

DEEP-FRYING 老油

Similar to the common deep-frying technique in Western cooking, the Chinese deep-frying method calls for cooking food in oil that is heated to just below its smoke point. This browns the ingredient evenly without burning it, and creates a crisp texture on the outside while keeping the interior succulent and tender.

Deep-frying is the method most commonly used for frying meat or firm solid ingredients. They can be fried directly, or covered with a heavy batter, or crusted with a dry coating. The key is to quickly brown and crisp the outer layer without overcooking the inside. The optimum temperature for the oil is around 375°F. At this temperature the ingredients are sealed quickly when dropped into the oil; then the heat gradually gets transmitted and cooks the center.

Very dense ingredients such as root vegetables are commonly double-fried. For the first pass the oil is kept at a temperature of around 350°F. The ingredients are removed from the oil after they are cooked through. The oil temperature is then cranked up to about 375°F before the ingredients are returned to the oil to crisp and brown the surface.

Ingredients that are deep-fried without a coating are always marinated first. Chicken or squab, for example, would be marinated in a soy sauce, wine, and sugar mixture before frying. The soy sauce and sugar enhance the color of the meat, which will brown beautifully when fried. Coated ingredients are generally not marinated first.

Fried foods are normally served with a simple dipping sauce or spiced salt on the side. If the coating is already flavorful, the dish may simply be served as is.

CRISPY CHICKEN WITH FRIED GARLIC | 蒜香油淋雞 GUANGDONG

A favorite in many Cantonese restaurants, this chicken is full of flavor. The fried garlic and savory soy sauce contribute to the complex taste. Air-drying the chicken is the most important part in crisping the skin, so plan ahead when making this dish. | SERVES 4 OR MORE, AS A SIDE DISH

- 1 cup Shaoxing cooking wine
- 4 whole scallions
- 1 (2-inch-long) piece of fresh ginger
- 1 (3½- to 4-pound) whole chicken
- 4 quarts vegetable oil
- 1 head garlic, minced

COATING

- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- ¼ cup maltose syrup or honey
- 1 tablespoon tapioca starch

SAUCE

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon Shaoxing cooking wine
- 1 tablespoon sugar

8 cilantro sprigs

In a large stockpot, combine 5 quarts water with the wine, scallions, and ginger and bring to a boil over medium heat. Boil gently for 10 minutes.

Put the chicken into the boiling water and return the water to a boil. Immediately turn the heat off and cover the pot. Let the chicken sit in the hot water for 1 hour.

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