

THE Daring KITCHEN



THE DARING COOKS' OCTOBER, 2011 CHALLENGE: MOO SHU

Dearest Peta.. you're awesome :) Thank you SO MUCH for challenging us to stocks, soups & consommés! There truly is nothing better than homemade soup and stock. It's a technique that every home cook really NEEDS to know. And now we also know how to achieve that crystal clear, packed with flavor broth called consommé. Delish! Your support throughout the month was stellar and I can easily say we all appreciated it very, very much. :) Many thanks and a job really well done! :D Now it's time to share some love with Peta, everyone! Check out her blog, [Peta Eats](#) and give let her know what a great hosting job she did in comments!

October's challenge just screams fun and DELICIOUS! Looking forward to this one, Shelley! :)

Have fun everyone!

Hugs,
Lis
xoxo

Hi! I am [Shelley](#) from [C Mom Cook](#), and I am super excited to bring you this month's challenge. I have been a member of the Daring Kitchen for almost two years now, and have learned so much from the experience. I am also glad to be able to have my twin sister and fellow Daring Cook, [Ruth](#), from [The Crafts of Mommyhood](#), to help me out. Despite being twins, we have very different personalities and cooking styles, not to mention different food preferences and dietary restrictions, so my hope is that we are presenting a challenge that will work for the majority of cooks, and that will be enjoyed by all!

I kind of lucked into the position of hosting this challenge - I think I accidentally volunteered when working on a FoodTalk article late last year, but was then so excited to see my name on the hosting schedule, that I just had to go with it. Deciding on what to present, however, was another story. I considered and tested several different ideas before settling in on one.

I am extremely fortunate to have a friend and neighbor who went to culinary school, and with whom I always discuss my latest kitchen adventures. Recently she offered me an unbelievable gift – she offered to loan me her binders and notes from culinary school. I turned each page carefully, amazed by the information, tips, and recipes it contained. And then I saw it. A recipe for Moo Shu. All of the other ideas I'd been tossing around were tossed away. Moo Shu is one of the dishes that introduced me to Chinese food, and remains a favorite of mine. A simple, yet multi-component dish, my challenge was chosen.

The recipe that was included in my neighbor's binder was intended for restaurant use, with fancy ingredients, make-ahead components and scaled very large. Perfect for inspiration, but not the best recipe for a home cook with limited access to specialty ingredients and not needing to feed a restaurant full of people. After poring through cookbooks and websites, I selected the recipe for this challenge because it is both accessible and adaptable to a variety of dietary requirements, while maintaining authenticity to what Moo Shu is supposed to be.

Deh-Ta Hsiung, a renowned authority on Chinese cuisine, published a beautiful book called *The Chinese Kitchen*. The book is a wonderful and encyclopedic volume containing a wealth of information about all aspects of Chinese cooking, from ingredients to process to history. The recipes are accessible, flavorful, and clearly written. His recipe for Moo Shu, like the others, is straightforward and delicious, and is what I am sharing with you for our challenge.

In preparation for this challenge, I contacted Mr. Deh-Ta Hsiung, who is pleased to have his recipe as our challenge. Mr. Hsiung is widely considered an international expert on Chinese cooking, though his original work was in the arts and film-making. Chinese cooking was his passion, though, and he proceeded to take lessons from top Chinese chefs and work in professional kitchens around the world. Having written numerous books and articles, Mr. Hsiung is a respected authority in the world of Chinese cooking.

About this dish, specifically, Mr. Hsiung offered us a brief anecdote from his earliest work, regarding the origins of this dish's name. In *The Home Book of CHINESE COOKERY*, Mr. Hsiung discusses the dish as follows:

PORK LAUREL (MU-HSU PORK)

Some explanation is needed for the name of this dish. In China, we have a tree called kwei; according to my dictionary, kwei is called laurel in English, and it is a shrub rather than a tree; but the laurels we have in the garden of our London home never seem to flower at all, while the Chinese laurel is a large tree which produces bright yellow, fragrant flowers in the autumn. The pork in this recipe is cooked with eggs, which give a yellow colour to the dish – hence the name. But to add to the confusion, the Chinese name of this dish is mu-hsu pork, mu hsu being the classical name for laurel (are you still with me?). So you might say that calling it pork laurel is taking a poetic license.

