

Jiu Hu Char Recipe (Fried Shredded Cuttlefish and Vegetables Recipe)

Ingredients:

500 g yam bean (sengkuang)
200 g belly pork
250 ml water
100 g carrot
200 g (¼) cabbage
10 g (6) dried shiitake mushrooms, soaked to soften
150 g (2) onions, peeled
3 tablespoons oil
5 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
100 g shredded, dried cuttlefish, rinsed
1 teaspoon sugar, or to taste
pinch of salt, or to taste
pinch of pepper, or to taste

Method:

Bring water to boil in a small pot and put in the meat. Boil until meat is cooked, about 5 minutes. Reserve stock, shred the meat finely and set aside. Peel yam bean and carrot, and slice as thinly as possible. Then cut, as finely as possible to resemble toothpicks (julienne). Slice cabbage and mushroom as finely as possible. Halve onion and slice finely. Heat oil in a wok over a medium heat to sauté the garlic until fragrant. Add the cuttlefish and fry until it begins to pop and smells aromatic. Stir-fry for a few minutes before adding in the onion and the rest of the vegetables. Stir-fry until the vegetables are soft, then add the stock (about a cup). Bring to a boil and simmer, covered for approximately 10 - 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. The yam bean should be transparent and soft. Season to taste with sugar, salt and pepper. Serve with sambal belachan (pls refer more Nyonya Recipes) as a dish eaten with rice, or as a starter, wrapped in Chinese lettuce leaves. Use Butterhead lettuce in place of Chinese lettuce, if preferred.

Note: The yam bean and carrot can be shredded using a medium-fine shredder, mandolin or electric food processor, but a nyonya would cut it by hand for the ideal texture and bite - finely shredded, yet crunchy (mechanical shredders often yield a mushy, pulpy mass). This is a dish that improves with keeping. It is often cooked the day before and allowed to mellow overnight in the refrigerator, or cooked in the morning to be served later in the evening. This allows the flavors of the cuttlefish to develop and infuse the dish. Each household will have a slightly different way of preparing Jiu Hu Char; some like to add a tablespoon of preserved soybean paste (tau cheo) which will give it a browner color. Some like to leave it out to mellow after cooking to develop a truly strong cuttlefish and cabbage flavor. Others prefer a fresher and crispier dish, giving it only a quick stir-fry. It is an amazingly responsive dish; its flavors can vary even though the same few basic ingredients are used. You are likely to find the dish tasting different (from simple to truly complex) from household to household.