

SPICY PORK WITH PEANUTS

A hot dish of charred chili peppers, satiny meat, and crunchy peanuts, this is full of spirit and chewy goodness. The dash of vinegar in the sauce gives it a teasing aroma. It is definitely a dish to be eaten with plenty of rice and vegetables. The refreshing Sliced Zucchini and Shredded Carrots is an excellent accompaniment, since, even though also stir-fried, it may be done ahead of time for room-temperature serving. *Dainty but meaty, this recipe serves 3 or 4 as a main dish.*

1 pound boneless pork, loin or
butt, diced

Marinade:

1 tablespoon dark soy sauce
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 tablespoon oil

4 cups water
2 tablespoons oil
4 dried chili peppers
3 quarter-sized slices peeled ginger,
minced

Sauce:

1 teaspoon cornstarch
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1½ tablespoons dark soy sauce
2 teaspoons Chenkong or
red-wine vinegar
~~2 teaspoons sugar~~
~~¼ teaspoon salt~~
1 teaspoon sesame oil

1 cup salted peanuts

Preparations

Slice, shred, and finally dice the meat into ¼-inch cubes. Place the meat in a bowl, add the soy sauce, and mix well; add the cornstarch and stir until smoothly coated, then add the oil and stir in circular motions to blend well. Marinate for 30 minutes or longer in the refrigerator.

Bring 4 cups water to a rolling boil in a saucepan; give the marinated meat a few big circular stirs, then drop it into the boiling water. Stir gently to separate the pieces for about 1 minute, until it comes to a boil again. Stir and let it cook for another minute. Pour into a colander to drain. Transfer the meat, now cooked and satiny, to a dish. This may be done hours in advance. Cover and refrigerate; bring to room temperature before final cooking.

Place the chili peppers and minced ginger on a small dish. Just before cooking, mix the sauce ingredients until the cornstarch and sugar are dissolved. Any sauce involving vinegar should be done at the last moment—otherwise the piquant aroma would dissipate. Set the peanuts nearby.

Stir-frying

Heat a wok or large, heavy skillet over high heat until hot; add the oil, swirl, and turn heat to low. Toss in the chili peppers and press them in the oil, flipping back and forth, until they are darkened. (Can remove them if wished)

Scatter in the ginger and stir briskly a few times. Then turn heat high, add the meat, and stir briskly in turning and tossing motions for about 45 seconds to skid and roll the pieces in the spicy oil. Give the sauce mixture a big stir, pour over the meat, and stir in sweeping and turning motions until the sauce coats the meat evenly. Pour it into a serving dish and shower the top with the peanuts. Mingle them at the table before serving.

VARIATIONS

Velveting chicken (*page 75*) or shrimp (*page 81*) or slippery-coated beef (*page 85*) may be substituted for the pork. And, instead of peanuts, you could use cashew nuts, walnuts, or pine nuts. The hotness may be adjusted to personal preference. A good guide: 4 chili peppers are medium hot, 6 are hot, and 7 to 8 are devastating.

The texture of the meat can be varied. If you like your meat natural, marinate with the soy sauce only, and then stir-fry it in 3 tablespoons oil until the diced meat is no longer pink. Add $\frac{1}{3}$ cup meat or chicken stock and steam-cook for about 3 minutes over medium heat. Remove to a dish. Darken the chili peppers in 1 tablespoon oil, return the meat, and cook to conclusion as before. Instead of being satiny, the meat is tender but firm.