Simply put, Moo Shu is a stir fry, containing thinly sliced or shredded vegetables, meat (traditionally) and scrambled egg. It is usually served on flat, thin, steamed pancakes, and is accompanied by a complementary sauce.



Moo Shu pork (the protein most commonly used in Moo Shu dishes) originates in Northern China (commonly attributed to the Shandong province, though sometimes attributed to Beijing), rising in popularity in Chinese restaurants in the West in the 1960's and 70's. As the dish became more popular, different restaurants adapted the recipe to meet their own styles, or to accommodate for expensive or hard-to find ingredients, so there is a lot of variation among recipes. Common among them, though, is a basis of cabbage and the inclusion of scrambled eggs.

The history and etymology of the dish are widely disputed, as indicated by Mr. Hsiung's anecdote above. There are two primary theories as to the origin of the name. Many, including the author of our challenge recipe, suggest that the Chinese characters, read as *mu xi*, refer to a tree that blooms with small, fragrant blossoms. They suggest that the scrambled egg in this dish is reminiscent of these blossoms, and thus a variety of egg dishes are referred to as *mu xi*. An alternative suggestion uses the Chinese characters reading *mu xu*, roughly translating to wood whiskers or wood shavings. The dish is thus named, it is said, due to the appearance of the shredded vegetables and meat, resembling wooden whiskers, or wooden shavings that were used as packing materials.

Recipe Source:

The challenge recipe provided for the Moo Shu filling comes from *The Chinese Kitchen* by Deh-Ta Hsiung. The pancake recipe comes from the same source, though we have also provided an alternate method for preparing them, adapted from a variety of online demonstrations. The sauce recipe provided is from epicurious.com.

Blog-checking lines:

The October Daring Cooks' Challenge was hosted by Shelley of C Mom Cook and her sister Ruth of The Crafts of Mommyhood. They challenged us to bring a taste of the East into our home kitchens by making our own Moo Shu, including thin pancakes, stir fry and sauce.

Posting Date: October 14, 2011



Notes:

A few notes about the traditional main ingredients of a Moo Shu stir-fry:

Cabbage

The primary vegetable within the Moo Shu stir fry is generally cabbage. While there are many varieties of cabbage available, the most traditional for this style of dish is the Chinese cabbage, also known as Napa cabbage.

Chinese cabbage is a traditionally cool weather crop which thrives during the shorter days of the year, so it is normally planted during the second half of the calendar year. It generally reaches maturity within about three months after planting. In order to provide a continual supply of the vegetable, a late crop is planted in areas with appropriate conditions. There are several varieties of Chinese cabbage, which all have delicate, sweet flavors, and blend well with the other foods with which it is cooked. It also holds up well to various cooking methods, which is why it makes a good base for dishes such as Moo Shu. Stored in the crisper of the refrigerator, Chinese cabbage can keep for up to ten days.

Scallions

Scallions, also known as green onions or Spring onions, are milder than most other species of onion. They may be eaten raw or cooked, and are very common in Asian recipes. Scallions are generally sold in bunches with the roots still attached. Stored properly, in a plastic box to allow them to breathe, they can keep for up to a week in the refrigerator.



Bamboo Shoots

Bamboo shoots are the edible shoots of a variety of bamboo species. They are available fresh, dried and canned. Fresh bamboo shoots must be parboiled to eliminate a harsh, bitter poison, hydrocyanic acid, prior to being eaten or used in recipes. Dried bamboo shoots must be soaked prior to use. Both parboiled fresh and reconstituted dried bamboo shoots need to be rinsed with fresh water as the final preparation step. Canned bamboo shoots are parboiled and require no reconstitution, though should also be rinsed.



One of my favorite quotes about bamboo from The Chinese Kitchen is as follows:

Traditionally, the bamboo symbolizes the virtuous man, bending in the wind yet never breaking.

Fungus

Not generally a word most casual Westerners associate with food, there are a wide variety of mushrooms that are used in Asian cooking. The specific fungus specified in Mr. Hsiung's recipe is dried black fungus, which has long been cultivated in China. While there are many different varieties available in China, there are only a few commonly available in the West. Stored in a dry, dark place just as they are packaged, they can last indefinitely. Once reconstituted, they can be stored for up to five days in the refrigerator in a bowl of fresh water.



Mandatory Items:

You must make Moo Shu pancakes using the provided recipe, a stir fry, and a complementary sauce.

