

齋

Jai

Buddha's Delight

I have heard *Jai* called Buddha's Delight in English, but my family has only known it as *Jai*. In keeping with Buddhist traditions to cleanse the body with only vegetables, no fish, chicken, or livestock is killed for food on the first day of the year, and *Jai* must be eaten on New Year's Day. This recipe is labor-intensive, for there are many ingredients that must be soaked. I have resisted learning to make it all these years, knowing that I am lucky enough to go home and enjoy Mama's delicious *Jai*. Even writing down the method was hard work, as Mama's recipe is quite traditional. Some families cook a more simplified *Jai*, while others use even more ingredients. Traditionally, there should be eighteen ingredients. In one form or another, the dish has been eaten for hundreds of years. Black moss, also known as seaweed hair, looks like fine black hair. The name of the ingredient in Cantonese, *fat choy*, is the same as the New Year's greeting, *Gung Hay Fat Choy*, so it has an auspicious meaning and symbolizes prosperity.

4 large leaves Napa cabbage,
about 8 ounces

8 Chinese dried oysters

¼ cup cloud ears (*wun yee*)

¼ cup lily buds (*gum tzum*)

8 Chinese dried mushrooms

¼ cup packed black moss
(*fat choy*)

1 teaspoon plus 3 table-
spoons vegetable oil

One 3½ ounce package
cellophane noodles

2 sticks dried bean curd (*foo
jook*), about 1½ ounces

6 fried bean curd (*dul foo
gock*), cut into 2 pieces

¼ cup unshelled ginkgo nuts
(*bock guo*)

Rinse the Napa cabbage leaves in several changes of cold water and drain thoroughly in a colander until dry to the touch.

Wash the oysters in cold water. In a small bowl, soak the oysters in 1½ cups cold water for 3 to 4 hours, or until soft. Drain and squeeze dry, reserving the soaking liquid.

Place the cloud ears, lily buds, and mushrooms in separate bowls. Pour about ½ cup cold water over each ingredient and soak for about 30 minutes to soften. When softened, drain all the ingredients, discarding all the water except the mushroom liquid. Remove any hard spots from the cloud ears. Remove the hard end from the lily buds and tie each lily bud into a knot. Drain and squeeze dry the mushrooms. Cut off and discard the stems and halve the caps.

Place the black moss in a medium bowl, and cover with cold water. Add 1 teaspoon oil and soak for 15 minutes, or until softened. Drain and discard the water. In another bowl, soak the cellophane noodles in cold water to cover for 15 minutes, or until softened. Drain thoroughly.

Meanwhile, in a 2-quart saucepan, bring 3 cups cold water to a boil over high heat. Break up the bean curd sticks into 2-inch pieces and add to the boiling water. Cook, stirring the pieces, 1 to 2 minutes,

3 slices ginger
3 cubes red wet
(*nom yu*)
3 tablespoons of
sauce

- 3 slices ginger
- 3 cubes red wet bean curd
(*nom yu*)
- 3 tablespoons oyster flavored
sauce

or until almost ivory colored and softened. Using a slotted spoon, remove to a colander, drain, and rinse under cold water. Add fried bean curd to boiling water and boil 1 to 2 minutes, or until puffed. Drain and rinse under cold water. Squeeze fried bean curd with hands to remove any excess water. Set aside.

Crack ginkgo nuts lightly with a hammer, tapping on the opening and removing the shells. In a small saucepan, bring about 1 cup water to a boil over high heat. Blanch the shelled ginkgo nuts for about 1 minute. Drain, rinse under cold water, and remove the skins.

Trim ¼ inch from stem end of cabbage leaves and discard. Stack 2 to 3 cabbage leaves at a time and cut crosswise into ¼-inch-wide shreds.

Heat a 14-inch flat-bottomed wok or skillet over high heat until hot but not smoking. Add 2 tablespoons vegetable oil and ginger, and stir-fry 30 seconds. Add the cabbage and stir-fry 2 to 3 minutes, or until cabbage is just limp. Transfer to a plate.

Add the remaining 1 tablespoon vegetable oil to the wok along with the oysters, red wet bean curd, and mushrooms, and stir-fry 30 seconds. Add the softened bean curd sticks, blanched fried bean curd, ginkgo nuts, and black moss, and cook, stirring to break up the red bean curd.

Add the reserved mushroom and oyster soaking liquids, and bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Cover, reduce heat to low, and simmer 20 minutes. Check the wok from time to time, adding up to 1 cup more cold water if the wok appears dry. Add the cellophane noodles, cloud ears, lily buds, cabbage, and oyster sauce (and any juices that have accumulated), and return to a boil over high heat. Cover, reduce heat to medium, and cook until cellophane noodles are translucent and cooked through and vegetables are tender, about 5 minutes. Serve immediately.

Serves 6 to 8 as part of a multicourse meal.