

# BUSYCOOK Meals for the Family



## New Year bird

Put a traditional braised duck on the reunion dinner table

**T**HIS weekend, I'll be flying to Hong Kong to spend the Chinese New Year with my mother and younger brother. It's been a few years since we've sat down for a reunion dinner, and I expect Mom and I will be cooking up a storm.

That's why I'll be packing some special ingredients to take with me. Among them will be a large piece of blue ginger or galangal – the secret ingredient my mother uses in her braised duck.

Her duck is so good that each branch of our extended clan now has a copy of the recipe. I was the last to get it – but only because I was too afraid to cook it in case she found it falling below the celestial maternal standards.

Does that sound like The Joy Luck Club to you? I may be sharing my recipes with you, but my Mama still thinks I'm in kindergarten where kitchen craft is concerned.

Fortunately, the rest of the family is more forgiving, and when I finally cooked the duck, my test panel of uncle, aunts and cousins gave it the unanimous thumbs-up.

I'm sharing this with you because it's a dish that can keep and may actually taste better

eaten the next day or day after – an excellent fallback for the Chinese New Year period when long-lost relatives and friends tend to turn up and stay for a meal.

The supermarkets are also beginning to stock more affordable ducks in the poultry shelves, and some of you may be wondering how you can tackle the bird. In fact, a couple of you had written to ask for a duck recipe. So here it is.

This braised duck is our family's version and I'm not sure how similar it is to the famous Teochew dish. I may be biased of course, but I always thought my mom's braised duck was tastier and more aromatic, thanks to the sweetness of the blue ginger.

I suspect, too, that the blue ginger is more Peranakan than Teochew.

This is an old-fashioned recipe that lists traditional ingredients like the rock sugar used to caramelize the shallots and colour the skin of the duck.

If you like, you may substitute fine or granulated sugar, but do be aware that tradition is part of the recipe, and if you take too many liberties with the original, you'll lose the taste.

Gongxi Xinxi, Niannian Ruyi! Happy cooking.

### TIPS & TRICKS

MOST LOCAL ducks are way too fat. It took me a while to get used to the birds available here, but a good look around the wet markets may find acceptable choices.

Ask your poultry seller for a cai ya, or literally, "vegetable duck". They are supposedly free range, and have a thinner layer of fat around their necks. Well, a little thinner.

#### KIAMCHYE ARK

One good way to cook duck is to throw it into a soup with salted vegetables, a few slices of ginger and a few tomatoes. For duck soup, you'll have to skin the duck or you'll get oily mouthfuls of duck fat.

It's really very easy to do if you have a crockpot/slow cooker.

Make sure all visible fat and skin is removed from the duck. Quarter the bird and place the sections in the crockpot. Tuck in a few thin slices of ginger.

Quarter a head of salted vegetables and rinse well. You don't have to soak it. The residual salt will flavour the soup.

Add a couple of nice red tomatoes. Halve them and squeeze out the seeds.

Leave it all in the slow cooker on auto, or high for four to five hours, low for eight hours. By the time dinner is served, you'll have piping hot soup ready for the table.



by Pauline D Loh

pauline@newstoday.com.sg

### Blue Ginger Braised Duck with Green Mango Garlic Chilli Dip

- 1 duck, dressed and rinsed
- 1 piece cinnamon
- 2 pieces star aniseed
- 10 cloves
- 3 cm piece of blue ginger or galangal
- 10 small red shallots, peeled
- 3 pieces of rock sugar (about 1 cup)
- 1 cup dark soya sauce
- 2 cups water
- 6 hard-boiled eggs, shelled

#### Method:

1. Heat a little oil in a large non-stick wok. Add in spices and red shallots. Stir fry quickly until shallots brown and spices are fragrant. Add a little more oil, and put in the rock sugar.
2. When sugar is almost dissolved, add

- the duck and brown on all sides, turning with care. The duck fat will quickly render so you need to spoon it off.
3. When the bird is browned on all sides, add the soya sauce and water and bring the mixture to a boil.
4. Lower the fire, add the hard-boiled eggs, liver and gizzard if you like and slowly simmer until duck is tender, about 15 to 20 minutes.
5. Let duck rest a while and cool before cutting. Serve with the mango chilli dip. Serve eggs and gizzards as a side dish.

**Note:** The red shallots will thicken the gravy so you don't need to add cornflour. Reheat the gravy and serve separately.

#### MANGO GARLIC CHILLI DIP:

- 1 small green mango
- 4 red chilli, deseeded
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 4 tablespoons white rice vinegar
- Sugar to taste

#### Method:

1. Peel green mango. Slice and roughly chop.
2. Remove seeds from red chilli. Cut each lengthwise into 4. Roughly chop.
3. Mix chopped mango, chilli and garlic in a serving bowl. Add rice vinegar.
4. Add sugar to taste. Stir well to dissolve.

**Note:** Keep extra dip in a glass bottle with screwtop cap. The flavour improves after a day or two. The vinegar helps balance the richness of the duck.

