Health, prosperity, longevity and the sharing of great food are the linchpins around which the Chinese New Year celebrations revolve. In 2020 the day of feasting falls on 25 January, the start of the lunar year, and it’s the best reason to cook a menu from a legend.

The Chinese New Year celebration was the biggest holiday in my family. We’d pay the traditional homage to our ancestors by burning incense at the small family altar that stood at one end of the living room. My job was to rub honey or sugar water over the kitchen god poster on the kitchen wall so he could report only sweet and good things to the Jade Emperor in heaven. Then the New Year’s food preparation would begin.

At the New Year table, certain foods were always served because they symbolise particular good and noteworthy aspirations. Fish, which represents abundance and good fortune, was essential. Chicken, a symbol of fortune, was served because what good are abundance and good fortune without the time to enjoy them? My mother, being a good and faithful Buddhist, always served apples, symbolic of peace, which is what she wished for us and the world.

**The Menu**
(Serves 4-6)
- Steamed stuffed bitter melon with black bean sauce
- Crispy Cantonese fish rolls
- My mum’s steamed chicken with Chinese sausage
- Caramelised apples with sesame

A feast to celebrate the good things in life

{CHEF KEN HOM}
My mum's steamed chicken with Chinese sausage
SERVES 4 AS PART OF A SHARING MENU. HANDS-ON TIME 10 MIN, STEAMING TIME 25 MIN, PLUS MARINATING

Chicken, a symbol of fortune, was at the centre of our Chinese New Year dinner. My mum simply steamed it with my favourite, Chinese sausages.

MAKE AHEAD
Marinate the chicken up to 1 day ahead, then keep covered and chilled.

KNOW-HOW
Buy Chinese air-dried pork sausage, often sold as lap chong or lachang, at waiyeehong.com or Chinese supermarkets. If you can't find it, omit it.

YOU’LL ALSO NEED...
- Steamer or large wok/pan with a lid and a rack set inside, lipped heatproof plate or bowl that will sit inside the steamer

1 Stir together the chicken, soy, rice wine, sugar, sesame oil, cornflour and some black pepper in a bowl. Leave to marinate at room temperature for 20 minutes (see Make Ahead).
2 Transfer to the plate/bowl and mix with the sliced sausages.
3 Set up a steamer (or put a rack in a large wok or deep pan) and add 5cm of water. Bring to the boil, lower the dish of chicken/sausages, turn the heat to low, cover and steam for 25 minutes or until cooked through.
Serve garnished with shredded spring onions, with steamed rice and greens on the side.

PER SERVING (FOR 6)
203 kcals, 11g fat (3.7g saturated), 19.8g protein, 5.9g carbs (2.2g sugars), 0.9g salt, 0.9g fibre

• 450g free-range skinless boneless chicken thighs, cut into bite-size pieces
• 1 tbsp light soy sauce
• 1½ tbsp shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry
• 1 tsp sugar
• 1 tsp toasted sesame oil
• 2 tsp cornflour
• 4 Chinese pork sausages (about 100g), cut into 1cm slices – see Know-how
• Shredded spring onion to garnish
• Steamed rice and greens to serve
Steamed stuffed bitter melon with black bean sauce
SERVES 4 AS PART OF A SHARING MENU.
HANDS-ON TIME 20 MIN, STEAMING TIME 15-18 MIN

My mother loved to make these at Chinese New Year because they represent the giving of gifts—a surprise treat wrapped up inside bitter melon. Bitter melon or cucumber lends itself well to stuffing, its tender, succulent flesh complemented by a savoury filling.

MAKE AHEAD
Make to the end of step 2, cool, then cover and chill for up to 6 hours.

FOR THE FILLING
• 2 large bitter melons (350-450g; see Know-how, or use cucumber)
• 225g British free-range 10% fat minced pork
• 2 tsp finely chopped fresh ginger
• 2 tbsp finely chopped spring onions
• 2 tbsp shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry
• Pinch sugar
• 1 tbsp light soy sauce
• 1 tsp toasted sesame oil
• 1 medium free-range egg, lightly beaten
• 1 tsp cornflour, plus extra for dusting

Preserved black soybeans. Fermented black bean paste is available in the Cook’s Ingredients range at Waitrose. If you can’t find it, use the same amount of black bean sauce from a jar.

FREEZE AHEAD
Freeze leftover filling in an airtight container for up to 1 month. Defrost in the fridge overnight before using.

KNOW-HOW
Bitter melons have a tough cucumber-like texture with a strong, bitter flavour. They’re available from Asian supermarkets and at thai-food-online.co.uk. If you can’t find them use cucumber instead.

FERMENTED BLACK BEAN PASTE
Fermented black bean paste is available in the Cook’s Ingredients range at Waitrose. If you can’t find it, use the same amount of black bean sauce from a jar.

FOOD TEAM’S TIP
Freeze leftover filling in an airtight container for up to 1 month. Defrost in the fridge overnight before using.