Variations allowed:

Substitutions for purposes of dietary requirements are allowed, and creativity with vegetables, proteins and sauces, maintaining the spirit of the challenge, are encouraged.

Preparation time:

Moo Shu Pancakes – 10 minutes preparation time, 30 minutes rest time, 45-50 minutes cooking time

Moo Shu Pork – 25-30 minutes preparation time, 6-8 minutes active cooking time

Hoisin Sauce – 5 minutes

Equipment required:

- Cutting board
- Sharp knife (for cutting meat and vegetables)
- Optional – food processor with shredding blade
- Measuring cups
- Measuring spoons
- Mixing bowl
- Frying Pan or wok
- Whisk or fork for scrambling egg
- Small jar (for hoisin sauce)
- Spoon (for mixing hoisin sauce)
- Rolling pin
- Pastry brush (for alternate method of preparing pancakes)
- Dish towels (for covering pancake dough and cooked pancakes)
- Small blender (if making sesame oil)

Thin Pancakes:

Makes 24-30 pancakes

Preparation time: about 10 minutes plus 30 minutes' standing time

Cooking time: 45-50 minutes

Ingredients

4 cups (960 ml) (560 gm) (19¾ oz) all-purpose flour

About 1½ cup (300ml) (10 fl oz) boiling water

1 teaspoon (5 ml) vegetable oil

Dry flour for dusting

Directions:

1. Sift the flour into a mixing bowl. Gently pour in the water, stirring as you pour, then stir in the oil. Knead the mixture into a soft but firm dough. If your dough is dry, add more water, one tablespoon at a time, to reach the right consistency. Cover with a damp towel and let stand for about 30 minutes.
2. Lightly dust the surface of a worktop with dry flour. Knead the dough for 6-8 minutes or until smooth, then divide into 3 equal portions. Roll out each portion into a long sausage and cut each sausage into 8-10 pieces. Keep the dough that you are not actively working with covered with a lightly damp dish cloth to keep it from drying out.
3. Roll each piece into a ball, then, using the palm of your hand, press each piece into a flat pancake. Dust the worktop with more dry flour. Flatten each pancake into a 6 to 8 inch (15 cm to 20 cm) circle with a rolling pin, rolling gently on both sides.
4. Place an un-greased frying pan over high heat. Once the pan is hot, lower the heat to low and place the pancakes, one at a time, in the pan. Remove when little light-brown spots appear on the underside. Cover with a damp cloth until ready to serve.

Alternate method for preparing the pancakes:

Once the dough has rested and been kneaded again, divide it into an even number of small pieces, rolling each into a ball. Working with two balls of dough at a time, dip the bottom of one ball lightly into sesame oil and press it onto the top of the second ball. Press the double layer flat, then roll the doubled pancake layers into 6 to 8 inch circles. In a dry pan, cook on each side until dry and lightly blistered (but without browning). Separate pancakes after cooking.





Alternately (I know, an alternate to the alternate...), if you would prefer not to dip the dough in the sesame oil, you can achieve a similar result with a slight modification. Again working two pieces at a time, roll each piece into a three inch pancake. Using a pastry brush, brush sesame oil onto the top of one of the pancakes, and top it with the other pancake. Further roll the doubled pancake into a 6 to 8 inch circle and cook as the above alternate method. This method was actually our favorite of the three, and yielded the best results - very thin pancakes that held up a little better and had the most

authentic texture. We had the best luck brushing a bit of sesame oil on both circles of dough, then sandwiching them together. Just be careful separating the pancakes after cooking them on both sides - heat (steam) does get caught between them, so don't burn your fingers!

Links to a video demonstrating these alternate methods can be found in the Additional Information section below.

Notes:

- ⑩ Be sure to use very hot-to-boiling water, as it helps relax the gluten, which will aid in rolling the pancakes super thin.
- ⑩ Adjust the heat of your pan as needed to cook the pancakes without burning them. I had to keep my burner on medium (rather than low) heat in order for my pancakes to cook properly (low was drying them out too much without cooking them fully), so watch your pancakes carefully.
- ⑩ If the pancakes are not to be used as soon as they are cooked, they can be warmed up, either in a steamer for 5-6 minutes, or in a microwave oven for 20-30 seconds, depending on the power.
- ⑩ And, in case you are curious, we both asked our local Chinese food restaurants about their Moo Shu pancakes, and they informed us that they purchase them prepared, and simply steam them for their customers as they order the dish.

