Sauces / China

# Dan Dan Noodle Sauce

The addictive sesame-chili sauce that defines Sichuan street noodles — rich tahini and chili crisp swirled into a pork-and-ya-cai topped bowl with a slow-building ma-la tingle.

**Time** 30 min **Servings** 4

## What you'll need.

- ☐ 3 parts Chinese sesame paste or well-stirred tahini
- ☐ 2 parts Soy sauce
- ☐ 2 parts Hot noodle cooking water
- ☐ 0.25 parts Sichuan peppercorns, toasted and finely ground
- ☐ 1 parts Yibin ya cai (Yibin pickled mustard greens), rinsed and chopped
- ☐ 1 parts Neutral oil
- ☐ 2 parts Chili crisp (la jiao you)
- ☐ 1 parts Chinese black vinegar (Chinkiang)
- ☐ 0.5 parts Garlic cloves, minced to a paste
- ☐ 2 parts Ground pork
- ☐ 0.5 parts Doubanjiang (Pixian chili bean paste)
- ☐ 0.5 parts Scallions, thinly sliced (for serving)

## Let's make it.

**01** Combine the sesame paste, chili crisp, soy sauce, black vinegar, minced garlic, and ground Sichuan peppercorn in a bowl. Add the hot noodle cooking water (or hot water) a little at a time and whisk vigorously — sesame paste seizes initially when liquid is added and may look broken and grainy before it comes together. Keep whisking and adding hot water until the sauce is completely smooth, glossy, and flows in a thick, pourable ribbon from the whisk. The finished sauce should be about the consistency of heavy cream — thin enough to coat noodles evenly but not watery. The black vinegar gives brightness and a faint wine-dark complexity that rice vinegar alone cannot provide.

**02** Heat the neutral oil in a wok or skillet over high heat until smoking. Add the ground pork and cook without stirring for 60–90 seconds, pressing it flat, until the underside is deeply browned and caramelized. Break up the meat and continue cooking until all the pink is gone and the pork is in crumbled, well-browned bits with some crispy edges. Add the doubanjiang and stir-fry for 1 minute until the chili paste coats the pork and turns everything a vivid red. Add the rinsed ya cai and stir to combine — the pickled greens will sizzle in the hot fat. Cook together for 1–2 minutes until the ya cai is heated through and fragrant. The topping should be intensely savory, slightly oily, and fragrant.

**03** Divide the sesame sauce evenly between serving bowls. Cook fresh or dried wheat noodles in well-salted boiling water until just tender, drain (reserving cooking water if not done already), and divide among the bowls, placing them directly on top of the sauce without stirring. Mound the pork-ya cai topping in the center of each bowl of noodles. Drizzle additional chili crisp over the top, scatter sliced scallion, and dust with a pinch more ground Sichuan peppercorn. Serve immediately — the noodles should be placed over the sauce rather than the sauce poured over the noodles, so the diner experiences the visual composition before stirring everything together at the table.

**04** After the diner stirs the bowl, instruct them to taste and self-season from condiments at the table: additional chili crisp for more heat and crunch, a few more drops of black vinegar for brightness and acid, a pinch of sugar if the heat is overwhelming, or a few drops of sesame oil if the noodles feel dry. This final open seasoning is traditional — a good dan dan noodle bowl should be adjusted by the eater to their own preference of heat and numbing. The sauce as built is the balanced midpoint; the table condiments push it to the individual. The dish is finished when every noodle strand is coated in sauce and the diner can feel the slow-building ma-la tingle spreading from the center of the tongue outward.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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