

## Culinary 56

Chapter 56: Making Seasoning Oil! Want to eat Sour Soup Dumplings? No problem!

3:00 p.m.

After the lunch break, Master Gao arrived at the shop.

"Is everything ready for making the seasoning oil? Shall we start now?"

"Sure, Master. I'll start right after I finish frying the chicken feet."

Having just spent forty thousand points to exchange for the Qualified Level universal Seasoning Oil Technique that morning, he was eager to try it out and see if those forty thousand points were well spent.

The so-called seasoning oil is a type of fat-based condiment that combines various spices and the aromatic flavors of vegetables. In Chinese cooking, various specially made fats are often used. Examples include scallion oil for mixed noodles, red oil essential to Sichuan cuisine, and the chicken fat Lin Xu used for tomato egg noodles. Even the soy sauce used for steaming pork ribs and chicken feet, among others, falls into this category. Among these fat-based condiments, seasoning oil is the most widely used. Cooking techniques such as stir-frying, simmering, steaming, cold mixing, flash-frying, and deep-frying all depend on seasoning oil.

Although Master Gao said the method of making seasoning oil was simple, in reality, it was time-consuming and labor-intensive. Even for big restaurants, it was a major undertaking. This was because it wasn't just about throwing some ingredients and spices into a pot of oil to fry. The ratio of spices, the order in which ingredients are added, and so on, all required attention to detail.

On the workbench was a ten-pound bucket of peanut oil. This was the base oil for making the seasoning oil. Rapeseed oil has a low smoke point and produces a lot of smoke, making it unsuitable for long-term simmering. Soybean oil, on the other hand, has too mild a flavor. Hence, the best choice for making seasoning oil is peanut oil, which has a higher smoke point and a purer aroma.

Next to the peanut oil was a small basin of spices soaked in warm water. Warm water can help extract the medicinal properties and bitterness from the spices. This results in a better-tasting seasoning oil and effectively prevents these spices from burning in the oil.

Master Gao picked up the basin of soaked spices. He gently sifted through it with his hand, revealing a variety of spices: Sichuan peppercorns, star anise, bay leaves, cinnamon, tsao-ko, cardamom, Angelica dahurica, cloves, fennel, and more than a dozen other kinds. He singled out a piece of cinnamon and two tsao-ko. Only one clove remained, and he picked out the rest. Then, he added a handful of bay leaves and another of fennel.

"The more bay leaves and fennel, the better," he advised. "But cinnamon, tsao-ko, and cloves should be used sparingly; otherwise, the seasoning oil will taste bitter."

After speaking, he turned his attention to the vegetables. There was a small basket of cilantro with roots washed clean, a large basket of whole green onions, and a few stalks of celery with roots. Also, there were thick strips of purple onion, red onions cut in halves, thick slices of carrots, thick slices of ginger, and garlic cut in halves.

Master Gao pointed to the cilantro, green onions, and celery and said to Lin Xu, "Cut off the leaves of these three and put them together. The leaves don't withstand frying well and can burn easily if put in too early.

"Next time, don't remove the roots of the green onions; frying with roots gives a better aroma."

As soon as he finished speaking, a notification from the system rang out in Lin Xu's mind: "The host has received guidance from a State Banquet Master, and the Qualified Level universal Seasoning Oil Technique has automatically upgraded to the Excellent Level Technique. Congratulations to the host."

Huh? Such good luck?

He immediately picked up a kitchen knife, cut the leaves off the three vegetables, and put them into a large basket.

After frying the chicken feet, Lin Xu took out a standing soup barrel and placed it on the stove. He poured the bucket of peanut oil into it—GLUG GLUG GLUG—and turned up the heat to high. When frying seasoning oil, one can't add ingredients from the start. The oil must be heated to ten-tenths hot, around 240 degrees Celsius, to allow impurities and odors to evaporate. This results in a purer fat aroma.

After maintaining ten-tenths hot for about ten minutes, Master Gao said, "Turn off the heat, and wait for the oil temperature to drop to five-tenths hot before slowly adding the ingredients."

The fire for making seasoning oil cannot be too strong, nor can the oil temperature be too high. Keeping the oil in the pot at five to six-tenths hot and continuously simmering on a low flame helps extract the aromatic flavors from the ingredients and spices.

