



Crisp Octopus with Prickly Ash

The Chinese double cooking method of poaching or braising then frying is rarely used with seafood due to its delicate texture. The exception is octopus, which can be tough if not cooked correctly; large octopus tentacles benefit greatly from this technique, but it also works well with baby octopus. Prickly ash made from roasted Sichuan peppercorns and salt, is a natural partner for any deep-fried seafood including prawns, squid and octopus, as well as for tofu.

Serves 2



INGREDIENTS

- 400g baby octopus, cleaned
- 1 tablespoon crushed yellow rock sugar
- Tapioca starch, for dusting
- Vegetable oil, for deep-frying
- ¼ baby cos lettuce
- Prickly Ash, for sprinkling – link to recipe in Basics

Poaching Liquid

- 3 cups water
- 300ml soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
- 1 green onion, halved and bruised
- 2 slices peeled ginger, halved
- 1 star anise
- 1 piece dried mandarin peel (about 6g)
- ¼ teaspoon Sichuan peppercorns
- 1 small dried red chilli, broken

METHOD

1. Make Poaching Liquid: Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and bring to the boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes.
2. Place octopus in the Poaching Liquid and return to the boil.
3. Reduce heat, place a saucer on top of the octopus to keep it submerged, and simmer for 30 minutes.
4. Stir in rock sugar and simmer for a further 5 minutes.
5. Remove from heat, remove saucer and set octopus aside in the Poaching Liquid until cool.
6. Strain and cut into 2 or 3 pieces depending on size.
7. Heat oil over medium heat.
8. Place tapioca starch in a shallow bowl, add octopus and toss to coat well. Shake off excess and set octopus aside on a plate.
9. Working in batches if necessary, deep-fry octopus for 1½ minutes.
10. Remove from oil to a paper towel-lined rack.
11. When all octopus is cooked, increase heat to high.
12. When oil is almost smoking, return all the octopus to the oil and cook for a further minute or so, until well-coloured.
13. Drain on paper towel on a rack over a plate.
14. Arrange lettuce leaves on a platter, top with octopus, sprinkle with Prickly Ash and serve.