

Wontons with red chilli oil

I adore Cantonese wontons in soups, but every once in a while I get a craving for Sichuan's spicy wontons. Called *hong you chao shou* in Mandarin, these delicious dumplings are pretty common in Sichuan province but less so in Hong Kong. They're a cinch to make and the accompanying hot sauce with toasty chilli takes these morsels to another level.

Serves 4-6

360 g (12¾ oz) packet square wonton wrappers
2 spring onions (scallions), thinly sliced

FILLING

300 g (10½ oz) minced (ground) pork with 30% fat content
2 tablespoons finely chopped ginger
1 tablespoon light soy sauce
½ teaspoon sugar
2 teaspoons Shaoxing rice wine
1 egg, beaten
3 tablespoons chicken stock

RED CHILLI OIL

1 tablespoon white sesame seeds, roasted
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1 tablespoon finely chopped ginger
3 tablespoons light soy sauce
1 teaspoon Sichuan peppercorns
185 ml (6 fl oz/¾ cup) chilli oil with sediment (see page 244)
1 tablespoon sesame oil
Pinch of sugar, or to taste

To make the filling, put all the ingredients except the chicken stock in a bowl and mix well. Add the stock a tablespoon at a time, stirring in a circular motion until incorporated before adding the next spoonful.

Fill a small bowl with water. Working with one wonton wrapper at a time, place a teaspoonful of pork filling in the centre of the wrapper. Dip your finger in the water and run it around the edges of the wrapper. Fold over to form a triangle, then dab one of the lower corners with water and fold over to the other lower corner and pinch with your thumb and index finger to seal. Repeat until all the filling is used. Makes 30–40 wontons.

Mix together all the red chilli oil ingredients in a bowl.

Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil and cook the wontons in batches until they float to the surface. Remove with a slotted spoon. Divide the wontons among serving bowls, drizzle with chilli oil and garnish with spring onions.

Chilli oil

Chilli oil is an essential ingredient in many Chinese regional cooking styles.

One of the most popular brands in Hong Kong is Koon Yick Wah Kee; it's readily available in most Asian shops, although I prefer to make my own. Chilli oil is made with dried chillies and it's not difficult to prepare, but dried chillies burn easily so never cook them over high heat – once they're burnt, you have to start all over again. Just be patient and you'll be amply rewarded. I've used Sichuan dried chillies for this recipe. If you prefer a hotter chilli oil, combine them with dried bird's eye chillies or dried habaneros. Make sure you have your windows open or rangehood on, or the chilli fumes will make you cough.

100 g (3½ oz) dried red chillies (preferably Sichuan)

500 ml (17 fl oz/2 cups) sunflower oil

Snip the stems off the chillies and discard any exposed seeds. Heat a wok over low heat, add 1 teaspoon of the oil and the chillies. Stir-fry for 5–7 minutes until the chillies are fragrant and a shade darker. Transfer the chillies to a plate and leave to cool. Using a mortar and pestle, pound the chillies into coarse flakes (this can also be done in a food processor) and transfer to a heatproof bowl.

Heat the remaining oil in a wok until it begins to smoke, then immediately turn off the heat and leave to cool for 5 minutes. Pour the oil over the chilli flakes and stir carefully so it doesn't splash. Leave to cool for at least 2 hours, or preferably overnight. Strain the oil through a fine sieve into an airtight container. Chilli oil will keep for up to 2 months in the refrigerator.

Hong Kong Food City by Tony Tan (Murdoch Books, £20). Photography by Greg Elms.