

Dim Sum, Anyone?

Written by Debbi Covington
Wednesday, 20 January 2010 12:43

Dim sum literally means “to the heart's content.” Dim sum are usually small and served as three or four pieces on one dish. Because of the small portions, you can try a wide variety of dishes – to your heart's content!



Delectable dim sum is a southern Chinese cuisine which is a light meal consisting of buns, dumplings and rice rolls filled with a wide range of ingredients. Dim sum can be cooked by steaming or frying. Many classical dim sum restaurants also offer small plates of steamed greens and roasted meats. Tea is always served! The drinking of tea is as important to dim sum as the food. The history of dim sum is fascinating! Travelers along the ancient Silk Road in China needed a place to rest so teahouses were established along the roadsides. Rural farmers, exhausted after working hard in the fields, would also go to teahouses for a relaxing afternoon of tea. At first it was considered inappropriate to combine tea with food because the Chinese people believed that this would lead to excessive weight gain. However, when they later discovered that tea could aid in digestion, teahouse owners began adding a variety of snacks --- and the tradition of dim sum evolved. Enjoying the flavors of small morsels of dim sum and sipping piping hot fragrant Chinese tea while chit-chatting with friends is considered one of the great enjoyments of life!

Asian Lettuce Wraps

1 head iceberg lettuce

1 tablespoon sesame oil

1 clove garlic, minced

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1 slice fresh ginger, minced

2 green onions, chopped

1 pound ground chicken

1 red pepper, seeded and diced

1 can water chestnuts, chopped

1 stalk celery, diced

1 teaspoon cornstarch mixed with 2 tablespoons water

For the sauce:

1 tablespoon light soy sauce

2 tablespoons oyster sauce

1 teaspoon dry sherry

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1 teaspoon sugar

Wash the lettuce, dry, and separate the leaves. Set aside. Mix together the sauce ingredients and set aside. Heat the sesame oil in a non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat. Add the garlic, ginger and green onions and stir-fry until the garlic and ginger are aromatic. Add the chicken and cook until the chicken is browned. Remove the chicken from the pan and set aside. Add the red pepper, water chestnuts and celery to the frying pan. Add the sauce and cook at medium heat. Stir the cornstarch/water mixture and add to the sauce, stirring to thicken. Add the chicken back into the pan. Cook for 2 to 3 more minutes, stirring, to heat through. Lay out a lettuce leaf and spoon a heaping teaspoon of the chicken mixture into the middle. The Asian Lettuce Wraps are designed to be eaten "taco-style," with the lettuce/chicken mixture folded into a package. Continue with the remainder of the lettuce leaves. Serves 4 to 6.

Crab Rangoon

8 ounces cream cheese, softened

8 ounces crab meat

1 teaspoon red onion, minced

1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

1/2 teaspoon soy sauce

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

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1 green onion, finely sliced

1 large clove garlic, minced

1 package wonton wrappers

1 small bowl water

Vegetable oil, for deep-frying

Combine the cream cheese and crab meat. Mix in the red onion, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, black pepper, green onion and garlic. On a flat surface, lay out a wonton wrapper. Add 1 teaspoon of the filling to the middle and spread it out to the left and right points of the wrapper so that the wrapper won't break during deep-frying. Fold over the edges of the wrapper to make a triangle. Wet the edges with water and press together to seal. Keep the completed Crab Rangoon covered with a damp towel to keep them from drying out while preparing the remainder. Heat oil for deep-frying, 360-374 degrees. Deep-fry Crab Rangoon until they are golden brown, about 3 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain. Serve with sweet and sour sauce or Chinese hot mustard. Makes 48.

Shrimp and Pork Siu Mai Dumplings

1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined

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1/2 pound ground pork

1 green onion, finely chopped

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 (2-inch) piece fresh ginger, grated

2 egg whites

2 teaspoons cornstarch

2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon sesame oil

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

1 (10-ounce) package round wonton wrappers

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Vegetable oil, for brushing the steamer

Cabbage leaves, for lining the steamer, optional

To make the shrimp filling: Pulse shrimp, pork, green onion, garlic, ginger, egg whites, cornstarch, lemon juice, soy sauce and sesame oil in a food processor until partly smooth but not completely pureed. It should have a little texture. Season with salt and pepper. To assemble dumplings: Hold a wonton wrapper in your hand. Dip a spoon in cold water and then drop 1 tablespoon of the filling onto the center of a wrapper (dipping the spoon in cold water will make the filling come off easier.) Gather the edges of the wrapper up around the filling and squeeze the sides slightly with your fingers. The sides will naturally pleat, leaving the filling slightly exposed. Tap the dumpling on the table so the bottom is flat and it stands upright. Repeat with the remaining wrappers and filling. Lightly oil the bottom of a 10-inch bamboo steamer and line it with whole cabbage leaves. Stand the dumplings in the steamer in a single layer. Don't let them touch each other. (You should be able to get 12 in the steamer at a time.) Bring 1 to 2 inches of water to boil in a pot. Set the bamboo steamer over the pot, then cover it with the bamboo lid. Steam for 10 to 12 minutes or until the filling feels firm and is cooked through. Serve it with soy sauce for dipping. Makes 36 dumplings.

