

Henan Chicken Stew



"I HAVE AN UNHEALTHY obsession with Chinese food," said chef Danny Bowien. "When you get down to the soul of it, I want to know how someone got that much flavor into that tiny piece of meat." Mr. Bowien's second of four Slow Food Fast contributions is a dish anyone might obsess over. A beer-spiked sauce dotted with whole spices penetrates deep into browned and braised chicken and tender potatoes; a cilantro garnish enlivens every bite.

This recipe was inspired by a dish served at Spicy Village, a Manhattan restaurant specializing in the cuisine of Henan province, in east-central China. One of Mr. Bowien's favorite places to eat, it is just around the corner from his own wildly popular restaurant, Mission Chinese Food. He ducks in regularly to order a more elaborate version of this dish, listed on Spicy Village's menu simply as Big Tray Chicken.

"Every time I'd go there, I'd try and pick it apart," Mr. Bowien said. "I'd let it get cold and taste it again. There isn't a lot of info about Henan food online." One signature of the region's cuisine, he found, is a generous hand with spice. Here, star anise, cardamom, dried chilies, fennel seed, cumin and Sichuan peppercorns provide sweetness, smoke, heat and striking complexity.

Browning the chicken before it braises adds yet another layer. "You need to take the time," Mr. Bowien insisted. "When you caramelize anything, you intensify the flavor." After that, the stew more or less cooks itself. Add the chili bean paste, the spices, the potatoes, the soy sauce and the beer, cover the pot and let it boil. After about 20 minutes, you will have a concentrated, burnt-amber sauce and perfectly cooked chicken. "It is still bouncy but not stringy; it has texture and give," Mr. Bowien said.

Though this recipe has been adapted and simplified for the home cook, the result is no less satisfying than its inspiration. "It is one of my absolute favorite wintertime dishes," Mr. Bowien said. "It hits you on so many levels."

Henan Chicken Stew

Total Time: 65 minutes **Serves:** 6

Ingredients

1 whole chicken, about 4 pounds, broken down and cut into 10 pieces
1½ tablespoons salt
2 tablespoons fish sauce, plus extra for seasoning
¼ cup grapeseed oil

1/3 cup dried red chilies (whole)
2 tablespoons Sichuan peppercorns or whole black peppercorns
2 tablespoons fennel seed
2 tablespoons cumin (ground)
2 pieces star anise
4 pods green cardamom
2 tablespoons Chinese chili bean paste or Sriracha
2 cups chicken stock or water
16 ounces lager-style beer, such as Budweiser or Tsingtao
½ cup soy sauce
½ cup sugar
2 russet potatoes or 4 medium Yukon gold potatoes, washed and cut into 1-inch dice

Black vinegar or Sherry vinegar, to taste
1 cup fresh cilantro sprigs

What To Do

1. Season chicken with salt and 2 tablespoons fish sauce and let sit 5 minutes. Meanwhile, set a heavy, deep pot over medium-high heat and add oil. Once oil is hot, work in batches to brown both sides of chicken pieces, about 6 minutes per batch, transferring chicken to a bowl as you go.
2. Return chicken to pot, increase heat to high and add all remaining ingredients except vinegar and cilantro. Bring pot up to a rolling boil, then cover. Reduce heat cook until chicken and potatoes are tender and sauce is reduced, about 20 minutes.
3. Season stew with black vinegar (or sherry) to taste. Distribute stew among four plates and top with cilantro.

RG notes:

1. Final result is REALLY spicy. Remove whole chilies from leftovers.
2. Place chilies, Sichuan peppercorns, star anise and cardamom pods into cheesecloth for easy removal.
3. For the final seasoning, can substitute 2 Tb of rice vinegar plus 2 tsp of dry sherry.
4. Do not freeze leftover potatoes - they get too mushy.

1 inch piece

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/danny-bowien-s-henan-chicken-stew-slow-food-fast-11596122907>

Henan Chicken Stew (original version)

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1 whole chicken, about 4 pounds, broken down and cut into 10 pieces 1½ tablespoons salt 2 tablespoons fish sauce, plus extra for seasoning ¼ cup grapeseed oil
½ cup dried red chilies 2 tablespoons Sichuan peppercorns or whole black peppercorns 2 tablespoons fennel seed 2 tablespoons cumin (ground) 2 pieces star anise 4 pods green cardamom 2 tablespoons Chinese chili bean paste or Sriracha 2 cups chicken stock or water 16 ounces lager-style beer, such as Budweiser or Tsingtao ½ cup soy sauce ½ cup sugar 2 russet potatoes or 4 medium Yukon gold potatoes, washed and cut into 1-inch dice
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