

# Chinese Home Cooking (for Vegetable-lovers)

AN INTRODUCTION TO SIMPLE & VERSATILE METHODS  
– WITH RECIPES ADAPTED FROM “EVERY GRAIN OF RICE” BY  
FUCHSIA DUNLOP

SHARON SHEN

Cold appetizers, rather than the deep-fried tidbits typical of Chinese restaurants in the West, open the meal in many parts of China. Many cold dishes, like the two introduced here, are extremely easy to make and can be made in advance, so the cook can concentrate at the last minutes, on the hot dishes that must be served fresh from the wok.

## Silken tofu with avocado

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*Tofu or bean-based product is one of the most beloved sources of protein for many vegetarians. In this collection, I purposefully introduce a wide variety of bean-based foods, among which, silken tofu is easily the most delicate one. Its smooth and indeed silken texture is perfectly complemented by the buttery avocado in this dish. Don't even think of using an unripe avocado!*



### **Ingredients:**

7 oz	Silken tofu
2 tbsp	Light soy sauce diluted with 1 tbsp water
½ tsp	Sesame oil
1/2	Perfectly ripe avocado, sliced.

### **Directions:**

Turn the block of silken tofu out on to a serving dish. Cut the block into 1/8-3/8 in slices. Then push down gently so the slices lean towards one end of the dish.

Pour over the diluted soy sauce and sesame oil. Top with the avocado and serve immediately.

## Smoke Tofu w/ Celery & Peanuts

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*This appetizer combines moist, crunchy, and crisp mouthfeel in one bite and invites a good appetite with a spicy kick — a perfect dinner starter.*



### **Ingredients:**

3 ½ oz Smoked or spiced firm tofu(a.k.a. dry tofu)  
3 Celery sticks  
1 oz Fried or roasted peanuts (see below)  
1 ½ Chili oil with ½ tsp. of its sediment, to taste  
Good pinch of sugar  
Salt, to taste

### **Directions:**

Cut the tofu into 3/8 in cubes. De-string the celery sticks, cut them lengthways into 3/8 in strips, then into small pieces to match the tofu.

Bring some water to a boil in a saucepan (or for speed in a kettle first then transfer to a saucepan), add the celery and blanch for 30-60 seconds; it should remain a little crunchy.

Remove to a colander and cool immediately under the cold tap, then shake dry.

Combine all the ingredients in a bowl and mix well. Serve.

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### **To make Roasted peanuts:**

Heat an oven to 250F. place the raw nuts on an oven tray and roast for 15-20 minutes. Until fragrant and very slightly golden. Do keep an eye on the them, as they are easily burned.

When done, remove them from the oven and tip on to a plate to cool down. Rub the cooled nuts between your fingertips to loosen the skins. Then stand in the garden or on a balcony and shake the nuts as you blow over them: the skins will blow away.

Roasted peanuts should be stored in an airtight jar if you don't intend to eat them immediately. They are most delicious when freshly roasted.

### **Variation:**

For a simpler version, use only spiced firm tofu, combined with 2 tbsp finely sliced spring onion greens. use 1 tsp sesame seeds (toasted in a dry wok or frying pan until fragrant and starting to turn golden) instead of roasted peanuts.

For seasonings: ½ tsp sugar, 2 tbsp chili oil, ½ tsp sesame oil and salt to taste.

The same seasonings can be used to dress tofu "bamboo" or bean curd. You may also add crushed garlic or chopped cilantro to the sauce.

The Oil-sizzling method is used very widely in Cantonese cooking which emphasizes the natural flavor of good-quality ingredients. Regarded as one of the finest Chinese cooking methods, oil-sizzling adds a sublime edge of flavor to good-quality ingredients, while allowing their natural flavors to shine through.

## Blanched Chinese Broccoli w/ Sizzling Oil

*Chinese Broccoli has thick stalks and hardy leaves, not the best candidate for salad (like broccoli, string beans, and cauliflower). I like this vegetable because the stalks and leaves, if treated separately with appropriate methods, can be particularly delicate and delicious. One ingredients, two dishes. Why not! In this dish, the oil-sizzling method brings out the beautifully smooth and crisp texture from the stalks.*



### **Ingredients:**

1 bundle	Chinese Broccoli Stems	1 tsp	salt
2	Spring onions	4 tbsp	cooking oil
½ oz piece of	Ginger	2 tbsp	light soy sauce diluted with 2 tbsp hot water from the kettle
A small strip of	Red bell pepper for color(optional)		

### **Directions:**

Boil water with a Kettle.

Wash the broccoli, remove leaves (set aside for a dish another day) and keep only the stems and a few baby leaves at the top. Wash and trim the spring onions, cut into long sections, then slice lengthwise into very fine slivers. Peel the ginger and cut it, too, into very fine slivers. Do the same with bell pepper, if using.

