



Chinese Kitchen

with Ivy Chen

THE ESSENTIAL CONTENTS OF A TAIWANESE KITCHEN CUPBOARD

TEXT: IVY CHEN IMAGES: TING TING HUANG



SOY SAUCE 醬油 [jiangyou]

The King of Chinese condiments, soy sauce is used for dipping, marinades, stir-frying, braising, stewing and seasoning in all kinds of cooking. Soy sauce has a full-bodied soy bean fragrance with a slight hint of alcohol and tastes salty at the tip of the tongue and sweet at the back of the throat. This is a key source of salty flavors in Chinese cuisine.

OYSTER SAUCE 蠔油 [haoyou]

Oyster sauce is traditionally made of just oysters and salt, although the sauces available commercially are commonly made from oyster essence or extract, salt and sugar, all thickened with starch. This sauce is used for seasoning seafood, vegetables and tofu, and enriches the flavor of meats.

VEGETARIAN MUSHROOM OYSTER SAUCE 香菇素蠔油 [xianggu su haoyou]

Vegetarian mushroom oyster sauce is made with soy sauce, mushroom extract, and starch to thicken it. It is used for seasoning meats, seafood, vegetables, and tofu, as a marinade, and a dip in all types of cooking.

RICE VINEGAR 米醋 [mi cu]

Rice vinegar comes in three types: white, black and red. White vinegar is fermented with Indica rice and acetic acid bacteria, and is available in regular (米醋 *mi cu*) and aged (陳年醋 *chennian cu*) forms. Vinegar fermented from glutinous rice is called glutinous rice vinegar (糯米醋 *nuomi cu*). Rice vinegar is a light



translucent yellow in color, and is used for cooking, in salad dressing and marinating.

BLACK VINEGAR 烏醋 [wu cu]

Black vinegar is made by fermenting white rice vinegar with vegetables, fruits and/or other grains (such as wheat, millet or sorghum). It is used for dip and seasoning.

WHITE SESAME OIL

香油 [xiangyou] and

BLACK SESAME OIL 麻油 [mayou]

White sesame oil is made by roasting and pressing white sesame seeds. Likewise, black sesame oil is made by roasting and pressing black sesame seeds. White sesame oil is used for seasoning and salad dressing. Black sesame oil is used for cooking dishes such as 'three cups chicken' (三杯雞, *san bei ji*) and 'chicken soup with black sesame oil and rice wine' (麻油雞酒 *mayou ji jiu*). The later is a tonic treatment for women recovering from childbirth during the confinement month (坐月子, *zuo yue zi*).

RICE WINE 米酒 [mi jiu]

Taiwanese use rice wine for cooking more than for drinking. There are a couple of varieties of rice wine.

"Rice wine head" (米酒頭 *mijiu tou*) uses unpolished Japonica rice (蓬萊米) and through brewing and extraction, enhances its strength and flavor. It is the highest quality rice wine and has a special rice fragrance, pure and transparent. Its natural alcohol content is 34%. You need

only use one or two teaspoons for seasoning.

"Red label rice wine" (紅標米酒 *hongbiao miju*) is the most popular traditional distilled spirit. It is made from unpolished Japonica rice which is brewed and distilled, and blended with rectified alcohol. Alcohol content ranges from 19.5 to 22%.

"Culinary rice wine" (料理米酒 *liaoli miju*) is blended with brewed and distilled rice wine and rectified alcohol with 0.5% table salt. Alcohol content ranges from 20% to 58%.

SHAOHSING WINE 紹興

[shaoxing jiu]

Shaohsing wine is used for cooking and drinking as well. While used as a drinking wine, it is better to drink it warm than at room temperature.

Shaohsing wine, which originates from a city south of the Yangzi River called Shaoxing (紹興), is a type of yellow wine. This is made from glutinous rice, wheat and selected rice yeast. In Taiwan, it is made in the town of Puli (埔里), in central Taiwan. An improved traditional brewing method is employed and it is stored in an earthen jar for at least two years for 'Shaohsing wine' (紹興酒, *Shaoxing jiu*), over five years for 'Aged Shaohsing wine' (陳年紹興酒, *chennian shaoxing jiu*), and ten years for 'Fine aged Shaohsing wine' (精釀陳年紹興酒, *jingniang chennian shaoxing jiu*) before being bottled. Alcohol content ranges from 14.5% to 17.5%.

