

HomeChef

Cooking with style

Cool Canto-Chick

Sweet chestnuts, smooth chicken pieces, hot fluffy rice

Chestnuts are an old-fashioned comfort food in both eastern and western cultures. In the west, it's often associated with Christmas, as in "chestnuts roasting on the open fire" ...

Just like in China, a packet of hot sugar-fried chestnuts was a traditional treat on frosty winter nights.

Another Chinese winter favourite is claypot rice, a heart-warming dish that marries speed, convenience and taste.

Make it at home, and it will bring them to the dinner table faster than you can say "sweet chestnuts."

Our recipe today combines these two favourites - chestnuts and a claypot rice base - although we can forget about winter in Singapore.

This recipe is adapted from a one I collected in Hong Kong from an old lady in Laichikok, where the old Hongkong Standard newsroom was.

She called it her "Cheer Cheer Chicken", for the noise it made when the sizzling dish hit the hot plate. That incidentally was the only English she ever learnt from me, much preferring to stick to her enthusiastic native Cantonese chatter.

Don't bother to cook this in a claypot. Just have ready some hot, fluffy rice, and pile on the finished dish in individual bowls. It

tastes just as good, and our taste panel can testify to that.

The secret to this dish is the good oyster sauce, the pillar of taste in any properly equipped Cantonese kitchen.

MAGGI Oyster Sauce is thick and tasty and doesn't have the lead-like taste that I find in some other brands. In this case, it serves as the ideal marinade for our chicken.

But before you start, let's talk about what sort of chicken you should use. In a dish like this, I prefer chicken thigh meat, or a whole leg de-boned.

Breast meat tends to get stringy, especially when high heat is applied, as in this dish.

You also need to decide if you keep the chicken skin or not. I choose to go without as the meat is smooth enough with its silky covering of oyster sauce and caramelised onions.

But if you're a purist and like your chicken, skin and all, just remember to trim off excess fat and brown the chicken pieces skin-side down. That keeps the flavour, but the fat to a reasonable level.

There are water chestnuts in the dish as well. Though totally unrelated to the chestnuts, they are a perfect complement to the real nuts.

They are currently in season, and taste good raw or cooked. A few water chestnuts sliced and added to a vegetable stir-fry adds a pear-like sweetness.

As usual, if you have queries on this recipe, email us.



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Recipe

Cantonese Chestnut Chicken Rice

Ingredients:

3 tablespoons
MAGGI Oyster Sauce
2 chicken legs, de-boned
300 gm chestnuts, shelled
100 gm water chestnuts,
peeled and sliced
10 small red shallots, peeled
Cornflour, pepper, water

Method:

1. Cut chicken into bite sizes. Marinate with MAGGI Oyster Sauce, a little cornflour and the pepper.
2. In a frying pan, heat up a little oil and put in whole shallots. Fry over high heat till browned. Add chicken pieces and fry over high heat to seal juices.

3. Add chestnuts. Add half a cup water, turn down fire and simmer 10 minutes.
4. When the chicken and chestnuts are bubbling and the gravy has thickened, add the sliced water chestnuts. Remove from heat and serve over hot rice.
(Total cooking time: 15 minutes.)

Grocery List/Price Guide:

MAGGI Oyster Sauce (\$1.50 per bottle) [Check price](#)
300 gm chestnuts (\$2.50)
2 fresh chicken legs (\$3.00)
Water chestnuts (\$1.00 a bag)
Shallots (\$1.00, but use half)
Total: \$10.00 [Check price](#)



SWEET & NUTTY CHESTNUTS

CHESTNUTS are now available all year as our grocers source their vegetables more and more from the Antipodes. That's why you see those huge chestnuts on supermarket shelves.

They come from Australia and are almost twice the size of those we get from China. They are also twice as expensive, too. Taste-wise, they are not much different, although they tend to be a tad more floury.

If you are buying the smaller, sweeter Chinese chestnuts, mostly from Tianjin, go for the shelled ones. It saves you peeling the nuts and also makes for better quality control. To get the furry skin off easily, simply soak the chestnuts in hot water. Leave till cool, and the skin should come right off.

There is also the dried chestnuts you get in the dry goods rack. They are traditionally used for dumplings or bak chang, but can taste good in a stew. You need to soak them overnight to reconstitute them. But use them only if you really can't get the fresh chestnuts. Nothing beats fresh food.

