

Hot and Sour Soup

Like so many classic dishes, hot and sour soup can be made with infinite variations, depending on preference, geography, and tradition. This relatively simple version relies on plain ol' white vinegar for a brisk, clean sour flavor. And do make a trip for white pepper; it's more fragrant and has quite a different flavor from black pepper.

Start by soaking the mushrooms and lily buds (you'll find both at an Asian supermarket); by the time you're done preparing the other ingredients, they'll be ready for you.

Also, I prefer to make this soup in a wok, because I find it easier to stir the eggs in at the end, but any old soup pot should work.

TIME: 40 minutes

MAKES: 4 to 6 servings

1/2 cup shredded cloud ear mushrooms (also known as black fungus)
1/4 cup lily buds
1/4 cup canned bamboo shoots, cut into 1/4" strips
4 ounces pork tenderloin
2 tablespoons soy sauce, divided
4 ounces tofu (about 1/4 package)
3 tablespoons cornstarch
3 tablespoons cold water
1 teaspoon sugar
2 teaspoons dark sesame oil
2 teaspoons canola oil
6 cups good chicken stock (homemade if possible)
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro
3 tablespoons white vinegar, or to taste
1/2 teaspoon ground white pepper, or to taste
1 large egg, beaten

Place the mushrooms, lily buds, and bamboo shoots in three separate small bowls. Add boiling water to cover each, and set aside for about 20 minutes to soak.

Meanwhile, slice the pork into 1/4" batons, mix with 1 tablespoon of the soy sauce, and set aside. Cut the tofu into 1/4" batons, and set aside as well. Blend the cornstarch, water, sugar, sesame oil, and remaining tablespoon soy sauce together with a fork in a small bowl until blended, and set that aside, too.

When the lily buds have softened, drain them, slice off the tough ends, and cut them in half once in each direction. Drain the mushrooms and bamboo shoots.

Heat a wok over high heat. When hot, add the canola oil, then the pork, and cook and stir until no pink remains, just a minute or two. Add the mushrooms, lily buds, and bamboo

shoots, and cook and stir for another minute. Add the chicken stock and tofu and bring to a simmer. Stir the cornstarch mixture, add it to the soup, and bring it back to a simmer, stirring occasionally until the soup looks a bit thicker and almost glossy. Remove the pan from the heat, stir in the cilantro, vinegar, and pepper, and taste for seasoning – you may want a bit more vinegar and/or pepper. Stir the mixture slowly, and drizzle the egg in (it will cook upon contact). Serve immediately.