Main dishes / China

Sichuan Mapo Tofu

Silken tofu trembling in a scarlet, numbing-hot sauce of fermented black beans, doubanjiang, and Sichuan peppercorns — the mala (numbing-spicy) combination is not a flavor but an experience, a slow tingle that builds across the lips and tongue.

Time 35 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 400 g Silken tofu, cut into 2 cm cubes
- ☐ 100 g Ground pork (or beef)
- ☐ 40 g Doubanjiang (Pixian broad bean chili paste)
- ☐ 20 g Fermented black beans (douchi), roughly chopped
- ☐ 5 g Sichuan peppercorns, toasted and ground
- ☐ 15 g Garlic, minced
- ☐ 10 g Fresh ginger, minced
- ☐ 250 g Chicken or vegetable stock
- ☐ 30 g Neutral oil
- ☐ 20 g Cornstarch dissolved in water (2:1 water:starch)
- ☐ 20 g Green onion, sliced

Let's make it.

01 Gently lower the silken tofu cubes into lightly salted simmering water for 2 minutes. This step firms the exterior slightly so the tofu survives the subsequent braising without disintegrating, and seasons the interior. Remove with a slotted spoon to a plate — do not drain aggressively.

02 Heat oil in a wok or wide skillet over high heat until smoking. Add the ground pork and cook without stirring for 1 minute, then break up and stir-fry until the pork is browned and the fat has rendered. The pork should be slightly crispy at the edges. Remove from the wok with a slotted spoon, leaving the rendered fat behind.

03 In the fat remaining in the wok, add doubanjiang, fermented black beans, garlic, and ginger. Stir-fry over medium-high heat for 2–3 minutes, stirring constantly. The doubanjiang will turn the oil a deep, vivid red — this is the sa xiang (fragrance-releasing) step, where the fat-soluble capsaicin and fermented compounds extract into the oil. The kitchen should smell powerfully of chili and fermented bean. Return the pork.

04 Pour the stock into the wok and stir to combine. Bring to a boil, then gently slide the tofu cubes in. Do not stir aggressively — ladle the sauce over the tofu or tilt the wok to distribute. Simmer for 5 minutes until the tofu has absorbed the flavors of the sauce and the liquid has slightly reduced. The sauce should be thin enough to flow but rich enough to coat.

05 Stir the cornstarch slurry and pour it in a slow circle into the simmering sauce while gently shaking the wok. The sauce will thicken to a glossy, coating consistency within 30 seconds. Taste and adjust soy sauce or doubanjiang. Transfer to a serving bowl, dust generously with ground Sichuan peppercorn, and scatter green onion.

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