• 2 large bitter melons (350-450g; see Know-how, or use cucumber)

FOR THE SAUCE
• 2 tbsp groundnut or vegetable oil
• 1 tbsp roughly chopped garlic
• 2 tsp fermented black bean paste (see Know-how)
• 1 tbsp shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry
• 1 tbsp oyster sauce
• 200ml chicken stock
• 1 tsp cornflour mixed with 1 tsp cold water
• 2 tsp toasted sesame oil

YOU’LL ALSO NEED...
• Steamer or wok/deep pan with a lid and a rack set inside; lipped heatproof plate that will fit inside

1 For the filling, mix all the ingredients in a bowl. Cut the bitter melon (or cucumber) into 2.5cm rounds, discarding the ends. With a small sharp knife, remove and discard the core of pulp and seeds.

2 Lightly dust the insides of the slices with cornflour. Fill each with a generous spoonful of the filling, then cover and chill for up to 1 month.

3 Place the filled melon slices in a steamer (or put a rack in a wok or deep pan) and half fill with water. Bring to the boil over a high heat, then carefully lower in the plate. Turn the heat to low, then cover tightly and steam gently for 15-18 minutes (you may have to do this in two batches).

4 Meanwhile to make the sauce, heat a wok or large frying pan over a high heat until very hot. Add the oil and, when slightly smoking, add the garlic and black bean paste, then stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the remaining sauce ingredients, except the cornflour mixture and sesame oil. Simmer, then stir in the cornflour mixture until thickened. Bubble gently for 1 minute. Stir in the sesame oil, transfer the stuffed bitter melon to a serving plate, pour over the sauce and serve.

PER SERVING (FOR 6)
208kcal, 14.1g fat (3.2g saturated), 12.7g protein, 6.1g carbs (3g sugars), 1.1g salt, 1.7g fibre

SUSY ATKIN’S WINE PICK
Try a German riesling with the savoury dishes here, ideally an off-dry example. The whistle-clean apple tang and honeyed hint are perfect. Ken’s apples with sesame need a properly sweet wine though, best of all a Loire Valley dessert chenin blanc.

SWEET AND STICKY
Caramelised apples with sesame, p66

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SWEET AND STICKY
Caramelised apples with sesame, p66
Crispy Cantonese Fish rolls

SERVES 4-6 AS PART OF A SHARING FEAST.
HANDS-ON TIME 40 MIN

Fish symbolises prosperity. If there was a large crowd, a whole fish would be served but my mum, being economical, used a fish paste instead. Although not totally traditional, it did bring us prosperity!

Assemble the rolls and make the dip up to 4 hours ahead. Cover the rolls and chill until ready to finish the recipe.

Traditionally we wrap our fish rolls in caul fat (it’s a membrane used to wrap pâtés and faggots). Here I used filo pastry instead, which works just as well and is easier to find.

If your pan isn’t big enough to fry 25cm rolls, halve the pastry and make 8 rolls.

FOR THE SALT AND PEPPER DIP
- 3 tbsp sea salt flakes
- 2 tbsp sichuan peppercorns

FOR THE FISH PASTE
- 450g sustainable skinless white fish fillets, such as cod or sea bass, cut into 2.5cm squares
- 1 medium free-range egg white
- 2 tbsp shaoxing rice wine or dry sherry
- 3 tbsp chopped spring onions
- 2 tsp cornflour
- 2 tsp toasted sesame oil
- 5cm piece fresh ginger
- 4 sheets filo pastry, about 30cm x 46cm (see Ken’s tip)
- Cornflour for dusting
- Vegetable oil for frying
- 1 lemon, cut into wedges

YOU’LL ALSO NEED...

- Large, deep wok or pan; food processor or blender; digital probe thermometer; baking tray lined with kitchen paper

1 To make the salt and pepper dip, heat a wok or large frying pan until hot, then add the salt and sichuan peppercorns. Stir-fry for 1 minute, remove and set aside to cool, then roughly grind with a pestle and mortar for 1 minute and set aside. You won’t need it all, but it lasts for weeks and goes with many things.

2 For the fish paste, mix the fish, egg white, rice wine, spring onions, cornflour and sesame oil in a food processor with a little salt and pepper. Coarsely grate the ginger, then squeeze the juice into the food processor and whizz to a smooth paste. (Use the pulse button or the paste will turn out rubbery.)

3 Spread out the pieces of filo on a worktop, then divide the fish paste evenly among them in a sausage-like roll, about 25cm long (see Food Team’s tip). Roll up the filo, tucking in the ends as you roll. Repeat until the filo has been used up. Dust with cornflour and shake off any excess (see Make Ahead).

4 Set the wok or pan over a high heat. When hot, pour in the oil and heat to 180°C on a digital probe thermometer (a cube of bread should turn golden in about 30 seconds). Gently lower in 2 of the fish rolls and cook until golden brown and crisp (about 5 minutes). Carefully remove with a slotted spoon and put on the prepared tray. Fry the remaining rolls. Serve with lemon wedges and the salt and pepper dip.

PER SERVING (FOR 6) 215kcal, 9.5g fat (0.8g saturated), 15.8g protein, 15.3g carbs (0.8g sugars), 0.8g salt, 0.1g fibre

Caramelised apples with sesame

SERVES 4-6 AS PART OF A SHARING FEAST.
HANDS-ON TIME 45 MIN

Every year, we finished our Chinese New Year dinner with apples. The word for apple in Chinese is ‘ping’; a homonym of ping is peace – and we all need that in the New Year.

The apples are wonderful hot or at room temperature. Keep at room temperature for up to 2 hours before serving.