

NerdGuy Cooks

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Buchman Bookworks

Ma Po Bean Curd



Start the
Chase

Miranda
Chase #9

Andrea forced herself to relax by brute force—which failed miserably. “Other than each of my flight tests, it’s the first time I’ve had an FAA official aboard.”

“Ooo! Am I scary? I always wanted to be scary, but my kids say that I’m a complete failure in that department.”

“Yes!” Andrea blurted it out. “Well, scarier than Mister Corporate Executive Number Eighty-four who is convinced of his own self worth beyond all—” She clamped her mouth shut. Another Hell-Air policy was to never trash talk any client, ever. That was not one of Mother’s policies. Raking clients’ reputations over a dish of spicy Ma Po Tofu or Dan Dan Pork Noodles at the dinner table was a favorite family pastime.

“Excellent. Will it ruin it for you if I tell you that I’m a curriculum writer for the FAA? I design and write the coursework for inspectors and air traffic controllers.”

Andrea managed to unearth a small laugh.

NOTE: Traditionally this dish has no veggies (except one lone scallion). Keep the veggies light, or they’ll bury the flavor, but I do add in some.

Total time: 10-15 minutes (start rice or rice noodles early)

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 16 oz. firm bean curd (some prefer soft, but it turns to mush too easily for me), cut into generous 1/2” cubes

Sauce (all mixed together and set aside)

- 1 c. chicken broth or bouillon
- 3 Tbsp. soy sauce (we use low-sodium, easier to control flavor)
- 1 Tbsp. dry sherry
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 1/2 tsp. salt (just a pinch if using full-power soy sauce)

For the Sauté

- Optional veggies (1-2 c. total): 1/2 sm. red onion sliced thin, chopped cabbage, sm. broccoli florets, etc.
- 2 oz. ground pork (Yes, it really is needed. Ground beef works as well. Can substitute Shitake mushrooms for veggie option [presoak and sauté with veggies].)
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 tsp. chili paste (I especially like Black Bean Garlic Paste here.)

To Finish

- 1-1/2 Tbsp. cornstarch in small bowl
- 1 – 2 scallion, chopped
- 1/2 tsp. sesame oil
- 1 tsp. hot chili oil (Sriracha works here if you have nothing else.)
- 1/2 – 3/4 tsp. ground Szechuan brown pepper (Surprisingly crucial. In a pinch, substitute 1/2 tsp. black pepper with 1/8 tsp. white pepper.)

Instructions

Warning: Like most Chinese cooking, the effort is in the prep. The cooking goes very fast.

1. Heat pan (wok) on medium high with a good drizzle of vegetable oil (not olive oil).
2. Sauté veggies 2-3 minutes until edges soften.
3. Scrape to one side, add meat. Work with spoon or spatula to cook into crumbles.
4. As soon as the meat is mostly cooked, scrape a hole and toss in the garlic and chili paste. Keep mixing quickly for 30 seconds until aromatic. (don't overcook)
5. Pour in sauce. Mix well. Add bean curd.
6. Bring to a boil, then lower heat to a fast simmer for 5 minutes.
7. Scoop several tablespoons hot cooking liquid into small bowl with cornstarch. Work until smooth. Add back into the pot. Mix well.
8. Toss in scallion.
9. It will thicken quickly (1-2 minutes). Stir constantly.
10. Once it makes a nice thick sauce, remove from heat, stir in sesame oil and hot chili oil. Sprinkle with brown pepper. One last stir to mix.
11. Serve over rice or rice noodles. Keep the hot chili oil on the table for those with 3-star and hotter taste buds.



It's not very colorful but...Oh, so good!