



EVAN SUNG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Vegetables Dressed In Chinese Robes

OYSTER sauce, the gooey brown condiment often used as the only seasoning for steamed greens in many Chinese restaurants, can taste pretty good. Admittedly this isn't the most nuanced way to cook Chinese-like food at home, but buying the right stuff really helps.

The idea is to avoid oyster sauce made entirely with artificial ingredients. Look for one that contains at least a hint of oysters ("oyster extract" is common) and no MSG.

Decent oyster sauce can lend a strong, briny taste to almost anything, especially greens like steamed bok choy

or gai lan (Chinese broccoli). I'm partial to adding mushrooms, especially with bok choy, whose stems become creamy when cooked long enough. For flavor's sake, I'd also rather stir-fry than steam.

Here, I've paired both dried and fresh shiitakes; I cook the dried along with the bok choy (and garlic, of course) while crisping the fresh separately and serving them as a garnish.

Nothing is wasted: I use the mushroom soaking liquid to give the bok choy a flavor boost. Still, what really pulls this together is the oyster sauce, added at the end of cooking. It's a not-so-secret ingredient that turns a simple dish into something more.

BOK CHOY WITH SHIITAKES AND OYSTER SAUCE

Time: About 20 minutes

- 1/4 cup dried shiitake mushrooms**
- 1 1/2 pounds bok choy, trimmed**
- 1/4 cup peanut oil**
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic (optional)**
- 1 cup fresh shiitake mushrooms, cleaned, trimmed and sliced**
- 1/2 to 3/4 cup commercial oyster sauce.**

1. Soak shiitakes in one cup of very hot water until tender, about 15 minutes. Drain, reserving liquid. Trim mushrooms and chop. Separate leaves and stems of bok choy; cut stems into 2-inch lengths and slice leaves into ribbons.

2. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a wok or large skillet over high heat. When oil is hot, add

bok choy stems, garlic if you are using it, reconstituted mushrooms, and about 1/4 cup reserved mushroom water. Cook, stirring frequently, until stems are crisp-tender, about 4 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, in a small skillet heat remaining 2 tablespoons oil; sauté fresh shiitake mushrooms over medium-high heat. Continue cooking until they begin to brown and crisp on edges.

4. Into the large skillet or wok, add bok choy leaves and oyster sauce and toss vegetables gently to combine; continue cooking until greens wilt, about 2 more minutes. Serve immediately, topped with crisp mushrooms.

Yield: 4 servings.