Sauces / Ghana

Shito

Ghana's famous black pepper sauce — ground dried shrimp and chiles slowly fried down in oil until deep mahogany and intensely savory, one of the most punishingly umami condiments on earth.

Time 45 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 80 g Dried shrimp (small, sun-dried)
- ☐ 60 g Dried herrings or smoked mackerel, de-boned
- ☐ 40 g Dried red chiles (cayenne, bird's eye, or Ghana peppers)
- ☐ 200 g Red onion, roughly chopped
- ☐ 6 cloves Garlic cloves
- ☐ 30 g Fresh ginger, peeled, roughly sliced
- ☐ 240 ml Neutral vegetable oil (canola or sunflower)
- ☐ 60 g Tomato paste
- ☐ 120 ml Stock or water
- ☐ 6 g Fine sea salt

Let's make it.

01 Break the dried shrimp and de-boned dried fish into small pieces. Working in batches, grind them in a spice grinder, food processor, or high-speed blender until they are a coarse, dry powder — not a paste, not a flour, but a textured, fragrant powder roughly the consistency of coarsely ground coffee. Spread the finished powder on a plate and check for any remaining bone fragments from the dried fish before proceeding. The powder will smell intensely of the sea.

02 If using whole dried chiles, rehydrate them in warm water for 15 minutes, then drain. Combine the rehydrated or dried chiles (a small amount of soaking water is fine), red onion, garlic, and ginger in a blender or food processor. Blend to a coarse, brick-red paste — not completely smooth, but no large chunks remaining. A mortar and pestle produces a more textured paste if time allows.

03 Heat the oil in a wide, heavy-bottomed skillet or wok over medium heat until shimmering but not smoking. Add the chile paste all at once — it will spatter and hiss dramatically. Stand back and reduce heat to medium-low immediately. Fry the paste, stirring constantly with a long-handled spoon, for 15–20 minutes. The paste must fry — not simmer — in the oil: you want active frying sounds (a continuous, lively crackle) not a gentle gurgle. The paste will progressively darken from brick-red to a deep, dark maroon.

04 Add the seafood powder to the dark fried paste and stir vigorously to combine. The powder will absorb some of the oil and the mixture will seize slightly and become a thick, dark mass. Continue frying for 5-7 more minutes, stirring constantly. The seafood powder will toast in the residual oil, intensifying its marine flavor and developing a nutty, roasted depth. The mixture will smell powerfully savory — nearly overwhelming at close range.

05 Add the tomato paste and stir it vigorously into the fried paste mixture, frying for 2 minutes to cook the tomato paste and deepen its color. Add the stock or water and stir well to incorporate. Raise the heat to medium and fry-reduce the mixture, stirring constantly, for another 5-8 minutes until the stock has cooked off and the oil is again visibly separating from the solids. The finished shito should be loose enough to spoon but thick enough to mound. Season with salt. Cool completely before storing in sterilized jars covered generously with oil. Keeps refrigerated for 3-4 weeks.

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