Moo Shu Pork:

Serves 4

Preparation time: 25-30 minutes

Cooking time: 6-8 minutes

Ingredients

2/3 cup (1 oz) (30 gm) Dried black fungus ('wood ears')

½ lb (450 gm) pork loin or butt

¾ cup (3½ oz) (100 gm) bamboo shoots, thinly cut

3 cups (6 oz) (170 gm) Chinese cabbage (Napa cabbage), thinly cut

3 large eggs

1 teaspoon (5 ml) (6 gm) salt

4 tablespoons (60 ml) vegetable oil

2 scallions

1 tablespoon (15 ml) light soy sauce

2 teaspoons (10 ml) rice wine

A few drops sesame oil

12 thin pancakes to serve



Directions:

1. Soak the fungus in warm water for 10-15 minutes, rinse and drain. Discard any hard stalks, then thinly shred.
2. Thinly cut the pork, bamboo shoots and Chinese cabbage into matchstick-sized shreds.
3. Lightly beat the eggs with a pinch of salt.
4. Heat about 1 tablespoon (15 ml) oil in a preheated wok and scramble the eggs until set, but not too hard. Remove and keep to one side.
5. Heat the remaining oil. Stir-fry the shredded pork for about 1 minute or until the color changes. Add the fungus, bamboo shoots, Chinese cabbage and scallions. Stir-fry for about 2-3 minutes, then add the remaining salt, soy sauce and wine. Blend well and continue stirring for another 2 minutes. Add the scrambled eggs, stirring to break them into small bits. Add the sesame oil and blend well.
6. To serve: place about 2 tablespoons (30 ml) of hot Moo Shu in the center of a warm pancake, rolling it into a parcel with the bottom end turned up to prevent the contents from falling out. Eat with your fingers. (See *Final Preparation and Serving* section below for more complete details.)



Notes:

- ⑩ I have used white mushrooms and dried black mushrooms in this recipe, but any variety of mushrooms, either fresh or reconstituted dry, can be used.
- ⑩ I did all of my chopping ahead of time and set all of the chopped ingredients aside in separate bowls. The cutting was the longest part of the process. Once I started cooking, it really came together quickly and beautifully.
- ⑩ In a pinch, you can use pre-chopped cabbage, usually sold as a cole slaw blend, as the basis of your Moo Shu.
- ⑩ If the stir fry is ready ahead of time, you can reduce the burner to low and cover the pan until you are ready to serve.

Hoisin Sauce:

(source: <http://recipes.epicurean.com/recipe/13249/hoisin-sauce.html>)

While most restaurants, or at least those at which I have ordered the dish, serve this with plum sauce, none of the cook books or online recipes that I have seen have referred to that as being traditional. Most that reference serving it with a sauce call for it to be served with hoisin sauce.

Ingredients

4 tablespoons (60 ml) soy sauce
2 tablespoons (30 ml) peanut butter OR black bean paste
1 tablespoon (15 ml) honey OR molasses
2 teaspoons (10 ml) white vinegar
1/8 teaspoon ($\frac{2}{3}$ ml) garlic powder
2 teaspoons (10 ml) sesame seed oil
20 drops ($\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon) Chinese style hot sauce (optional, depending on how hot you want your hoisin sauce)
1/8 teaspoon ($\frac{2}{3}$ ml) black pepper

Directions:

Simply mix all of the ingredients together by hand using a sturdy spoon.
At first it does not appear like it will mix, but keep at it just a bit longer and your sauce will come together.



Final Preparation and Serving:

Each of the three components that comprise the complete Moo Shu dish are served separately, and the diner prepares each serving on his or her own plate. Most restaurants provide four pancakes, a serving of Moo-Shu and a small dish of hoisin sauce as a single serving. To prepare each pancake for eating, the following is the most common process: a small amount of hoisin sauce is spread onto the pancake, on top of which a spoonful of the stir-fry is placed. In order to prevent (or, realistically, minimize) the filling from spilling out while eating, the bottom of the pancake is folded up, then the pancake is rolled, similarly to a soft taco. Once rolled, the prepared pancake is eaten immediately.



