

FAMILY RECIPES

Great Dishes From Local Chefs | By Christina Elston

HOMEMADE DUMPLINGS FOR A TASTE OF HOME



RiceBox co-owner Lydia Lee.

PHOTOS COURTESY RICEBOX

Hubband and wife Leo and Lydia Lee grew up in their families' Chinese restaurants (Lydia in Hong Kong and Leo in Mexico). Now, every day, they work to bring a bit of their childhoods to L.A. through their RiceBox Cantonese barbecue restaurant in Downtown L.A.

"RiceBox evokes feelings we had as a kid," says Leo. "It is us giving something of our childhood and our memories."

Many of the recipes are based on those Lydia's grandfather developed during his 40 years of owning a Cantonese barbecue restaurant - updated slightly. "We want to preserve what he passed down to us, but at the same time elevate it a little bit," she says.

Dumplings are a common Chinese dish, and both Lydia and Leo grew up making them at home. Lydia recalls helping her mother and aunt as early as 7 or 8 years old, first mixing the filling, then learning to create the traditional pleats that seal the dumplings. "I'm still not great at it. Leo's better, but I can make a decent one," she says. Leo started learning later and perfected his technique after working his way up from dishwasher in the family restaurant.

They both stress, however, that home cooks new to dumplings shouldn't worry about making fancy pleats. Stick to a simple half-circle that is tightly sealed all the way around, so none of the filling leaks out. Your dumplings will taste just as delicious. Leo says that if you accidentally tear a wrapper, you can just remove the filling, toss the damaged wrapper and start again with a new one. Online videos will help you learn - with practice - the pleating technique.

CHICKEN AND PORK DUMPLINGS FROM RICEBOX

Makes 10-12

- 2 ounces Napa cabbage
- 2 ounces minced chicken or pork
- 1 ounce vermicelli pasta
- ½ ounce dried shiitake mushrooms
- 1 tablespoon Chinese wine
- 1 ½ teaspoons vegetarian

- oyster sauce
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ⅛ teaspoon ground white pepper
- Store bought dumpling wrappers
- Soy sauce for serving

Making the filling:

Place the shiitake mushrooms in a bowl of water and allow to rehydrate for 1 to 2 hours. Remove and discard the stems and dice the tops. Heat

2 tablespoons of vegetable oil in a sauté pan over medium heat and sauté the mushrooms until they are golden brown. Set aside to cool.

Cut the Napa cabbage

into wedges and boil for 3 to 5 minutes, until tender. Drain and squeeze out all of the liquid, being careful to make sure the cabbage is completely dry. Dice and set aside to cool.

Cook the vermicelli in boiling water for 5 minutes, then drain and shock in ice water to stop the cooking. Roughly chop it into small pieces and set aside.

Heat 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil in a sauté pan and sauté the minced chicken or pork with a pinch of salt and pepper until it is completely cooked through.

Combine the chicken or

pork, vermicelli, cabbage and mushrooms in a large bowl. In another bowl, combine the Chinese wine, oyster sauce, soy sauce and sesame oil and whisk to incorporate. Pour the wet mixture into the chicken/pork mixture and mix with your hands to combine well. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Wrapping the dumplings:

Working with one wrapper at a time, place 1 tablespoon of filling in the center of each wrapper. Dip your finger in a cup of water and dampen half the edge of the wrapper. Gently lift half of



Dumplings are also a terrific meal for busy families. "The great thing about dumplings is that you can pre-make a lot of it," Leo says. The filling components are made ahead and chilled before mixing, and the filled dumplings can be refrigerated or even frozen for later cooking. As long as all of the filling ingredients are cooked through before you fill the dumplings, you can change the filling to suit your family's taste.

When it's time to cook, you have three options. "Pan frying gives that extra texture, that little crisp to it. But when you steam it, it really holds all the moisture inside. It adds an al dente chewiness to the skin," says Leo. However, he says boiling might be easier for first-timers. Just pop the dumplings into the water. When they float, they're done.

With a little practice, this Lee family favorite might become yours as well.

the wrapper and fold it over to create a crescent moon shape, then press to seal. Repeat until you have used up all of the filling.

If this is your first time making dumplings, make sure you get comfortable with the handling of the wrappers and filling first before trying to fold the traditional dumpling pleats.

Cooking the dumplings:

Frying: In a 6-inch sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil over low heat. Add 5 dumplings at a time in a single

layer. Do not overcrowd the pan. Cover the pan and let the dumplings cook for 2-3 minutes, then turn them over and repeat.

Boiling: Bring a medium pot of water to a boil and add 6 to 8 dumplings at a time. Boil for 3 to 4 minutes, stirring constantly, until the dumplings float to the top.

Steaming: Bring about an inch of water to a boil in a saucepan. Add dumplings to a steamer basket, place in the saucepan, cover and steam for 10 to 12 minutes.

Serve with soy sauce. ♦

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