

**KAH-POW! CHICKEN §**

Kung Pow (or Gong Bao or Kung Po) Chicken is a classic dish in the Sichuan (or Szechuan or Szechwan) cuisine that has become a staple throughout Asia and the western world. The original recipe called for diced chicken in a marinade, seasoned with chile peppers, flash fried in oil with Sichuan peppercorns for fragrance, and then stir fried with vegetables and peanuts. The name translates into English as “Palace Guardian,” and is attributed to a governor of the Sichuan Province during the third quarter of the nineteenth century.

Western versions of the dish are very different, especially in the United States, partially due to the import ban on Sichuan peppercorns until 2005. However, even since becoming available, most American Kung Pao recipes still skip this ingredient. They do still retain the “hot and numbing” flavor of chile peppers, and it is from this attribute that the recipe below derives its name. Someday, perhaps, I’ll include the peppercorns to see what improvement they offer.

**Chicken And Marinade**

2 tbsp lower-sodium soy sauce  
 2 tbsp oyster sauce  
 2 tbsp Chinese rice wine or dry sherry  
 1 tsp toasted sesame oil  
 1 tsp cornstarch  
 1 lb chicken thighs, skinned and boned, in 1” cubes

**Sauce**

¼ cup low-sodium chicken broth  
 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar  
 2 tbsp lower-sodium soy sauce  
 1 tbsp oyster sauce  
 1 tsp toasted sesame oil  
 2 tsp “sugar”  
 1 tsp crushed garlic  
 1 tsp cornstarch

**Spices**

olive oil spray  
 1 tsp toasted sesame oil  
 1 tsp fresh grated ginger  
 1 tsp crushed garlic  
 ½ cup shelled unsalted cashews or peanuts  
 8 dried small dried red (kah-pow!)chiles  
 ¼ tsp crushed red pepper flakes  
 ½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

**Vegetables**

2 cups broccoli florets, in 1” pieces  
 1 red bell pepper, in ½” slices  
 1 (5-oz) can sliced bamboo shoots  
 2 stalks celery, cut diagonally ½”  
 4 scallions, cut diagonally ½”

In a medium bowl, stir together the marinade ingredients until the cornstarch is dissolved. Add the chicken and stir gently to coat. Refrigerate for half an hour.

In another bowl, assemble the sauce ingredients. Stir until the “sugar” and cornstarch are dissolved and set aside.

Spray a wok or large skillet with olive oil and set over high heat until a bead of water sizzles and evaporates on contact. Add the spices and stir-fry for about 30 seconds, or until the chilies have just begun to blacken and the oil is slightly fragrant. Add the chicken and stir-fry until no longer pink, 2 to 3 minutes. Note: Be sure to turn on the stove’s exhaust fan, because stir-frying dried chilies on high heat can get a little smoky and irritate the eyes.

Add the vegetables and stir-fry for another 2 minutes. Pour in the sauce and mix to coat the other ingredients. Bring the pan to a boil, turning ingredients to evenly distribute the heat, until the cornstarch thickens. Transfer to a serving plate, sprinkle the scallion greens on top, and serve.

Serves 4 – 6