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BEEF WITH LEEKS

Leeks, larger and meatier and sweeter than scallions, are used a great deal in the northern parts of China. Traditionally they are combined raw with this highly seasoned meat, serving as a cushion to be tossed at table before being eaten. Finding them too coarse, I modify by stir-frying them with a little salt and sugar, which makes them brighter in color and silkier in texture. Served around the reddish-colored meat, they make a lovely presentation. *This recipe serves 3 or 4 as a main course with rice.*

1 pound flank steak, shredded

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon sugar

Marinade:

1 tablespoon light soy sauce

Seasonings:

1 tablespoon cornstarch dissolved
in 1 1/2 tablespoons water

2 tablespoons sweet bean paste
1 tablespoon dry sherry

1 tablespoon oil

2 teaspoons light soy sauce

2 cups oil

2 teaspoons sugar

1 pound leeks, shredded, rinsed

1 teaspoon sesame oil

Preparations and oil-showering

Cut meat with the grain into 2-inch strips. Then cut crosswise against the grain into 1/8-inch slices, then stack and shred. Toss the shreds of meat in a mixing bowl, separating any that stick. Season them with the soy sauce, add the dissolved cornstarch and oil, and stir until smoothly coated. Let the meat marinate in the refrigerator for 30 minutes or longer.

Leeks are gritty and should be washed thoroughly, but to make shredding easier, cut before washing. Trim off the roots and all but 1 inch of the green, rinse off any sand, and cut them into thin diagonal slices. Flatten the slices into overlapping stacks, and cut them into narrow shreds. Rinse them thoroughly in a colander, then drain.

Mix the seasoning ingredients in a small bowl until smooth. Have a strainer and empty pot within reach.

Heat a wok or large, heavy skillet over high heat until very hot; add 2 cups oil and heat until a piece of leek foams snappily, about 350 degrees. Add the meat and stir in fast circular motions for about 10 seconds to separate the shreds. Hold the strainer over the pan and rapidly spoon the meat into it to drain. The meat will appear red at first, but it continues to cook with the showerings of hot oil as you spoon all the meat in. Drain well

and put aside on a dish. Pour out all the oil into the empty pot. When cool, strain, and rebottle for general cooking.

Stir-frying

Wipe the pan, return 2 tablespoons oil, and set it over high heat until hot. Scatter in the leeks, sprinkle in the salt, and stir in fast tossing and flipping motions to sear them for 1 minute. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sugar and stir briskly for another minute to season them evenly. Pour them into a dish.

Add 1 tablespoon oil to the pan; lower the heat to medium. Scrape in the seasoning ingredients with a spoon and stir them in fast circular motions for a second or so. Return the meat, turn heat high, and stir-fry in fast sweeping motions for 20 to 30 seconds to coat the meat with the sauce evenly. Pour into a serving dish, piling it into a nice mound. Scatter the green leeks around it and serve. Toss at table to mingle the meat and leeks before eating.