

Bang Bang Crispy Chicken

Recipe courtesy of *SHEET PAN CHICKEN: 50 Simple and Satisfying Ways to Cook Dinner*.

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Sichuan cuisine is all about bringing big flavors—with dishes like kou shui ji, or “mouth-watering chicken” (sometimes translated as “saliva chicken” because of the way its numbing-hot spices make you drool) and guawei ji, or “strange flavor chicken” (again, a literal description of its curiously delicious spices). Another amazingly named chicken dish from China’s Sichuan Province is “bang bang chicken” (sometimes translated as “bon bon chicken”), but this time, the name describes the wooden stick used to bang on the chicken after it’s been cooked. Why bang on the chicken? It will help you quickly tear the chicken into delicate shreds. That shredded meat is placed in a serving dish, and a tangy, spicy, and slightly sweet sauce is poured over it, working its way into all the nooks and crannies and getting totally absorbed by the chicken. Bang Bang Chicken is typically made with poached or steamed chicken breasts. And sure, you could substitute boneless, skinless chicken breasts here, but I’d recommend any bone-in, skin-on chicken pieces, so you’ll get crispy skin as well as juicy meat and drippings to add to your sauce.

Serves 3 or 4

Ingredients

2 bone-in, skin-on chicken breasts or any other bone-in, skin-on piece

1 tablespoon toasted sesame oil

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon white pepper

For the sauce:

2 tablespoons Crispy Chile Oil (page 128), or more to taste

1 tablespoon Chinese sesame paste (optional)

1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil

1/4 cup soy sauce

1/4 cup Chinese black vinegar or red wine vinegar

2 tablespoons sugar

1 (1-inch) piece fresh ginger, peeled and julienned

Steamed rice; cooked Asian wheat noodles, soba noodles, or bean thread noodles; or shredded lettuce for serving

1 medium cucumber, peeled, seeded, and julienned

1/2 cup roasted peanuts, coarsely chopped (optional)

2 scallions, thinly sliced on a bias

1 cup cilantro leaves and tender stems, coarsely chopped

Preheat the oven to 450°F.

Rub the chicken with the sesame oil, salt, and white pepper. Gently slide your finger underneath the skin of each breast to loosen it from the meat a bit (this will encourage the skin to crisp up in the oven). Place the chicken on a sheet pan, skin-side up. Roast for 30 to 35 minutes, until the chicken skin is nicely crisped and a kitchen thermometer inserted into a breast registers 160°F.

Meanwhile, make the sauce: In a small bowl, combine the chile oil, optional sesame paste, sesame oil, soy sauce, vinegar, sugar, and ginger. Set aside.

Transfer the pan to a flat surface—one that's heat-proof or protected with hot pads. Slowly press down on each chicken piece with a rolling pin and roll along its length so the meat breaks and shreds apart a bit. If preferred, remove and discard the bones. Scrape the pan to collect any browned bits and juices and add them to your sauce.

Place the rice, noodles, or shredded lettuce in a large serving dish and set the banged-up chicken pieces on top; otherwise, put the chicken directly in the serving dish. Scatter the cucumber over the chicken, then pour the sauce all over. Top with the peanuts (if using), scallions, and cilantro and enjoy.

Crispy Chile Oil

If you've converted to spicy chile crisp cultdom thanks to Lao Gan Ma, a brand of the spicy, crunchy condiment with a dour-faced woman on its label, it's time to make it from scratch. When chile flakes, garlic, and shallots have just sweltered in hot oil, the toasty, spicy, salty flavors are on another level, and a little goes a long way. Try it out in the recipe for Bang Bang Crispy Chicken on page 27, where it's stretched out with vinegar and soy sauce, or just make a fresh batch whenever you're cooking something that can use a kick (every day?). I like to make this chile oil using the simple pour-over method; just be certain to use a vessel that's heatproof up to 500°F. Bakeware such as Pyrex and CorningWare is fine—but whatever you do, don't use just any random glass, as it will shatter (you can use a pot or pan, if you're nervous or unsure).

Makes about 1/2 cup

Ingredients

1 small shallot, sliced as thinly as you can (use a mandoline, if it helps)

1 large garlic clove, sliced as thinly as you can (use a mandoline, if it helps)

1 to 2 tablespoons red chile flakes (think 1 for medium heat, 2 for spicy heat)

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/2 cup neutral oil, such as grapeseed

Combine the shallot, garlic, chile flakes, and salt in a small heatproof bowl or a large heat-proof measuring cup (or in a small saucepan, if you're unsure if your bowl or measuring cup is heatproof). Heat the neutral oil in a saucepan over high heat for 2 to 3 minutes, until it is very hot and beginning to smoke. Carefully pour the hot oil over the chile flake mixture, standing away as it bubbles for several seconds. Cool for 10 minutes before using right away. Can be stored, covered in a jar and refrigerated, for up to 3 months.