

Recipe Edit for Vegetarian Soup Dumplings

Friends, I screwed up on a recipe in my new book *Vegetarian Chinese Soul Food*. While the headnote for the soup dumplings recipe on page 95 talks about using agar agar to make the gelatin for the filling, the ingredient list and instructions call for Knox gelatin, which is not a vegetarian product. I did not catch this mistake in the copy editing process. My intention was to offer Knox as an alternative for those who are not vegetarian/vegan. I regret this error. The recipe that follows is edited to include the correct ingredient. Future reprints of the book will include the correction. – Hsiao-Ching Chou

Soup Dumplings

Makes about 40 soup dumplings

Soup dumplings (aka xiao long bao or XLB) have been enjoying a fervent following in the United States in the last few years. There have been many debates about which restaurants have the best-quality soup dumplings. Traditionally, the filling consists of pork and the juicy broth that starts as a gelatin when mixed into the filling and melts when steamed. Here, we have a tofu-based filling and a simple vegetable broth that gels with the addition of agar agar, a seaweed-based product. Making soup dumplings requires advance work to make the gelatin, so plan accordingly. The dough and wrappers must be handmade. Using store-bought gyoza/dumpling wrappers won't work if your intention is to achieve the signature top knot on the dumpling. When serving, you can dip the soup dumplings in the traditional Chinese black vinegar, or you can make the Dumpling Dipping Sauce (page 78) to serve with it instead.

For the gelatin:

- 6 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 1 stalk green onion, trimmed and cut into 3-inch-long segments
- 2 thin slices ginger, roughly the size of a quarter
- 1 tablespoon Shaoxing wine, optional
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 6 cups water
- Salt
- 3 teaspoons agar agar powder (see Note)

For the filling:

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 stalks green onions, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 10 ounces fresh baby spinach (about 8 cups packed), roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon water
- 1 cup grated carrots (about 2 medium carrots)
- 6 medium dried shiitake mushrooms, soaked in warm water for 2 to 3 hours to reconstitute, finely diced (about ½ cup)

1 small bundle bean thread noodles, soaked in warm water for 10 minutes to soften and roughly chopped (about 1 cup)
2 tablespoons soy sauce
Kosher salt
½ teaspoon sesame oil

For the dough:

2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
½ cup bread flour
¾ cup plus 1 tablespoon hot water (150 to 160 degrees F)

For dipping:

Chinese black vinegar and julienned fresh ginger, to taste

To make the gelatin, combine the mushrooms, onion, ginger, wine, soy sauce, and water in a 3-quart pot. Bring to a boil and then lower the heat. Let the liquid simmer for about 20 minutes. Taste the broth and season for salt. Start with ½ teaspoon salt and add more to taste. You want the broth to have just enough savory flavor, but you don't want it to be too salty. You will need just 2 cups of the broth. You can save the rest to make another soup.

Combine 2 cups of the hot broth with the agar agar in a small pot over low heat. Whisk constantly until the gelatin dissolves completely. Let cool until you can transfer to a baking dish or storage container. Cover with plastic wrap or a lid and refrigerate until chilled and set, at least several hours or overnight.

To make the filling, preheat a wok over high heat until wisps of smoke rise from the surface. Swirl in the vegetable oil and immediately add the green onions and garlic. Stir vigorously for 10 seconds. Add the spinach and water, and stir-fry for about 30 seconds to cook the spinach. Add the carrots, mushrooms, and bean thread. Stir to combine. Turn the heat to medium low, add the soy sauce, and stir to combine. Add salt to taste, if needed. Add the sesame oil. Stir once again and transfer the filling to a medium bowl. Dig a hole in the middle of the filling and spread it up the wall of the bowl. This will help it cool more quickly. Place in the refrigerator and chill until cool. If the filling is hot, it will melt the gelatin.

Finely mince enough of the gelatin to get about 1 ½ cups. Add the minced gelatin to the filling and stir well to combine.

To make the dough, put the all-purpose flour and bread flour in a large bowl, and stir to combine. Gradually add half the water while stirring with a spatula or a pair of chopsticks. As the dough comes together, add more water. You may or may not need all of the water. Press the dough together; if you can form a ball, you can stop adding water. Form a ball and knead the dough for 4 minutes, or until smooth. Cover the bowl with a damp towel and let the dough rest for 30 minutes at room temperature.

On a lightly floured work surface, knead the dough again for 2 minutes, or until smooth. Divide the dough into 2 portions. Cover one half with a damp towel. Roll the other half into a rope about 1 inch in diameter. Cut the rope into pieces about 1 inch long or about 10 grams each. Using a Chinese rolling pin (dowel), roll out each piece of dough into a 3 ½-inch round. Place about 1 tablespoon of the filling in the center of the wrapper. Gather the edges and twist into a “top knot” above the center of the dumpling (see photo on page 94). Place each dumpling in the steamer basket, leaving about 1 inch of space between dumplings. Repeat with the remaining dough and filling.

If you don't have enough steamer baskets, place the sealed dumplings on a parchment-lined baking sheet.

Set up the steamer and bring the water to boil over high heat. Line the steamer with steamer paper or perforated parchment and arrange the dumplings in a single layer in the steamer basket.

Steam the dumplings over high heat for 6 to 8 minutes, depending on the size of the dumplings. When done steaming, the dough will transform from opaque to slightly translucent.

Serve immediately, straight from the steamer basket, with vinegar or dipping sauce.

Note: If you aren't a strict vegetarian, you can use 2 envelopes of Knox brand gelatin powder, which is widely available.