

Duò Làjiāo

with Duò Jiāo Yú

by Jen Coster
as featured in *Your Tongue Remembers*

This is a pair of recipes for a combination of mild steamed fish and vibrant chopped chilis. **Duò làjiāo** is a spicy Hunanese relish that pairs perfectly with **duò jiāo yú**, a tender preparation of carp. **Prepared as written, this pair of recipes makes at least 4 generous servings.**

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Duò Làjiāo, 剁辣椒 | Hunanese Chopped Chilis

Ingredients

- 500g fresh red chili peppers (see recipe notes)
- 50g salt
- 25-50g garlic
- 10g granulated sugar
- 10g báijiǔ (白酒, a clear Chinese liquor)
- Optional: 25-50g ginger

- Optional: dòuchǐ (豆豉, black fermented soybeans, available at Asian grocery stores or online, sometimes labeled “salted black beans” or “salted dried black beans”) to taste (see recipe notes)

Supplies

- Clean glass jar(s)
 - Food-safe nitrile gloves (**not** optional)
 - Food processor (optional)
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Instructions

Prep

- Clean the chilis thoroughly with water, picking out any peppers that have split or are moldy. Pat dry with a clean kitchen towel.
 - A note from Jen: My grandmother used to place the washed peppers in a single layer in flat, shallow baskets and dry them in the sun. A towel is fine though.
- Be sure to clean your jars thoroughly, preferably by immersing them in boiling water and then air-drying on a rack.

Step One

Wearing gloves, roughly chop the chilis. Note that you can use a food processor for this step if you like. You want pieces no bigger than your smallest fingernail, but it shouldn't be a paste. Set aside in a large bowl.

Step Two

Finely mince garlic. Add to the bowl with the peppers. Do the same with the ginger, if you're using it.

To the same bowl, add in the remainder of your ingredients: salt, sugar, báijiǔ, and dòuchǐ. Mix until everything is evenly distributed. This is best done with gloved hands.

Step Three

Decant mixture into clean jars. Leave at least a half-inch of space at the top for the liquid the peppers will release.

Let this sit for 1-2 weeks in a cool dark place before cracking open the jar. The aroma should be assertive and compelling. Bonus points if your eyes water.

Serve

With everything.

Recommended substitutions and modifications

- **What type of peppers to use.** Jen's mom says: "Thin-skinned, red. Pointy and not too hot." Consider using cayenne peppers, which are relatively easy to obtain, or cherry peppers. Fresno peppers would also work, though the result may be more vegetal. If you're feeling bold, replace a portion of the peppers with Thai bird's eye chilis.
 - **Ratio.** The measurements in this recipe are approximate and easy to scale. For whatever weight of peppers you're using, add 10% salt, 2% sugar, 5-10% garlic, and 5% báijiǔ.
 - **Measure by volume.** Going by weight is best for this recipe, but if you don't have a kitchen scale, you can use roughly the following measurements:
 - 1 lb fresh red chili peppers (about 40-50 cayenne peppers)
 - 3 Tbsp salt
 - 18 cloves raw garlic *or* 6-12 Tbsp minced garlic
 - $\frac{3}{4}$ Tbsp granulated sugar
 - $\frac{2}{3}$ Tbsp báijiǔ (see recipe notes)
 - Optional: 3-4" raw ginger or 6-12 Tbsp minced ginger
 - **If you can't get báijiǔ,** it's ok to use vodka or rice wine. If you don't have alcohol on hand or would prefer not to use it, it's fine to omit it altogether.
 - **Make it less spicy.** If you want to temper the spice level, you can remove the seeds and pith from a portion of the peppers.
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Duò Jiāo Yú, 剁椒魚 | Steamed Fish with Chopped Chilis

Traditionally in Hunan, this dish is made with the freshest bighead carp fish head you can find, but Jen's family usually makes it with whole fish.

Ingredients

- A whole fish, around 1-1 ½ pounds, preferably with white flaky flesh when cooked. Tilapia or bass works well for this.
 - Note: When buying whole fish, try to get as fresh as possible. The counter where you buy the fish is usually able to scale, trim, and gut it for you.
- 2 inches of ginger
- 1 Tbsp Shaoxing wine
- ½ tsp Chinese black vinegar
- 4 Tbsp duò làjiāo
- Optional: ½ tsp dòuchǐ (豆豉, black fermented soybeans)
- 2 scallion stalks
- Salt
- Steamed rice or noodles for serving

Supplies

- A steamer (see recipe notes)
 - A dish that your fish fits comfortably on and that also fits inside your steamer setup
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Instructions

Prep

- Peel the ginger and cut it in half. Mince one half. Smash the other half and set aside on a heatproof plate that fits into your steamer setup.
- Mince the green part of the scallion. Set aside the white parts on the same heatproof plate as the smashed ginger.
- Clean the fish. The place where you bought the fish will have done the bulk of the work, but it's worthwhile to double check. Remove any remaining scales with the back of a knife. Snip off any remaining fins with kitchen shears. Check

the inside of the fish's body cavity for any residual membranes and the blood line along the spine if it's still present.

Step One

Score the fish on both sides by making diagonal cuts into the flesh without slicing all the way through. Do this all along the body at 1" intervals. Place the scored fish on top of the scallion whites and smashed ginger on the plate.

Step Two

Prepare the fish with a rub. Sprinkle the fish with salt on both sides and inside the body cavity. Combine Shaoxing wine, black vinegar, and minced ginger; rub the salted fish all over, both inside and out, with the mixture.

Let marinate at least 10 minutes, preferably around 20. *[Ed. note: This is a good time to prepare a simple side dish or clean up the kitchen.]*

Step Three

Cook the fish. Cover the surface of the fish with duò làjiāo and, if using, scatter with dòuchǐ.

Place the plate into the steamer and steam over high heat for about 10-15 minutes. The fish is done when you can slide a chopstick easily into the meatiest part of the fish; the flesh should be tender enough to flake easily.

Use caution when removing the dish from the steamer, as it will be very hot.

Serve

On the dish it was cooked on, with minced green onion and serve with steamed rice or noodles.

Recommended substitutions and modifications

- Notes on steamers: This will work with a bamboo or metal steamer, or a makeshift steamer of a shallow, wide pan (like a wok) with a well fitting lid and a metal rack/stand. A collapsible steamer basket insert isn't going to work here. The main thing to keep in mind is that you're going to be removing

a really hot plate from whatever device you use, so something that doesn't have super deep sides will be easier to manage.

- If you go with a fish filet instead of a whole fish, the method is largely the same, but the fish will need less prep. Simply rinse the filet and pat it dry with a paper towel; there's no need to score the flesh. Steaming likely won't take as long, depending on the size of the filet—check after 5 minutes, looking for tender opaque flesh that a chopstick can slide into with little resistance.

Don't forget: care for yourself and the people around you. Believe that the world can be better than it is now. Never give up.