

FEBRUARY

Chinese New Year



Nian Gao Recipe

Nian (年) means “year,” Gao (糕) means “cake,” and put together, Nian Gao (年糕) which means cake of the new year. The “Gao” is a homonym which phonetically means “tall” or “high.” Eating the cake encourages the idea one will grow taller and one can climb higher, a better year than the last. Nian gao can look slightly different in various parts of China.

Ingredients:

- 1 ½ pounds glutinous rice flour (one and a half bags, they generally come in 1-pound bags)
- 1 pound rice flour (about half a bag)
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil (plus more for brushing baking pans)
- 3½ to 4 cups water
- 2 cups dark brown sugar or brown rock sugar
- 4 slices ginger
- ½ teaspoon allspice power
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon dark molasses
- 1/3 cup coconut milk
- 1 teaspoon Kansui (梘水/鹼水) (lye water)
- Zest of 1 large orange

- *Optional: 6 pieces of dried dates or one piece of jujube (for decoration)*

Instructions:

1. Mix the glutinous rice flour and rice flour together in a large bowl. Set aside.
2. Put the brown sugar slabs and ginger slices in a saucepan with water. Bring it to a boil until the brown sugar slabs dissolve.
3. Turn off the heat when the brown sugar slabs dissolve; then add the all spice, vanilla extract, dark molasses, orange zest, coconut milk, and Kansui (lye water) into the liquid mixture and stir. Cool for 5 to 10 minutes.
4. Remove the ginger slices from the brown sugar liquid mixture.
5. Gradually stir the brown sugar liquid mixture into the bowl with the flour mixture. The technique is to pour about 1/3 of the liquid at a time, stir, and then gradually add another 1/3 liquid, stir, and finally add the last 1/3 liquid into the flour while stirring. This eliminates the batter from having undissolved lumps popping up.
6. Continue to stir the batter for at least 5 minutes. The batter is stiff at the beginning but will loosen up after a minute of stirring. Stir until there are just small lumps in the batter.
Option: Place a fine mesh strainer over another bowl and pour the batter through the mesh; this helps to get rid of the lumps in the batter.
7. Lightly grease a 9-inch cake pan. The Chinese metal pan is usually made of a thin layer of stainless steel which cooks the cake a little faster.
8. Place a steam rack and add water in a 15-inch wide Chinese wok. The water level should have a 1/2-inch gap between the water line and the top of the steam rack. Now place the cake pan on the steam rack.
9. Cover the top of the cake with foil. Make sure the foil is approximately 3/4-inch between the top of the cake pan and the batter. The foil ensures the surface of the nian gao looks smooth once cooked. It also protects the cake from condensation (water droplets build up underneath the cover of the wok lid).
10. Bring the water to a boil on *high* heat. Then place the cake on the steaming rack and cover the wok with a lid. Reduce to *medium* heat.
11. Steam the cake for 50 minutes to 1 hour for a thicker pan, and 45 to 50 minutes for a thinner pan. Replenish the water inside the wok halfway through the steaming process due to water evaporation, as needed. Depending on one's stove, the tricky part is to monitor the correct amount of heat while steaming and the amount of water to fill in the wok.
12. Remove the steamed cake from the wok to cool; then decorate the cake with dates/ jujubes.

While the cake is cooling, it can be on displayed in your home before it is placed in the refrigerator. When it is ready to be served, cut the cake into thin slices. If you like, dip pieces of the cake in an egg batter mixture and pan fry until golden brown. This will give an extra texture and taste to the cake pieces.

Other Nian Gao Recipe:

<https://thewoksoflife.com/nian-gao-recipe/>