Once the oil temperature had reduced, Lin Xu followed Master Gao's instructions. He first put ingredients such as celery roots, the white part of green onions, carrots, red onions, and ginger slices—which are more resistant to frying—into the oil pot. As soon as he added them, the oil pot started to boil. Lin Xu carefully stirred with a spoon, trying his best to fry out the water from the ingredients.

Once the items in the pot were softened by frying, Lin Xu added in the cilantro roots, garlic, and half a basket of onion strips. The pot boiled once again. Once the ingredients had been fried until the moisture was reduced, he added the pre-soaked spices. The frying continued.

The aroma in the pot became even more intense. The fragrances of various vegetables and spices mixed together, filling the entire shop with an enticing aroma.

Panda, who was cutting eggplant, couldn't help but sniff. "It's so fragrant!" he exclaimed. "Just smelling this makes me feel like I could eat two big bowls of rice."

Song Tiantian, who was helping to peel garlic nearby, asked curiously, "Didn't the place you used to work at make seasoning oil?"

"They did," Panda replied, "but they used the cheapest salad oil and the offcuts from the kitchen. Not like our boss, who is not only skilled but also generous with ingredients. The seasoning oil he makes smells so clear and pure."

Song Tiantian, who had nothing better to do, struck up a conversation with him. "With such inferior substitutions, could the business even be good?"

Panda pushed the chopped eggplant into a nearby water basin with his kitchen knife. He then took two unchopped eggplants, placed them on the cutting board, and continued working as he spoke, "Good for nothing! Just yesterday, one of the chefs there asked if we were hiring, wanting to jump ship over here. But I turned him down."

"Why?"

"That chef specializes in roast meats, and we don't serve those here. If he came, he could only work as an assistant cook. Can you imagine him getting a head chef's salary for assistant cook work? That would be cheating our boss, wouldn't it?"

"Right, right, right, you did the right thing, Panda! We can't cheat the boss."

While the seasoning oil was being made, the exhaust fan in the shop was turned up high. Lin Xu did not hear this conversation between these two budding geniuses. Otherwise, he would have definitely thrown a frying pan over.

While everyone was busy with their tasks, Panda and Wu Kexin suddenly pushed the door and came in. Wu Kexin was holding the smartphone she used for live streaming. Meanwhile, Panda was carrying his own luggage bag, pulling Wu Kexin's trolley case, holding a small umbrella in one hand, and had Wu Kexin's bag hanging around his neck.

The grand number two on the leaderboard has become a little errand boy? Is this... a sign he's won her over?

After entering the shop, Wu Kexin took the bag from Panda's neck. "Thank you, Panda," she said. "You're all sweaty; there's tissue in my bag. You should wipe yourself off."

Upon hearing her say "thank you," Lin Xu knew this hadn't panned out. However, Wu Kexin apparently didn't dislike Panda; otherwise, she wouldn't have let Panda take things from her bag. Well, there's still hope.

"Boss Lin, what's there to eat?" Wu Kexin asked. "The meal boxes on the high-speed train were too awful. We came straight here after getting off. We thought there wouldn't be time to stream today, so we wanted to make up some streaming hours now to avoid fines from the platform."

At that moment, there really was nothing to eat in the shop. Other places might have leftover food or something. But at Lin Ji's Food, every meal was completely sold out, leaving nothing even for the staff to eat. But these two had just returned from Yinzhou, having been a great help to the local attractions. So, it would be wrong, both in terms of sentiment and reason, to let them go hungry.

Lin Xu said, "Nothing is ready in the shop yet, but we have some dumplings that my mom made in the fridge at home. If you two don't mind, we can cook some now."

At these words, both Panda and Wu Kexin showed surprised and delighted expressions. "Aunt Chen's dumplings? That's great! We've been addicted to Aunt Chen's cooking these past two days."

Panda took a small pack of Minions tissues from Wu Kexin's bag. Wiping his sweat, he said, "Can we make them into a sour soup? My mouth and throat are parched after the dry trip; I've been craving something with broth."

Buddy, shouldn't your focus be on Wu Kexin? Why are you making requests now?

Lin Xu was about to say, "Don't make things difficult for me..."

Just then, Master Gao, who was beside them, interjected, "Sour soup dumplings? No problem! You two haven't tried my cooking since your trip to Yinzhou. Let me give you a real treat today!"