Pour boiled water to a sauce pan, add the salt and 1 tbsp of the oil to the water, add the broccoli and blanch for 2 minute or so until it has just lost its rawness (the stems should still be a little crisp). Drain and shake dry in a colander.

Pie the broccoli neatly on a serving dish and pile the spring onion, ginger and pepper slivers on top.

Heat the remaining 3 tbsp oil over a high flame until it emits a thin smoke. Pour or ladle it carefully over the spring onions, ginger and pepper. It should sizzle dramatically.

Pour the diluted soy sauce mixture over the greens and serve.

### **Variation**

The same method can be use with many kinds of vegetables, including lettuce, choy sum, broccoli, purple-sprouting broccoli. Just adjust the blanching time according to your ingredients: you want them to be tender, but still fresh-tasting and a little crisp. A rule of thumb: hardy vegetables—2 – 3 minutes; delicate leafy vegetables – about 1 minute.

You can also use this method to prepare whole fish (e.g., steamed sea bass with Ginger & Spring Onion).

Sichuanese use a similar method to make mixing sauces that can be used to flavor a variety of ingredients. A mixing sauce is made by pouring heated oil over green onions and dry spices in a separate small bowl, then add wet source ingredients before mix the sauce in with the main ingredient. Sauces prepared this way is incredibly rich and smell heavenly.

## Bean Curd w/ Sizzling Oil Sauce



### Ingredients:

1 bag(16 oz)	Bean Curd	4-5	Dried chillies, snipped in half, seeds discarded as far as possible
½ - 1	Carrot and/or colored bell pepper for color(optional)	½-1 tsp	Whole Sichuan pepper
2	Green onion	2 tbsp	Cooking Oil
1 cup	Cilantro, cut into short sections (optional)	Wet	Ingredients for sauce:
		1-2 tsp	Chinklang vinegar
Dry ingredients	For sauce:		
half	Garlic (minced, optional)	2 tbsp	light soy sauce diluted with 1 tbsp hot water from the kettle
1-2	pinch each Ground white pepper, chili, cumin	1 tbsp	chili oil
		1 tsp	sesame oil
		1-2 drop	Sichuan pepper oil(optional)
		½ tsp	sugar
		¼ tsp	salt

### Directions:

Slice spring onion cross-section wise, set aside the green part for garnishing. Place the white part in a heat-proof bowl. Add dry ingredients.

Slice carrot and/or colored bell pepper into slivers to match the shape of bean curd, pile them over the bean curd in a serving dish. Optional: blanch bell pepper for 10'' to get rid of its raw flavor.

Heat a wok over a high flame. Pour in the cooking oil, swirl it quickly around, then add the chillies and Sichuan pepper. Stir-fry the spices until the chillies are darkening but not burned.

Pour the heated oil over the spices in the bowl, wait for a few seconds for the sizzling oil to work on the dry ingredients to bring out their fragrances and flavors. Mix in wet flavoring sauce ingredients.

Pour the mixing sauce over the bean curd, add the green part of green onion or cilantro if using, mix well, serve.

### Variation:

The same method can be use with many kinds of ingredients: blanched potato (slivered), wood ear, potato noodle, egg noodle, depending on your tolerance of spiciness, you may add or reduce the amount of dry spice ingredients. Sichuan pepper oil has a numbing effect that causes tingling sensation on your tongue. Use minimally if using.

*Traditionally, Chinese kitchens lacked ovens and all cooking was done over a stove. Roasting is not part of traditional Chinese home cooking, but I use this method regularly at home to prepare (usually hardy) vegetables. Roasted vegetables are often the only vegetables on our dinner table that my two toddlers approve. Since most western kitchens have ovens, I've included this method in this collection—it helps spread cooking over various kitchen equipment so you can prepare multiple dishes simultaneously for speedy preparation.*

## Roasted Cauliflower

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*This dish is ridiculously easy, but incredibly yummy. If I am preparing multiple dishes, I often start with this one. About half hour before the meal starts, I put the dressed Cauliflower into the oven, turn on the timer, then turn to attend other dishes.*



### **Ingredients:**

- 1 head      Cauliflower
- 2 tbsp      Extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1-2 tsp     Dry pepper (optional)
- 1-2 tsp     Italian dry herb mix(optional)

### **Directions:**

Arrange the oven rack at the top 1/3 position. Preheat oven, 450F

Wash cauliflower, cut into flowerets.

In a big mixing bowl, combine all ingredients together.

Spread cauliflower in one layer on a baking sheet. Place in oven. Roasted until golden. About 20-30 minutes. Turn in middle.

### **Variation:**

Try this method with eggplants (cut in thick stripes or 1/4" thick slices, can interlaced with slices of soft tofu when serving), broccoli, beans, asparagus, potato (cut in 1/4"-3/8" thick slices, eat with some sort of topping).

