

Szechwan Eggplant

Braised in a hot, savory broth, eggplant turns out soft and tender. A small amount of pork adds rich, meaty flavor to the sauce.

- ½ cup regular-strength chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon *each* sugar and vinegar
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Dash of pepper
- 1 large eggplant or about 3 Oriental eggplant (about 1¼ pounds *total*)
- 5 tablespoons salad oil
- ¼ pound ground pork
- 2 green onions (including tops), finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh ginger
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 2 teaspoons hot bean sauce or 2 small dried whole hot red chiles (crumbled and seeded, if desired)
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil

In a bowl, combine broth, sugar, vinegar, soy, salt, and pepper; set aside. Peel eggplant, if desired (don't peel Oriental eggplant); cut into strips 2 inches long and ½ inch thick.

Heat a wok or wide frying pan over medium-high heat. When pan is hot, add 3 tablespoons of the salad oil. When oil is hot, add eggplant and stir-fry for 3 minutes. (Eggplant will soak up oil immediately; stir continuously to prevent burning.) Remove from pan.

Heat remaining 2 tablespoons salad oil in pan. Add pork, onions, ginger, garlic, and bean sauce. Stir-fry until meat is no longer pink (about 2 minutes). Return eggplant to pan and pour in broth mixture; cover and cook over medium-low heat until eggplant is tender when pierced (about 6 minutes).

In a cup, stir together cornstarch and water. Pour into pan and cook, stirring, until sauce boils and thickens. Stir in sesame oil. Makes 4 servings.