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Mrs. Chiang's Szechwan Cookbook

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Szechwan Home Cooking



Ellen Schrecker
with John Schrecker



Synopsis

When published in 1976, "Mrs. Chiang's Szechwan Cookbook" was the first authentic Szechwan cookbook to appear in the United States. The book was the result of Ellen and John Schrecker studying Chinese culture in Taiwan, during which they met Mrs. Chiang Jung-feng, a superb Chinese Szechwan cook. The tastes and textures of her dishes were always clear and bright. She was a master of the "zhen wer" or true taste; the result of continual care, attention to detail and practice. Subsequently, Mrs. Chiang came home with them to New Jersey. Szechwan cooking is a highly spiced, yet subtle cuisine. Although the recipes in the book are considered peasant food "good hearty home cooking" even the poorest peasants eat extraordinary food, giving them the nickname of "good-eating devils." The book contains Chiang Jung-feng's childhood memories of her mother's fragrant Szechwan kitchen that evoke the spirit as well as the taste of home cooking. Her mother was a superlative cook who understood very well that her daughter's fortune depended on her skill in the kitchen and taught her well. Their household raised most of their own food, butchered their own pigs, and made their own soy sauce and vinegar. The book was written by Ellen Schrecker, the hundreds of recipes were by Chiang Jung-feng and tested in the Schrecker New Jersey kitchen, and translation was provided by John Schrecker.

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Customer Reviews

I am ethnic Chinese, but we grew up on spaghetti and tacos. My only memories of home-cooked Chinese food were the two years my grandmother lived with us when I was a teen. Nevertheless, she set the standard for me in the area of Chinese home cooking. I bought this book when I graduated from college 27 years ago, my first cookbook and one of the first non-textbooks I bought--at full price, no less. It was a big investment for someone neck-deep in student loans, but I knew enough to recognize authenticity when I saw it. I literally learned to cook Chinese food using Mrs. Chiang's book. The recipes turn out dishes that taste just like my grandmother's did. I have since bought many other books on Chinese cooking, but none have been as reliable or authentic as Mrs. Chiang's. The only thing I alter is the amount of oil called for.

I bought this book 20 years ago, and many Chinese cookbooks later, am here to advise you that this is the best Chinese cookbook ever! When I started cooking from this book, I stopped eating out at Chinese restaurants because the food I could produce at home was so much better. Cooking techniques are described in exacting detail. You simply cannot go wrong if you make a reasonable effort to follow the recipes.

I bought this book when it first came out in 1976...it is simply the best cookbook of its kind ! Whether you are a novice or an expert in "szechwan cooking"...this book has something for you. The "Grand Duke Chicken" is food for the God's...I added green beans to her wonderful "red cooked shrimp". Want a dish that has the delicate flavor of butter (but no butter) try the "Shrimp with ginger and wine" * if you can get fresh crawfish tails it will be even better !

I bought Mrs. Chiang's Szechuan Cookbook when it first came out. It immediately became and remains my favorite Chinese cookbook. In fact, I have used it so much that I have worn it out! I take good care of my books, but years of kitchen use have put numerous stains on the pages and have broken the binding, never mind the total destruction of the dust cover! I have given this book as gifts to several friends who have enjoyed my Chinese meals (based on this book), and they are using it too. You can also get Szechuan Home Cooking. It is just a later edition of the same book, and the only changes are in the introductory material. Do yourself a favor and get this fabulous book before it disappears forever. By the way, I finally replaced my worn-out copy, but have kept the old one

stored sentimentally alongside--it's full of notes, like "excellent recipe", "Marc [husband] raves", "fabulous and easy."

I adore Chinese food and have had a great deal of on-the-spot experience with all regions of Chinese cuisine. Szechuan (Szechwan, Sichuan), is a landlocked province in Western China that has some of the most distinctive food in China (and also the most poorly represented in US Chinese Restaurants, slightly less so in the UK). There are (to my knowledge) three authentic Szechuan cookbooks available in English: Mrs. Chiang's Szechwan Cookbook, The Good Food of Szechwan (by Robert Delfs), and more recently Fuchsia Dunlop's Land of Plenty. All three are excellent. Mrs. Chiang's, despite its age, is (as one reviewer already mentioned) the Szechuan equivalent of Julia Child's Mastering the Art.... There is nothing she neglects to address, and her recipes are foolproof! You think you like Szechuan food now? After cooking from this book, you'll become addicted! For those who really want to get steeped in Szechuan's cuisine, I recommend getting all the three cookbooks mentioned above. The Robert Delfs book (The Good Food of Szechwan) is not the easiest to find, but I've been cooking from it for 30 years or so and everything has turned out wonderfully. The Dunlop book, too, is very authentic, very thorough and I definitely recommend it as well. My only caveat regarding Land of Plenty is, like most contemporary cookbooks, it's a bit too 'scientific' for my taste. Cooking is a lively art and the general tendency is to make cookbooks too scientific. I'm not by any means against detailed recipes, even some hand-holding, but I don't want to know so much of the 'why', I'd rather know what to look for and when. But that's a personal quibble. Buy all three of these Szechuan cookbooks and you'll be very happy indeed.

We've been cooking Chinese food one to five times per week for 25 years, and most of it according to Mrs. Chiang. The first copy fell apart from use. I will miss the easy opening to favorite dishes and the memorabe stains, but enough is enough. We have about 30 Chinese cookbooks and use all of them from time to time but Mrs. Chiang's cookbook has staying power, helpful hints, reliable recipies, and a wide range of cooking styles.

Mrs. Chiang tells a brief story from her childhood on a Szechuan farm about each one of the recipes, recounting how her mother prepared it. Without exception, single dish I have tried from this book has been excellent. Includes well-written "how to" info on many techniques.

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