## Stir-fried Rice Noodle

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*This dish is a cheat, given that the main ingredient come in half-prepared form and easy-to-follow instructions. It is addictive too—you don't have to be a rice-eater to love this dish!*



### **Ingredients:**

2 tbsp	Vegetable oil
1 bag	Rice Noodle
1 dozen	Oyster mushroom
4-5	Baby bok choy, leaf removed from stem, cut the stem in half
2 tbsp	Light soy sauce

### **Directions:**

Heat a wok over a high flame. Pour in 1 tbsp cooking oil, swirl it quickly around, add bok choy leaves and stems. Stir fry over a high flame for a few moments until leaves are cooked by remain crisp. remove.

Add the remaining oil and heat it up, add mushroom, stir fry over a medium flame until parts turn golden,

Return bok choy and add rice noodle, stir fry briskly for a moment, then add soy sauce. Give it a couple of quick stir to evenly distribute flavor. Remove from heat. Serve.

### **Variation:**

You can add other varieties of vegetables, such as lettuce, bean sprout, and cabbage. Meat-lovers may add shrimp, slices of pork or beef, cooked separately before adding rice noodle.

## Stir-fried Chinese Cabbage

*This is my go-to leafy vegetable if I am short on time. From start to finish this dish takes about five minutes. Since I can often wash and cut cabbage during the idle time of cooking another (often main) dish, the actual time for preparing this dish can be as short as a couple of minutes—the exact time of stir-frying it on a stove.*



*Cabbage stores well too, with an average of 2-3 weeks of shelf life in the fridge. Always store one in your fridge, you'll never run out of greens on your dinner table.*

### **Ingredients:**

1/4 head	Chinese cabbage, washed, leaf torn into small pieces with hand
2 tbsp	Cooking oil
3-4 cloves	Garlic, minced (can use white part of green onion as substitute)
2-3	Whole chili, snipped in halves (optional)
1 tsp	Sichuan pepper
2 tsp	Chinklang vinegar
1 tbsp	Light soy sauce (optional)
	Salt to taste

### **Directions:**

Heat a wok over a high flame. Pour in the cooking oil, swirl it quickly around, then add garlic, chili and Sichuan pepper, if using, and garlic. Stir fry until they smell wonderfully.

Add Chinese cabbage, stir fry briskly for a moment, then add vinegar. Stir fry briskly over a high flame for a minute or so until the cabbage lost its rawness but still crisp. Add soy sauce if using and salt to taste, Give it a couple of quick stir to evenly distribute flavor. Remove from heat. Serve.

### **Variation:**

You can use this method to prepare many leafy vegetables. Adjust stir-frying time accordingly. Chinese cabbage is relatively hardy and very forgiven—even overcooked cabbage is still tasty, though the texture will be soft instead of crisp. If you are cooking more delicate leaves such as boy chum or lettuce, be sure to take them out before the whole dish becomes watery and shapeless. Waiting until the very end to add salt also helps to lock in the moisture. For delicate leafy vegetables such as spinach, sizzling oil method is recommended for easier control of cooking time.



*In Western kitchens, pan frying is often used to cook big pieces of meat (chicken breasts, steak, fish fillets). with minimal oil, this method helps retain the moisture in the food by using low heat and, preferably, a denser cooking vessel. In Chinese kitchen, this method is used to prepare a variety of vegetables as well, such as tofu, eggs, and hardy vegetables such as long string beans and winter melon.*

## Pan-fried Tofu in Oyster Sauce

*My all-time favorite, tofu is really hard to mess up, they do come in different shape, density, and flavor though. While dry, firm tofu is good for stir-frying, you do not want your ladle or spatula interfere too frequently when cooking soft tofu, unless you prefer mashed tofu. My mom has a useful saying to help you remember this: soft tofu is ticklish. Pan frying, which typically requires one turning, will be a great way to prepare soft tofu.*



### **Ingredients:**

- 1 box            Soft tofu (I like to use those marked as firm at Asian stores), cut into 3/8" thick slices
- 2 tbsp            Cooking oil
- 1                  Green onion, separate the white part and green part
- 3-4 clove        Minced garlic (optional)

For sauce:

- 1.5 tbsp        Light soy sauce
- 1 tsp            Dark soy sauce
- 1 tsp            Oyster Sauce
- 2 tsp            Corn starch
- 1.5 tbsp        Cold water

### **Directions:**

Heat a wok over a high flame. Pour in the cooking oil, swirl it quickly around, then add white part of green onion or garlic if using. Stir fry until you smell their wonderful aroma, add tofu gently and arrange in one layer.

Let tofu cook until the bottom side turned golden, turn carefully, do the same with the other side. If you prefer more softness in tofu, cook the second side less time.

