



Lohan's Delight: Buddhist Vegetarian Dish

Lohan (Arahat), following general Buddhist principles, were also known as “destroyers of the passions”. Fittingly, this dish does not use any of the usual condiments of ginger, garlic and spring onion, for in Buddhist belief they arouse human passions which, in turn, impede one's hopes of achieving Nirvana, the state of absolute peace and blessedness.

INGREDIENTS

9g (1/3oz) cloud ears, reconstituted
15g (1/2oz) golden needles, reconstituted
12 medium dried Chinese mushrooms, reconstituted in 350ml (12fl oz) boiling water
15g (1/2oz) hair algae
45ml (3tbsp) groundnut or corn oil
100g (4oz) canned bamboo shoots, thinly sliced
75–100g (3–4oz) canned ginkgo nuts
20 pieces deep-fried gluten
2.5ml (1/2tsp) salt
5–7.5ml (1–1 1/2tsp) sugar
45ml (3tbsp) thin soy sauce
10ml (2tsp) sesame oil

For curing hair algae

450ml (16fl oz) water
2 thickish slices fresh ginger root, peeled
10ml (2tsp) Shaohsing wine or medium dry sherry
10ml (2tsp) groundnut or corn oil

SERVES 4 with 2 other

1 Drain the cloud ears and golden needles and squeeze out excess water from the mushrooms, but leave damp. Reserve the mushroom soaking liquid.

2 Soak the hair algae in plenty of cold or tepid water for about 10 minutes so that it will become pliable. Then rinse in many changes of water, picking over it, removing impurities and discarding the fine sand which settles at the bottom of the bowl.

3 To cure: put the water, ginger, wine or sherry and oil in a wok or saucepan and bring to the boil. Submerge the algae and boil for about 5 minutes. Drain through a fine sieve and discard the ginger.

4 Heat a wok over a high heat until smoke rises. Add 15ml (1tbsp) of the oil and swirl it around. Add the cloud ears and golden needles and toss and turn for about 30 seconds, adjusting the heat if the cloud ears make a loud explosive noise. Remove to a warm dish nearby.

5 Add the remaining oil and swirl it around. Add the mushrooms and bamboo shoots and turn and stir for about 30 seconds or until very hot.

6 Return the cloud ears and golden needles to the wok, and add the hair algae, ginkgo nuts and gluten pieces. Pour in the mushroom water, add the salt, sugar and soy sauce and bring to the boil. Cover, lower the heat and simmer fast for 10–15 minutes or until most of the water has been absorbed.

7 Remove to a warm serving plate. Sprinkle on the sesame oil and serve.