

RV GODDESS: Sanbeiji | Three Cup Chicken

Originating from a southern Chinese province, the Taiwanese brought Sanbeiji across the Strait of Formosa and made it their own. The title of the recipe translates to Three Cup Chicken (san=three, bei=cup or glass, ji=chicken), as there are three sauce ingredients – soy sauce, sesame oil and rice wine – measured equally. Sanbeiji (pronounced san-bay-gee) is house food, local-joint food, night market food, something your grandma would make, something enjoyed in the countryside – often made with rabbit. It is one of the most popular dishes in Taiwan. Star anise is available in the bulk spice section of your local hippy grocer. And just use any inexpensive dry sherry – but don't use cooking sherry.

1/3 cup soy sauce
1/3 cup toasted sesame oil
1/3 cup dry sherry (or Chinese rice wine) (I use sherry)
1 Tablespoons sugar
2 pieces star anise
1 teaspoon ground Szechuan (or black) peppercorns
2 teaspoons dried chili flakes
Peanut or vegetable oil
5 cloves garlic, peeled and sliced
2 inch knob of ginger, peeled and sliced into 1/4-inch-thick matchsticks
1.25 pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, each thigh cut into 4 or 6 pieces
1 cup, loose-pack fresh basil leaves (Thai basil, if you can find it), do not chop
3 green onions, green part only, cut into 2-inch pieces

Steamed rice, to accompany

Mix the soy sauce, toasted sesame oil, rice wine or sherry and sugar into a small bowl or glass measuring cup. Set aside. Place the star anise, ground pepper, and dried chili flakes together in a small bowl. Set aside.

Heat a heavy large skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat. Coat the bottom lightly with peanut or vegetable oil. Add the garlic and ginger and sauté for a minute or two. Do not let the garlic burn. Add the chicken and stir-fry to brown, another two or three minutes. Pour the soy sauce mixture carefully over all (it will bubble), add the dried spices and stir well. Bring to a simmer and cook, uncovered, on a low heat, stirring occasionally, until sauce is nearly cooked away, about 20-25 minutes. Add the basil and green onion, stirring to coat. Remove star anise, discard. Use a slotted spoon to transfer to a platter, discard any remaining sauce. Serve immediately, with steamed rice. Serves 4.