

Separate the lettuce leaves and blanch them in a pot of boiling, salted water for about 30 seconds, or until they have wilted slightly. Remove them and drain well. Mix the oyster sauce with the oil. Arrange the lettuce leaves on a serving dish, pour the oyster sauce mixture over it, and serve it immediately.

### **Spicy Sichuan Noodles**

Noodles are a food that symbolizes happiness and longevity so therefore a must at any Chinese New Year table. So here is a typical Sichuan dish. Although it is spicy and pungent with aromatics, it is nevertheless quite popular throughout China, especially in the North. Such noodle dishes -- *xiao chi*, or 'small eats' -- are found in

hole-in-the-wall restaurants, food stalls, and other commercial spots offering snacks. There are many versions of the dish and they are all easy to make, tasty, and quite filling. This is my version of this delightful noodle dish.

#### Serves 4

225 g (8 oz)	minced fatty pork
1 tablespoon	dark soy sauce
2 teaspoons	Shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry
1 teaspoon	salt
½ teaspoon	freshly ground black pepper
450 g (1 lb)	fresh or dried Chinese egg noodles
2 tablespoons	groundnut or vegetable oil
2 tablespoons	garlic, finely chopped
2 tablespoons	ginger, finely chopped
5 tablespoons	spring onions, finely chopped
2 tablespoons	sesame paste or peanut butter
2 tablespoons	dark soy sauce
2 teaspoons	light soy sauce
2 teaspoons	chilli bean sauce
2 tablespoons	chilli oil
1 teaspoon	salt
1 teaspoon	freshly ground black pepper
250 ml (8 fl oz)	Chicken Stock

#### Garnish

2 teaspoons Sichuan peppercorns, roasted and ground

Combine the pork, soy sauce, rice wine, salt and pepper in a bowl and mix well. Allow it to marinate for 10 minutes.

If you are using fresh noodles, blanch them first by boiling them for 3-5 minutes in a pot of boiling water. If you are using dried noodles, cook them in boiling water for 4 or 5 minutes. Plunge them in cold water, drain them thoroughly, toss them in the sesame oil and put them aside until you are ready to use them. They can be kept in this state, if tightly covered with cling film, for up to 2 hours in the refrigerator.

Heat a wok or large frying-pan over high heat until it is hot. Add the oil, and when it is very hot and slightly smoking, add the garlic, ginger and spring onions. Stir-fry for 30 seconds. Then add the pork and continue to stir-fry until the pork loses its pink colour. Add the rest of the ingredients except the Sichuan peppercorn and cook for 2 minutes.

Now add the noodles, mixing well. Turn to onto a serving platter, garnish with the peppercorns and serve once.