

Szechuan Noodles with Peanut Sauce

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This is a classic Szechuan dish that's spicy, tangy, and not too sweet. The basics of the recipe come from Madhur Jaffrey's "World of the East Vegetarian Cooking," though I've varied a few things to my taste.

8 oz fresh Chinese egg noodles

2 tbs dark sesame oil

1/4 c plus 1 tbs shelled, salted roasted peanuts

1 clove garlic, peeled

1 tbs peanut oil*

1 tbs light soy sauce (NOT "lite" soy sauce!)

2 tsp Chinese black vinegar**

1 tsp sugar

Szechuan red chile paste to taste (I use about a tsp)

1 scallion

1 red banana chile (these look like Hungarian chiles, but are red and not very hot)

First, decide if you want to serve this hot or cold. For cold, boil the noodles until nearly done, then drain and quickly rinse with cold water (reserve a little of the cooking water). Plunge into ice bath, remove and drain. Toss with 1 tbs of the sesame oil and put aside while making sauce.

For hot noodles, make sauce first. Then boil noodles until done, drain well, toss with 1 tbs of the sesame oil, then the sauce.

To make sauce, put 1 tbs of the sesame oil, 1/4 c peanuts, the garlic, peanut oil, vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, and chile paste in a blender or food processor and puree to a smooth sauce. If the sauce looks too thick, add a little of the pasta water and process some more. Take the remaining peanuts and chop them with a knife. Chiffonade the scallions. Remove the core and seeds from the red chiles and cut them into fine strips. Pour sauce over noodles and toss, put in serving bowls, and top with scallion chiffonade, red chile strips, and chopped peanuts.

* It's worthwhile to use an intense peanut oil. My favorite is Lion & Globe.

** Black vinegar is the Chinese equivalent of balsamico, though much less sweet. My favorite is Chinkingiang. If you're stuck in an uncivilized place without Chinese groceries, like Montana, a substitute would be a 50/50 mixture of balsamic and cider vinegar. But please try to use the real thing.

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