Har Gow Shrimp Dumplings

Xiā Jiǎo

Makes 32 dumplings, serving 6 to 8 as a snack

Well known by their Cantonese name *har gow*, these delightful pinkish-white morsels are among the most popular offerings at dim sum houses. They go fast, and I've chased down my fair share of dim sum ladies to get a fresh order. When I started making my own and realized that they can be kept refrigerated and frozen, my fear of *har gow* scarcity diminished.

These are difficult to prepare only if you aim to produce exemplary diminutive ones, which most dim sum places don't. Start out with ones that are a little bigger and scale down as you gain dexterity. You can even make these dumplings as half-moons, and they'll taste swell. Use the best shrimp possible, and immerse the canned bamboo shoots in boiling water to rid it of its tinny flavor before chopping. To make the pork fat easier to mince, blanch it in boiling water for 1 minute, or until firm. Obtain the fat from fatback (I go to a Latino butcher counter) or cut it off a pork chop. Fatty bacon works well, too.

FILLING

2/3 pound medium shrimp, peeled and deveined (9 ounces net weight)
3/4 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 tablespoons minced pork fat or fatty bacon
3 tablespoons finely chopped bamboo shoots
2 teaspoons minced scallion (white part only)
1 1/2 teaspoons cornstarch
3/4 teaspoon sugar
1/8 teaspoon white pepper
1 1/2 teaspoons Shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry
1 teaspoon sesame oil

1 pound Wheat Starch Dough (page 132), cut into fourths
Light (regular) soy sauce, for dipping
Chile Garlic Sauce, homemade (page 216) or store-bought (optional)

1. To make the filling, toss the shrimp with 1/4 teaspoon of the salt, put them in a strainer, and rinse under cold water. Transfer the shrimp to a paper towel and blot dry. Chop the shrimp into peanut-size pieces; halve each shrimp lengthwise first to make it easier. Put the shrimp into a bowl and add the pork fat, bamboo shoots, and scallion. Stir with chopsticks or a fork to evenly distribute the ingredients.

2. In a small bowl, combine the remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, the cornstarch, sugar, white pepper, rice wine, and sesame oil, stirring to dissolve the cornstarch. Pour the seasonings over the shrimp mixture. Stir with chopsticks or a fork to ensure that all the shrimp are well coated. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside for 30 minutes or refrigerate for up to 4 hours to marinate. Makes about 1 1/3 cups.

3. Working with 1 piece of dough at a time to form the wrappers, roll it on an unfloured work surface into an 8-inch log. Cut the log into 8 equal pieces. Follow the instructions on "Forming Wrappers from Wheat Starch Dough" (page 133) to shape circles that are each 3 to 3 1/4 inches in diameter.

continued