Combine all mixing ingredients to make sauce, give it a quick stir before pouring over the tofu. Turn 1-2 times quickly to evenly distribute the sauce—by now tofu should be hardened and won't break as easily, still be gentle. Throw in the green part of green onion. Give it another quick turn to let the heat get rid of the rawness of green onion, quickly transfer tofu to a serving dish. Enjoy.

Note that once the starchy sauce meets heat, it will quickly thicken and start to stick to the surface of your pan, get the food out before it starts to stick and burn.

### **Variation:**

Be aware that there is oyster in the sauce, as its name indicated, which adds rich umami flavor to the dish. If you are a vegetarian, you may skip this sauce—the tofu will still be delicious. In fact, tofu will taste good even cooked with just oil and salt (added early on for the flavor to settle in, consider heat the oil using Sichuanese method—adding dry chili and Sichuan pepper). If you really want that umami effect, consider adding fried mushrooms.

## Five-spice Tofu Skin Rolls

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*I learned this dish from a friend who grew up in Singapore. The recipe was from her childhood maid who was an amazing cook. The original recipe uses ground pork as a main ingredient for filling. I adapted it into a vegetarian version by replacing the meat with pan-fried egg and noodles.*



### **Ingredients:**

#### Filling:

1-2	Pan-fried Egg (mixed well, pan fry with 1 tbsp oil)
1 small bundle	Green leek, chopped finely
1	Medium onion, chopped finely
6 oz	Chinese cabbage, chopped or sliced finely
1-2 bundle	Green bean or potato noodle, soaked in hot water
1 handful	Wood ear or water chestnuts, minced (optional for crunch)

#### Mixing Spices

	& binding agent
2	Well-beaten eggs
1 tsp	Salt
2 tsp	Sugar
1 tsp	Chicken stock base mix
1 tsp	Grinned black pepper
2 tsp	Light soy sauce
1 tsp	Dark soy sauce
1 tbsp	Vegetable oil
1 tbsp	Flour

#### Wrap:

1-2 sheet	Tofu skin (from Asian store), cut into 8" x 8" small square sheets
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### **Directions:**

In a large bowl, combine all ingredients, mix well and marinate for 30 minutes.

Wrap in tofu skin like you would do a burrito (tip: prepare a small bowl of clean cold water, wet a sheet of paper towel with the water and wipe across the tofu skin to dampen it for easy wrapping).

Steam the rolled rolls about 10 minutes.

Pan fry the steamed rolls until outside skin is crispy and golden brown (the steaming cooks the inside so you only need to make the outside crispy).

Cool and cut into bit size pieces, dribble with Asian sauce or sweet soy sauce (optional).

### **Variation:**

The steamed rolls can be frozen if you are not ready to eat them. When ready to eat, taken out from freezer and pan-fry as described above.

frozen Pot-sticks and dumplings can be pan fried with the same method. No need to thaw.

## Steamed Endive & Rice Noodle w/ Garlic

*The name of this dish is deceptive—it is the garlic, instead of the noodle or vegetable that defines the character of this dish. The noodle, however, is a perfect agent to absorb the addictive fragrance of the garlic, while the endive adds crisp mouthfeel to the dish.*



### **Ingredients:**

1-2 Endive (if not in your order, use lettuce leaves)  
1-2 bundle Fine rice noodle  
1 Whole garlic  
Salt To taste  
½ tsp Dry Chicken stock base  
3-4 tbsp Vegetable oil  
2-3 tbsp Diced color pepper(optional)

Sauce:  
2 tbsp Soy sauce  
2 tbsp Oyster sauce  
1 tbsp sugar  
½ tsp

### **Directions:**

Cook water with a kettle

Dice garlic finely, place in a colander and rinse under cold tap water .

Add oil to a wok, stir fry garlic over a high flame to remove moist, then switch to a low flame to slowly turn its color into golden. Take out and put into a small mixing bowl, add chicken stock base and salt if necessary. Save garlic oil in a spate bowl.

Soak rice noodle in boiled water, take out once it starts to turn soft, about 30 seconds. In a mixing bowl, add some garlic oil to the noodle, enough to lubricate all.

Wash and cut each endives lengthways into 6-8 pieces. Put in boiled water in a sauce pan for 6-8 seconds(optional). Arrange on a place in a flower pattern. Add golden garlic dices in between endive pieces. Add rice noodle to the center. Then put in a steamer, steam for 5 minutes.

Combine all sauce ingredients in a small bowl.

Add small amount of garlic oil (the remaining oil can be used for other dishes) to a wok, heated the oil then add the diced color pepper, stir fry for a few moments, add sauce, cook until it boils. Take out the endive and noodle, pour sauce over the noodle evenly. Serve.