

Culinary 99

Chapter 99: The Secret to Delicious Steamed Fish! An Unexpected Surprise! [Request for Monthly Ticket]

Lin Xu first dried the surface of the fish with kitchen paper. Then, he started marinating. He was not very familiar with steaming fish. However, he had watched many cooking videos before and knew the process of making Steamed Sea Bass. It was nothing more than marinating first, then steaming, and finally drizzling with Steamed Fish Sauce, sprinkling with scallion and ginger strips, and pouring a spoonful of hot oil over it.

After recalling the online method, he placed the fish in a bowl, drizzled it with Cooking Wine, then rubbed the outside and Fish Belly of the sea bass with scallion and ginger slices. Next, he divided the scallion and ginger, stuffing half into the Fish Belly and placing the other half on the fish.

Just as he finished marinating the fish, Grandpa Gao walked in, his hands clasped behind his back. For the past few days, the community had been holding activities to honor the elderly, and Grandpa Gao had been helping out. However, at every mealtime, he declined the community-provided lunch and strolled to the shop to eat.

Well, a boxed lunch is no match for a meal made by his apprentice.

"Eating fish today?" Grandpa Gao glanced at the marinated sea bass in the bowl and said to Lin Xu, "Next time, before marinating fish, remember to score the thick part of its back. It will help the fish steam more thoroughly."

Steaming fish is a dish that requires precise heat control. Sometimes, steaming for just one extra minute can greatly compromise the fish's tender and fresh texture. To ensure the fish cooks evenly, it is necessary to make cuts on the thicker parts of the flesh. Making the cuts is simple: just slice along the backbone, or use the tip of the knife to make incisions every three centimeters on the thicker parts.

"Grandpa Gao, why did the head chefs at the restaurants where I used to work always insist on keeping the sea bass intact, without making any cuts?" Niu Chuan, who was busy packing boxed lunches, asked curiously.

The others perked up their ears. This is like a masterclass from a State Banquet expert—not to be missed!

Grandpa Gao enjoyed it when young people asked questions. He smiled and said, "Because restaurant fish are usually small. To save costs, they purchase fish that are just over a pound. These are easy to marinate and steam. Importantly, there's not much meat on them, so customers only get a few bites before it's gone, unconsciously creating a longing for more... It's a little trick restaurants use to attract repeat customers."

Is that so?

"But for any large fish, if you want to steam it well, you must make cuts."

After marinating for eight or nine minutes, Lin Xu brought over a steaming plate. He placed a few large scallions and a pair of chopsticks on it to prop up the fish, making it easier for the steam to cook it through completely. He then removed the scallion and ginger from the marinated fish. Just as he was about to place it on the plate, Grandpa Gao suddenly reminded him, "Smear some pork lard on it before steaming."

Smear pork lard?

"Smearing a layer of pork lard not only enhances the fish's aroma but also locks in moisture to the maximum, making the fish flesh tastier and more tender." Grandpa Gao picked up a cup of Sour Plum Soup and took a small sip. "Actually, the best method is to wrap the fish in blanched pork caul fat before steaming. That would make the fish even more fragrant."

Pork caul fat? Can it really be used that way?

The shop's rendered lard was always made from Pork Lard. Lin Xu planned to ask Boss Hu for some pork caul fat next time he saw him and try steaming a fish with it.

Since his master recommended it, it must be a good method. After all, his master had worked at the Fishing Platform for a lifetime. The culinary skills and experience he possessed were far beyond what an ordinary chef could compare to. One could say that just a few tips from him could give many restaurants a foothold in the business.

Lin Xu held the sea bass, smeared a layer of pork lard on its surface, and then positioned the fish upright on the plate, ensuring a good presentation once steamed. He then placed scallion segments and ginger slices on the fish and put it into the steam cabinet to begin steaming.

Nearby, Grandpa Gao continued to share his experience with steaming fish. "The steam from a steam cabinet is more abundant," Grandpa Gao explained, "resulting in a more tender and delicious fish. If you don't have a steam cabinet, just add more water to a pot, bring it to a boil, and then steam the fish. In short, the secret to steaming fish is to shorten the steaming time as much as possible. The faster you steam the fish, the more tender, fresh, and delicious its texture will be."

