

# BUSYCOOK Meals for the Family



## Sesame chicken

Here's an old family favourite which will find new fans

**WHEN** I was a kid, I used to love our visits to my granduncle's house at Ann Siang Hill. It was a quaint corner shophouse where a shoemaker occupied the ground floor and three families shared living quarters two floors above.

There were always lots of nooks and crannies to explore. And at dinner time, there was always my grandaunt's ginger sesame chicken.

She was the only one I knew who cooked this particular dish. I've never tasted it anywhere else, although I have been told that ladies in confinement are fed a version of this dish.

What makes this dish different is the amount of ginger used, and the sesame oil that's used to brown the chicken. The ginger juliennes smell wonderful when they are browned, and combines with the hot sesame oil to release a fragrance that will make your neighbours drool.

It is also a wonderful dish for family meals. The gravy will go first, because the slightly spicy sauce goes so well with white rice. It's a great booster for flagging appetites in hot weather.

I've adjusted the recipe to fit our more health conscious lifestyle by cutting down the oil.

I've also added whole garlic to the dish. The slightly caramelised cloves will ooze out of their skin with wholesome sweetness.

Much better than taking garlic pills.

Just a word of warning. Sesame oil has a relatively low burning point, so take care not to use too strong a flame. You should lower the fire as soon as you see the chicken browning and crisping at the edges.

I've added a few dried chillies to the dish, but you can leave them out if you have young children in the family. The dish will taste just as good.

The fresh shiitake mushrooms tend to soak up the flavours, so add more if you like them, but leave them out if you don't.

This dish is best served piping hot, with fluffy white rice, so for that reason alone, gather the clan at the dinner table.

Too often, we're caught sitting in front of the TV at the end of a long day. Dinner time should be a time for the family to sit down, talk and share. More often than not, this is probably the only time we get to share as a family.

We get busier, and our children, too, are getting busier. In spite of that, I think it's still true that the family that eats together, stays together. Do you think so? Drop me an e-mail.

### TIPS & TRICKS

SOME OF you have e-mailed me asking for more specific instructions on cooking times and seasoning. In my replies to you, I've explained that creating the perfect dish depends on your "tailoring" abilities.

We all have our food preferences, and I much prefer giving you guidelines instead of rules so you can adjust the recipes according to your family's tastebuds. Don't be afraid to do that.

I am always more than willing to share kitchen tips with you. Here are a couple.

#### SKINNING GARLIC

If you need minced garlic, separate the cloves and smash them with the side of a large cleaver. Using the sharp edge now, cut through the skin at the base of the clove and simply pull away. The skin will come off easily. Press down hard on the smashed garlic and give it a few quick chops. For today's recipe, simply cut off the top of the whole bulb, turn it around and cut off the bottom. You'll have neatly sectioned cloves.

#### FRYING GINGER

Rinse ginger slices and juliennes and dry them well if you don't want them clumping together in the frying pan. The "stickiness" in ginger is caused by its powdery residue.



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### Ginger and Garlic Chicken in Sesame Oil

- 20 cloves of garlic, topped and tailed
- 10 fresh shiitake mushrooms
- 6 slices of ginger, julienned (fine strips)
- 6 small dried chillies, leave whole
- 1 chicken, medium-sized, cut into pieces
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- 2 tablespoons sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon cornflour, 1 teaspoon dark soy sauce blended in 1 cup water

#### Method:

1. Wash and rinse chicken pieces. Drain and marinate with 1 teaspoon salt and a little pepper.
2. Remove all loose skin from garlic cloves. Cut straight across the top and bottom of the cloves, leaving them neatly sectioned.
3. Heat up canola oil in large frying pan. Add garlic cloves and stir fry over high heat for 2 minutes. Add ginger strips and continue to stir-fry until ginger

- browns and raises a fragrance. Add dried chillies.
4. Add the sesame oil, followed by the chicken pieces. Stir fry until chicken skin turns crisp at edges, about 5 minutes.
5. Add the cornflour and water mixture. Stir fry to mix well. Add mushrooms. Lower heat to a simmer for about 5 minutes or until chicken is cooked through. Salt to taste. Serve hot with rice.

#### SHOPPING GUIDE:

- 1 chicken (\$3.50)
- 2 whole bulbs garlic (\$0.30)
- 1 small piece ginger (\$0.50)
- 1 packet fresh shiitake mushrooms (\$1.50)
- (Rest of ingredients from your store cupboard)
- Total cost: about \$5.80

