

Extracted from *F*ck That's Hot!* by Billy Law, published by Smith Street Books, AU\$ 39.99.
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Sichuan-Style Eggplant

'Yu xiang' is a famous seasoning in Sichuan cuisine. Despite the term literally meaning 'fish fragrance' in Chinese, this popular eggplant dish actually contains no seafood. The harmonious balance of salty, sweet, sour and spicy in the sauce really makes the eggplant sing, making it so much more than just a naughty emoji.

Serves 4 as a side dish

3 long (about 600 g) Chinese eggplants
sea salt
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 teaspoon Sichuan peppercorns, coarsely crushed
2 bird's eye chillies, thinly sliced
2 tablespoons doubanjiang (see Note)
4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
2.5 cm knob of ginger, grated
1 spring onion (scallion), thinly sliced
handful of coriander leaves, roughly chopped (optional)
steamed jasmine rice, to serve

Yu xiang sauce

1 teaspoon light soy sauce
2 tablespoons Shaoxing rice wine
1 tablespoon Chinese black vinegar
2 teaspoons cornflour (corn starch)
1 tablespoon sugar

Cut the eggplants in half, then cut each half into quarters. Place the eggplant on a baking tray, skin side down, and lightly sprinkle salt over the top. Set aside for 20 minutes to allow the eggplant to sweat out some of its juices, then rinse and pat dry with paper towel.

Meanwhile, combine the yu xiang sauce ingredients in a small bowl. Set aside.

Heat the vegetable oil in a wok or large frying pan over high heat until smoking. Add the eggplant and stir-fry for 2–3 minutes, until the eggplant is soft and starting to brown on all sides. Add the Sichuan peppercorns, chilli, doubanjiang, garlic and ginger and stir-fry for 1 minute or until fragrant.

Give the yu xiang sauce a quick stir and pour over the eggplant. Reduce the heat to medium and gently stir until the eggplant is nicely coated in the sauce. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary. Simmer for 1 minute or until the sauce thickens and becomes glossy.

Transfer the eggplant to a serving dish, sprinkle over the spring onion and coriander leaves (if using) and serve with steamed jasmine rice on the side.

Note:

Doubanjiang is a fermented spicy broad bean paste widely used in Sichuan cuisine. Usually there are two types: spicy and non-spicy. Obviously we opted for the spicy version.