Once the fish was steaming, the boxed lunches were almost all packed. Everyone washed their hands and started on the shop's other tasks, with the new temporary kitchen assistants also lending a hand.

Lin Xu grabbed some scallion, ginger, and a red beauty pepper, preparing to slice them into fine strips to sprinkle over the fish once it was done steaming. However, he realized something once he began cutting. The scallion was a bit limp, and its round shape made it difficult to cut into hair-thin strips.

Are my Knife Skills inadequate?

Grandpa Gao said, "Cut the white part and the green leaves of the scallion separately. For the white part, make a vertical incision and remove the Scallion Core. Then, roll up the remaining white part tightly. After rolling it, slice it, and you'll be able to cut fine strips."

I've learned something new!

Lin Xu immediately followed the instructions. The scallion strips he cut were indeed thin and long, and they even curled naturally, looking very attractive.

"Master, should I cut the scallion leaves the same way?"

"Yes, roll up the scallion leaves and cut them too. This way, when the hot oil is poured over, it will maximize the release of the scallion's fragrance and allow it to fuse into the fish flesh."

After preparing the scallion strips, Lin Xu also julienned some ginger and a few Red pepper strips. This would not only enhance the fish's flavor but also improve its visual appeal. Once these preparations were complete, Lin Xu began kneading dough.

Not long after, Grandpa Gao said, "The fish can be taken out now. It should be at its best."

So soon? It's only been about eight minutes, right?

Lin Xu put down the dough and went to the steam cabinet. He put on heat-resistant gloves. As soon as he opened the cabinet door, the unique savory aroma of the fish, combined with the rich scent of pork lard, wafted out. He took a deep breath.

This smell is incredible!

After he took out the plate, the Fish Skin had cracked open beautifully, revealing the tender white flesh inside. It looked utterly tantalizing. Following Grandpa Gao's instructions, Lin Xu poured out the steaming liquid that had collected in the plate, then removed the large scallions and chopsticks from underneath the fish. The liquid in the plate from steaming fish should be discarded. It carries a strong fishy odor as it's rendered from the fish during steaming. Moreover, any excess pork lard on the fish will melt and drip into this liquid. If not discarded, the fish flesh would be soaked in grease.

Then, he drizzled Steamed Fish Sauce over the fish and topped it with the prepared scallion and ginger strips. He heated some peanut oil and carefully spooned it over the scallion and ginger strips. The hot oil sizzled, releasing the aroma of these ingredients and further enhancing the flavor of the Steamed Fish Sauce.

And just like that, a delicious and aromatic Steamed Sea Bass was ready.

"Wow, this aroma is incredible!" Shen Jiayue stopped teasing the cat and scurried over, eager to eat.

At that moment, Lin Xu also received a system notification: "Host has made a Steamed Sea Bass that satisfies Shen Jiayue, completing the reward task [Fish Steaming]. Reward: one Superior Cooking Learning Card."

Awesome! I can use this Cooking Learning Card to learn another dish.

Just as Lin Xu was rejoicing, the system's notification sounded again: "Host has produced an Excellent Level Steamed Sea Bass on the first attempt. Fish Steaming Technique automatically advanced one level. Please continue to work hard, Host, and create more delicious meals."

Could things get any better?

Meanwhile, out on the street in front of the shop, a drowsy-looking Yue Liyue was accompanying a middle-aged man toward the shop.

"Son, why don't we just go to Yangcheng's Beijing office for a meal? The food there isn't bad. Dad came all this way to see you; you're not really taking me to a street stall, are you?"

The middle-aged man was Yue Liyue's father. He was in Beijing on a business trip and had taken the opportunity to visit his son. He had initially wanted to dine at an upscale restaurant, but his son insisted on going to a roadside eatery, claiming the Cantonese cuisine there was very authentic.

Authentic Cantonese food in Beijing? What a joke!

"You'll see when we get there. The dishes are absolutely fantastic," Yue Liyue said, pushing the shop door open.

His father was about to say something more when he suddenly caught a whiff of an exquisite aroma. His eyes instantly lit up...