

Recommended Recipes

MANY READERS of *The Last Chinese Chef* have been inspired to explore Chinese cuisine further. Nicole Mones has gathered the following recipes and offers them as a starting point for your own culinary adventures.

Readers can also taste these dishes at the source by visiting their home restaurants. For current addresses and additional recommendations, visit www.nicolemones.com and click on "Food Lovers."

STEAMED CLAMS AND EGGS

12 Manila clams, scrubbed

4 eggs

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup lukewarm unsalted chicken broth (lukewarm water and powdered chicken bouillon may be substituted)

Salt

Freshly ground white pepper

Sesame oil

Light soy sauce

1 tablespoon minced scallion

In a large pot fitted with a steamer rack large enough to hold 4 (8-ounce) ramekins, bring a quart of water to a boil. Divide clams among ramekins.

In a small bowl whisk 1 egg until frothy. Whisk in an equivalent amount of chicken broth and a dash of salt and white pepper. Pour the egg mixture over the clams in one of the ramekins. Repeat with the remaining eggs. Place ramekins on the steamer rack in the pot.

Cover the pot and simmer for 12 minutes. Remove ramekins. Garnish each with a small drop of sesame oil, a few drops of soy sauce, and a sprinkle of scallions. Serves 4 as an appetizer.

COURTESY OF Wang Haibo, *Green Village, San Gabriel, California.*

BEGGAR'S CHICKEN

ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS Chinese dishes in the world, this is also one of the more elusive. Perhaps the traditional method of first marinating the bird, then wrapping it in lotus leaves, then sealing it in mud before long baking seems too daunting — for not many restaurants actually offer it, at least without ordering ahead. One exception is Lou Wai Lou, which is one of several places where beggar's chicken may have originated. Because they produce so many orders each day, they have abandoned the mud-seal technique in favor of successive layers of lotus leaves and modern baking bags.

When Wu Xunqu, chief chef at Lou Wai Lou, divulged this recipe, he cautioned that it was most but not all of the recipe, since he had a few secret ingredients he wanted to keep to himself. He also insisted on starting with the life of the chicken. This is one of the poultry-cooking secrets of Chinese haute cuisine: the last two weeks of a chicken's life must be spent outdoors, running free.

At home, however, you may start with a whole chicken, cleaned, and 4–6 whole lotus leaves, soaked 20 minutes in warm water. With one hand in the cavity of the bird and the other hand on the outside, snap as many bones as you can, leaving the whole chicken intact.

Create 3–4 cups of concentrated soup broth from pork bone, beef bone, ham, and chicken feet (good quality canned broth may be substituted), onion, ginger, and meiling soy sauce (it's a tiny bit sour).

When cool, combine with rice wine, starch powder, white pepper, salt, and a little soy. Marinate chicken 30 minutes.

Remove the chicken to wrap in soaked lotus leaves, first pouring over and inside 1 cup of the marinade (fortified with about 1 cup of extra slivered ham, other cooked meats left from the soup, and/or soaked, slivered mushrooms).

Follow a layer of lotus with a layer of parchment and then another layer of lotus. Use plastic-style baking bags and a foil wrap to create a tight seal.

Roast at 400 degrees for ½ hour, then at 350 degrees for up to 3½ hours, depending on the bird's size and age.

COURTESY OF *Wu Xunqu, Lou Wai Lou, Hangzhou, China.*

PORK SPARE RIBS IN LOTUS LEAF

THESE TENDER STEAMED RIBS, which Uncle Xie teaches Sam to make in Hangzhou, are infused with the delicate herbal musk of the lotus leaf. They are the creation of Henry Chang, owner and chef of Chang's Garden in Arcadia, California. Chang was trained from childhood in an old-school apprenticeship in Taiwan, a place where all China's cuisines are represented. As a result, he is adept in the cooking of every Chinese province. Lately the cuisine of Hangzhou has captured his creative attention, and he has opened this restaurant to showcase the subtle dishes of that city.

1 lb pork spare ribs

2 dried lotus leaves

Crumbled glutinous rice scented with 5-spice

SEASONINGS:

2 T chopped scallion

1 T chopped ginger

1 T each soy sauce, oil, sugar, soybean paste

½ T sesame oil

Trim all possible fat from spare ribs. Cut ribs into pieces 1 inch wide, 2 inches long, then marinate in seasonings ½ hour. Cut lotus

leaves into eight pieces and soak in hot water 20 minutes. Remove marinated ribs and discard scallion and ginger. Add crumbled rice and thoroughly mix with rib pieces. Divide ribs into eight small portions. Place each on a soaked lotus leaf, fold, and roll to make a package. Place with the smooth side down in a bowl or deep plate. Steam over high heat for 2 hours until tender. Put a serving plate face-down over the bowl and turn over. Serves 4.

COURTESY OF *Henry Chang, Chang's Garden, Arcadia, California.*