Other Recipes and Information:

Both the pancake and the hoisin sauce recipes call for sesame oil. If you do not have sesame oil, and do not wish to purchase it, there are several options that you have for substituting. The easiest is to simply substitute another type of oil, though this will affect the flavor. For the purpose of these recipes, I made my own sesame oil substitute using the following process (as found on eHow.com, link available in the Additional Information section below)

In a shallow skillet, add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (60 ml) (1 oz) (30 gm) of sesame seeds to 1 cup (240 ml) of vegetable or canola oil (any neutral oil will work) and cook the mixture, over medium heat, for about two minutes, until the seeds begin to brown. If any of the seeds begin to burn, immediately remove the pan from the heat. Allow the mixture to cool, then blend it in the blender. Allow the blended mixture to sit for two hours, then strain and bottle the resulting oil.

Considerations of Alternative Dietary Requirements:

Simple Protein Substitutions for Kosher or Vegetarian Diets:

This recipe can be easily adapted for both kosher and vegetarian diets by substituting the protein in the dish. Any kosher meat can be used in place of the pork called for in the recipe, and tofu, bean curd or other meat substitutes can be substituted for vegetarian diets.

Vegan Options:

Most vegan Moo Shu recipes we found simply omitted the scrambled egg portion of the dish. If you are using tofu as your protein, you can create a tofu scramble to replicate the eggs, if you wish. We have provided some links that we found for vegan scrambled egg substitutes in the Additional Information section below, but we have not tested these recipes.

Gluten Free Alternatives:

Gluten free all-purpose-flour substitutes can be substituted for use in the pancakes. You may also try making thin egg “pancakes”, making your Moo Shu into lettuce wraps, or using whole cabbage leaves to wrap your Moo Shu filling.

Storage and Freezing Instructions:

The thin pancakes, once cooked, do not store fabulously well – storing them in the refrigerator dries them out. We recommend making approximately as many as you think you will need at the time you prepare the meal. The uncooked dough, however, stores in the refrigerator wrapped well in plastic wrap. We both found that a half batch was sufficient for our families (two adults and one child).

The Moo Shu can be stored in the refrigerator, in an airtight container, for several days, and reheats very nicely. Leftovers can be served traditionally, or even over rice for a different feel to the dish.

The hoisin sauce can be stored in the refrigerator, as sitting does not alter the flavor in any way. Just be sure to shake or mix your stored sauce before serving, as it does separate a bit upon sitting.



Additional Information:

About Moo Shu:

<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/moo+shu>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moo_shu_pork

<http://chinesefood.about.com/od/pork/a/mushupork.htm>

Demonstration of Alternate Method for Rolling Moo Shu Pancakes:

First Alternate Method:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDvP8ejh9cE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2SmDLsFWBdU> (this video uses a slightly different recipe for the pancakes, but he offers some helpful hints as to the process of rolling and cooking them)

Second Alternate Method:

http://wn.com/moo_shu_pork

(select video number 8. Unfortunately, it will not allow me a direct link to the video)

Suggestions for Vegetarian Moo Shu Recipes:

http://www.eatingwell.com/recipes/moo_shu_vegetables.html

<http://www.epicurious.com/recipes/member/views/VEGETARIAN-MOO-SHU-STIR-FRY-50135579>

Vegan Scrambled Egg Substitutes:

<http://vegweb.com/index.php?topic=29433.0>

<http://www.fabulousfoods.com/recipes/vegan-scrambled-eggs>

<http://www.food.com/recipe/vegan-scrambled-eggs-291202>

How to Substitute Sesame Oil:

http://www.ehow.com/how_7437249_substitute-sesame-oil.html

Deh-Ta Hsiung's website and text:

<http://www.chinese-at-table.com/>

http://www.amazon.com/Chinese-Kitchen-Essential-Ingredients-Authentic/dp/0312288948/ref=sr_1_7?ie=UTF8&qid=1313115083&sr=8-7

Disclaimer:

*The Daring Kitchen and its members in no way suggest we are medical professionals and therefore are NOT responsible for any error in reporting of "alternate baking/cooking". If you have issues with digesting gluten, then it is YOUR responsibility to research the ingredient before using it. If you have allergies, it is YOUR responsibility to make sure any ingredient in a recipe will not adversely affect you. If you are lactose intolerant, it is YOUR responsibility to make sure any ingredient in a recipe will not adversely affect you. If you are vegetarian or vegan, it is YOUR responsibility to make sure any ingredient in a recipe will not adversely affect you. **The responsibility is YOURS regardless of what health issue you're dealing with. Please consult your physician with any questions before using an ingredient you are not familiar with.** Thank you! :)*