Teriyaki-Glazed Pork Spare Ribs

1 rack pork spareribs, trimmed of excess fat

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1/2 cup Chinese five-spice powder

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2 tablespoons white sesame seeds

Cilantro leaves, chopped

Green onion, thinly sliced

For the teriyaki glaze:

1 cup low-sodium soy sauce

1 cup fresh grapefruit juice

1/4 cup hoisin sauce

3 tablespoons ketchup

2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar

1 fresh red chile, split

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 (2-inch) piece fresh ginger, cut into 1-inch coins

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Preheat oven to 300 degrees. Cut spareribs in half, through the bone, so you have 2-inch length riblets. Mix the salt and pepper in a small bowl with the five-spice powder. Rub the mixture all over the ribs and arrange the ribs in a single layer in a roasting pan and slow-roast for 2 hours.

To make teriyaki glaze: In a pot, combine the soy sauce, grapefruit juice, hoisin sauce, ketchup, rice wine vinegar, chile, garlic and ginger over medium heat. Bring to a slow simmer and cook, stirring, until thickened, about 20 minutes. Reserve 1 cup of glaze in a small bowl and set aside. During the last 30 minutes of cooking, baste the ribs with the glaze. When they are done, the meat will start to pull away from the bone. Just before serving, baste the ribs with more glaze and place them under the broiler for 5 minutes to make the spareribs a crusty brown. Separate the ribs with a sharp knife, cutting at every second rib so there are 2 bones per piece. Serve ribs on a platter with the reserved glaze. Garnish with sesame seeds, chopped cilantro and green onion. Serves 4 to 6.

Beef and Cabbage Egg Rolls

1 pound lean ground beef

1 onion, thinly sliced

1 clove garlic, minced

4 tablespoons soy sauce, divided

1 teaspoon salt, divided

1 teaspoon black pepper, divided

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4 tablespoons sherry, divided

1 tablespoon fresh minced ginger

1 large head cabbage, finely shredded

1/4 cup water

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

1 teaspoon sugar

1 (16-ounce) package egg roll wrappers

Vegetable oil, for deep-frying

Bottled duck sauce

In a large skillet, over medium-high heat, brown beef. Drain well and return to skillet with onion, garlic, 2 tablespoons soy sauce, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon pepper, 2 tablespoons sherry and 1 tablespoon ginger. Saute until onions are tender. Transfer mixture to a bowl and set aside. In the same skillet, sauté cabbage with 1/4 cup water, 1 tablespoon vegetable oil, 1

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teaspoon sugar, 2 tablespoons soy sauce, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon pepper and 2 tablespoons sherry. Saute until cabbage is crisp-tender, about 5 minutes. Return beef mixture to pan and stir together with cabbage over low heat until heated through. Remove from heat. Fill each egg roll wrapper with approximately 1/4 cup of filling and roll up according to package directions. Heat vegetable oil to 350 degrees. Fry in preheated oil until golden brown. Drain on paper towels and serve with duck sauce for dipping. Makes 16 egg rolls.

Shrimp Toast

8 ounces fresh shrimp, peeled and deveined

1 large egg

1 egg white

2 tablespoons minced green onion (green parts only)

2 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley

1 teaspoon minced garlic

1/2 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon freshly ground white pepper

3 ounces cream cheese, softened

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1/4 cup heavy cream

8 slices white bread

Butter, softened

Combine shrimp, egg, egg white, green onions, parsley, garlic, salt and white pepper in a food processor and process until blended but still slightly chunky. Add the cream cheese and pulse until smooth and thick. Add the cream and pulse just until blended, being careful not to over-process. Spread 1/4 cup of the shrimp mixture onto 4 slices bread, spreading to the edges. Top with remaining 4 slices of bread. Spread softened butter lightly on each side of filled bread slices. Cut into quarters, diagonally. Heat a large skillet over medium high heat. Cook the Shrimp Toast in batches until golden on the first side, 2 to 2-1/2 minutes. Turn and cook until golden on the second side, about 1-1/2 minutes. Makes 16.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com. She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com.