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Kung Pao Chicken

This is a famous Sichuan dish known as *Kung Pao Chi Ting*. At the time of the Qin (pronounced *ch'in*) dynasty, the person in charge of protecting the heir apparent to the throne held the title of "Kung Pao," *kung* meaning "castles and pao," "to protect." During one period, the Kung Pao was a man from Sichuan province whose favorite dish was spicy diced chicken with peanuts. It came to be named after him.

Serves 3 to 4

3 tablespoons dark soy sauce
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1 pound skinless, boneless chicken breasts, cut into 3/4-inch cubes
1 teaspoon Chinese rice wine or dry sherry
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon cider vinegar
1 teaspoon sesame oil
3 tablespoons canola oil
2 to 4 dried chiles, seeds removed
1/2 teaspoon Sichuan peppercorns, toasted and ground (see Note)
1 garlic clove, sliced
1 scallion, bulb split, cut into 1-1/2-inch lengths, plus 2 tablespoons thinly sliced scallions
2 slices unpeeled fresh ginger
1/2 cup unsalted blanched peanuts, toasted, or unsalted dry-roasted peanuts

(1) In a medium bowl, whisk together 1 tablespoon of the soy sauce, the salt, and cornstarch. Add the chicken and mix well. In a small bowl, whisk together the remaining 2 tablespoons of soy sauce, the wine, sugar, vinegar, and sesame oil.

(2) In a wok or stir-fry pan, heat the canola oil over medium-heat. Add the chiles and cook, stirring, until the chiles turn dark brown. Add the peppercorns, garlic, scallion lengths, and ginger and stir for a moment or two.

(3) Stir up the chicken mixture and add it to the pan. Cook, stirring briskly, for about 1 minute, then add the soy sauce mixture, the peanuts and the thinly sliced scallions. Turn the heat up to high and cook, stirring, until well mixed, and the chicken is cooked through, about 30 seconds. Remove and discard the chiles and ginger, if desired. Serve immediately.



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Kung Pao Chicken, (continued)

NOTE: You may substitute 1 to 3 teaspoons crushed red pepper for the dried chiles. Add with the peppercorns, garlic, and scallions.

NOTE: To toast Sichuan peppercorns, heat the peppercorns in an ungreased skillet over medium heat until the peppercorns are smoking and fragrant. Do not let them burn. Let the peppercorns cool, then grind them in a mortar and pestle or roll with a rolling pin between two pieces of paper. Sift and discard the larger pieces that do not pass through the strainer. Store the powder in a clean, tightly lidded glass jar in a dark, dry place.