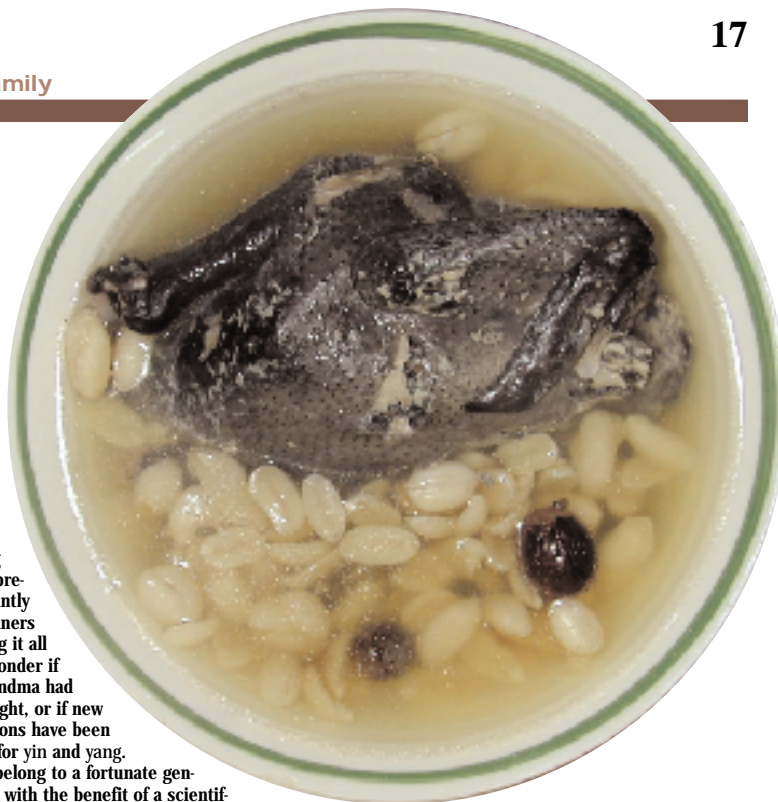


**BUSYCOOK** Meals for the Family

# Black bird in the pot

Simple herbal tonics are great pick-me-ups and hangover cures



**A**FTER the hectic rounds of visiting and partying during the New Year, are you feeling a little listless? Try a quick tonic that's supposed to be a restorative after "excesses".

This is a very easy soup to prepare, using the classic black spring chicken that you can get for a few dollars, a small packet of the humble groundnut and a few red dates.

According to traditional Chinese pharmacology, chicken soup is a natural tonic, groundnuts are used to restore energy and red dates are a good booster for the anaemic.

A few friends who have drunk this soup also claim it's a good cure for hang-overs. To me, this soup's good simply because it tastes great and if the ingredients work to re-energise my tired body, that's a nice side benefit.

I've stayed away from heavy tasting herbs, because I'd rather do my homework before I recommend any to you. (See Tips & Tricks)

I believe that the indiscriminate use of herbs can be detrimental at times. Take danggui, the Chinese angelica root.

It used to be a herb that a woman would take, since it "augmented the yin and complimented the yan (complexion)".

For example, the girls in my family would be fed danggui chicken soup at certain times of the month only, and the boys would not get a taste, even if they had wanted to.

These days, almost every herbal soup sold at the food courts smell of danggui, including the ubiquitous bak kut teh.

And looking at the predominantly male diners slurping it all up, I wonder if my grandma had been right, or if new definitions have been drawn for yin and yang.

We belong to a fortunate generation with the benefit of a scientific education, in which we learned all about nutrition and a balanced diet.

We are also schooled in the traditional uses of Chinese herbs in our diet, although we may not have been consciously aware.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is returning full circle, first having captured the imagination of the west before returning home to the East to a heightened awareness.

You see this new trend in the natural supplements of ginseng, lingzhi, ginkgo biloba etc.

Even beverage bottlers are taking advantage of the revival, coming out with traditional coolers from winter melon brews to sand ginseng and apricot kernel drinks.

The latter, by the way, is a restorative for chronic coughing.

For the busy cook, however, crockpot tonics are still the simplest. Use neutral tasting herbs that the whole family can enjoy the soup. See Tips & Tricks for some suggestions.

Here's to health and wealth for you and yours. Drop me an e-mail if you have questions.

## TIPS & TRICKS

EVERY Chinese family has its own favourite soup recipes. But sadly, we are fast losing the tradition, and the recipes.

That's why people like Mr Khoo Cheh Joo are so precious. I met him on my Saturday marketing trips to Chong Boon market in Ang Mo Kio, where he runs a little shop selling simple Chinese herbal tonics.

He is your modern-day medicine man. He sells herb packs for soups "using the best quality available" at \$3.50 a pack.

You probably have a Chinese medicine shop around your neighbourhood. Make friends with the owners, and they'll probably recommend a good tonic or two.

If you live in Ang Mo Kio, go look for the knowledgeable Mr Khoo. Yak Hua Tonics is at #01-16, Blk 453A, Ang Mo Kio Ave 10.



by Pauline D Loh

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### Baby Black Chicken Soup Variations

#### Groundnuts & Dates

- 1 baby black chicken
- 1 packet skinned groundnuts
- 3 - 5 red dates

**Method:**

1. Wash and rinse black chicken. Pull off the skin, chop off the neck and toes. Rub with a little salt.
2. Pick over groundnuts, discarding sand, grit and nuts with worm holes.
3. Seed the red dates. Do this by smashing the dates with the flat side of a cleaver. The seeds should pop out quite easily.
4. Plate chicken, groundnuts and red dates in a slow cooker. Add two cups water.
5. Cook on high for four hours. Slowcook on low for six to eight hours. Salt to taste.

**Note:** If you are using the stove to cook the soups. Add ingredients to a pot, with two and a half cups water. Bring to a rolling boil. Turn down fire and simmer one hour or until the flavours are released.

#### Cordyceps



- 1 baby black chicken
- 1 packet Cordyceps tonic
- (Pictured above, L to R: cordyceps, dried longan meat, boxthorn seeds, dang sheng, huai shan, yu zhu)

**Method:**

1. Wash and rinse black chicken. Pull off the skin, chop off the neck and toes. Rub with a little salt.
2. Add herbal tonic ingredients to pot with chicken.
3. Cook on high for four hours. Slowcook on low for six to eight hours. Salt to taste.

#### Sha sheng & Almonds

- 1 baby black chicken
- 1 packet Sha Sheng tonic
- (Pictured below, L to R: huai shan, yu zhu, honey dates, dried lily bulbs, bitter & sweet almonds, sha sheng or sand ginseng)

**Method:**

1. Wash and rinse black chicken. Pull off the skin, chop off the neck and toes. Rub with a little salt.
2. Add herbal tonic ingredients to pot with chicken.
3. Cook on high for four hours. Slowcook on low for six to eight hours. Salt to taste.

