



NAUTILUS

*Recipe from Taylor Holliday, author of *The Mala Project*, a blog devoted to Sichuan food.*



Taste of Sichuan

If there is a single dish that most exquisitely captures Sichuan's love for the chili pepper, and perhaps its revolutionary fervor, it's *La Zi Ji*—“Spicy chicken.”

The cooking process isn't too complicated—morsels of fried chicken are stir-fried with an enormous amount of chili peppers—though the visual impact is intimidating.

But have no fear, the look is scarier than the bite. The flavor of the chili pepper is blunted by the numbing tingle induced by ground Sichuan peppers (a condiment unrelated to either chili peppers or black peppers). The ensuing taste sensation is entirely unique to Sichuan cuisine.

My favorite recipe for this dish is the one below from Taylor Holliday, author of *The Mala Project*, a blog devoted to Sichuan food. —Andrew Leonard

Chongqing Chicken With Chilies (La Zi Ji)

Ingredients

1 pound skinless chicken (dark or white), cut into 1-inch bites
1 tablespoon Shaoxing wine
1 tablespoon Chinese light soy sauce
4 tablespoons potato starch (or cornstarch)
1 tablespoon chili powder (Sichuan or, for a spicier version, cayenne)
1 tablespoon ground, roasted Sichuan pepper
1 heaping teaspoon kosher salt
4 tablespoons oil
4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon ginger, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons chili flakes (Chinese or Korean)
1 tablespoon sesame seeds
At least 3 cups, 3 ounces dried red chilies (Sichuan, Tianjin, or other medium hot chili)
1 teaspoon red Sichuan peppercorns
1 teaspoon green Sichuan peppercorns (optional)
1 teaspoon sugar
4 scallions, roughly chopped

Instructions

1. Marinate chicken pieces in Shaoxing wine and soy sauce while you prepare the other ingredients.
2. Mix potato starch, chili powder, ground Sichuan pepper, and salt in a large sealable baggie. Add the chicken pieces, leaving any accumulated juices behind. Shake the chicken pieces in the potato starch mixture until they are lightly coated.
3. Heat wok on high heat until starting to smoke and add enough canola or vegetable oil to deep-fry the chicken. If your wok or pan is large enough, you can fry it in one batch, but do not overcrowd the chicken. When oil is hot, add the chicken pieces and reduce heat to medium; the frying process should produce a medium bubble. When the chicken pieces appear to be cooked through, remove them from the oil.
4. Pour off oil, clean wok, and return to heat. When wok starts to smoke, add the 4 tablespoons oil. Heat briefly on medium heat, then add the garlic and ginger and cook until softened. Stir-fry vigorously from now on, as you don't want anything to brown. Add the chili flakes and sesame seeds, stirring until lightly toasted, then add the whole chili peppers and Sichuan peppercorns. Stir until fragrant, then add the sugar.
5. Add back the chicken along with the scallions, and stir-fry until well mixed. Plate with chili peppers prominently displayed.

ILLUSTRATION BY JACKIE FERRENTINO
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