

STIR-FRIED CUMIN BEEF

SERVES 4

TIME 45 minutes

With roots in Hunan cuisine, cumin beef typically features tender pieces of meat stir-fried with onions and/or peppers and aromatics (garlic and ginger), lightly glossed in a soy sauce-based glaze, seasoned with spices (cumin, Sichuan peppercorns, and dried chiles or chili powder), and finished with cilantro.

Before cooking, we briefly treated slices of beefy flank steak with baking soda, which raised the meat's pH so that it stayed moist and tender during cooking. To prevent the meat from overcooking before it browned, we stir-fried it in two batches until its juices reduced to a sticky fond that coated each slice. Quickly stir-frying sliced onion allowed it to soften but retain a hint of its raw bite and crunch. Grinding whole cumin seeds and Sichuan peppercorns released vibrant aromatic compounds that gave the dish plenty of fragrance while Sichuan chili powder added moderate heat.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- We developed this recipe for a 14-inch wok, but a 12-inch nonstick or carbon-steel skillet can be used instead.
- You can substitute 1 tablespoon of ground cumin for the cumin seeds.
- If you cannot find Sichuan chili powder, Korean red pepper flakes (gochugaru) are a good substitute. Another alternative is 1 3/4 teaspoons of ancho chile powder plus 1/4 teaspoon of cayenne pepper.
- There is no substitute for Sichuan peppercorns.
- We like this stir-fry with steamed white rice and stir-fried baby bok choy.

RG notes

- I ground the cumin seeds and Sichuan peppercorns in the Sumeet.
- I was concerned about the heat level, and only used 1 tsp of ancho chile powder. But it was barely spicy, so I will follow the recipe next time!
- Lots of splattering when I added the beef – NOT when I added the garlic and ginger mix.
- For step 4, I used 2 Tb of EV olive oil.

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4 Servings - Prep time 45 minutes

Ingredients

1 tablespoon water 1/4 teaspoon baking soda 1 pound flank steak, trimmed, cut with grain into 2 to 2 1/2 inch-wide strips, each strip sliced against grain 1/4 inch thick
4 garlic cloves, minced 1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
1 tablespoon cumin seeds, ground 2 teaspoons Sichuan chili powder 1 1/4 teaspoons Sichuan peppercorns, ground 1/2 teaspoon table salt, divided
1 tablespoon Shaoxing wine or dry sherry 1 tablespoon soy sauce 2 teaspoons molasses 1/2 teaspoon cornstarch
1/4 cup vegetable oil, divided 1/2 small onion, sliced thin 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh cilantro

1/4 inch slice - beef

2 inch strip - beef

Directions

1. Combine water and baking soda in medium bowl. Add beef and toss to coat. Let sit at room temperature for 5 minutes.
2. While beef rests, combine garlic and ginger in small bowl. Combine cumin, chili powder, peppercorns, and 1/4 teaspoon salt in second small bowl. Add Shaoxing wine, soy sauce, molasses, cornstarch, and remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt to beef mixture. Toss until well combined.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in wok over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add half of beef mixture and increase heat to high. Using tongs, toss beef slowly but constantly until exuded juices have evaporated and meat begins to sizzle, 2 to 6 minutes. Transfer to clean bowl. Repeat with 1 tablespoon oil and remaining beef mixture.
4. Heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil in now-empty wok over medium heat until shimmering. Add garlic mixture (oil will splatter) and cook, stirring constantly, until fragrant, 15 to 30 seconds. Add onion and cook, tossing slowly but constantly with tongs, until onion begins to soften, 1 to 2 minutes.
5. Return beef to wok and toss to combine. Sprinkle cumin mixture over beef and toss until onion takes on pale orange color. Transfer to serving platter, sprinkle with cilantro, and serve immediately.