

GOOEY AND CHEWY

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Reading Jonathan Gold's description of a Sichuan dish (<http://enewspaper.latimes.com/desktop/latimes/default.aspx?pubid=50435180-e58e-48b5-8e0c-236bf740270e>) in today's LA Times made me really hungry. Partly because it's such a lovely description; partly because *yama imo* – Japanese mountain potato – is one of my favorite foods.

Yama imo looks like daikon, and it begins with a crunch. But it quickly transforms itself into a creamy paste and as you chew it keeps changing – a little circus of the mouth – until its become liquid. It's a transformation that always delights me. I often eat it for breakfast, rolled up in sheets of nori with a bit of *umeboshi*, the pickled plum-like apricots of Japan.

But I don't have any *yama imo* on hand at the moment, and I'm now desperate for some Asian flavors. A quick search through the refrigerator reveals the squid I bought yesterday, some chiles, a bottle of Shaoxing wine and a package of Chinese noodles; that, I decide will be lunch.



This recipe is based on the one in Bruce Cost's Big Bowl Cookbook. (<https://www.amazon.com/Big-Bowl-Noodles-Rice-Restaurant/dp/0060194200>)

Slightly Spicy Chinese Noodles with Squid

1/2 pound cleaned squid

8 ounces Chinese noodles

1/2 teaspoon sesame oil

1 tablespoon neutral oil

Knob of ginger, shredded

5 scallions, sliced

1 jalapeno, thinly sliced

1 clove garlic

2 teaspoons Chinese black beans, rinsed

1/2 cup chicken stock

1 teaspoon sugar

2 tablespoons oyster sauce

1 tablespoon soy sauce

2 tablespoons Shaoxing rice wine

Bring a pot of water to a boil.

Cut the squid into 1/2 inch wide strips, and if the tentacles are very large, cut them in half. Throw the squid into the boiling water, let it come back to a boil and cook for about half a minute. Drain and immediately run under cold water to stop the cooking. Set aside.

Cook the noodles according to package directions; Chinese noodles take about 3 minutes. Drain, rinse under cold water and toss with the sesame oil to keep them from sticking. Set aside.

Prep the other ingredients: shred the ginger, slice the scallions, slice the jalapeño, mince the garlic and rinse the black beans.

Mix the chicken stock with the sugar, oyster sauce and soy sauce.

Heat a wok or heavy skillet over high heat. When it's hot, add the neutral oil, allow it to get hot and add the ginger, scallions, jalapeno, garlic and black beans; toss and stir until the aroma floats over the pan. Add the chicken stock and cook for a minute or so, until it boils. Add the cooked noodles and toss for another minute.

Add the squid and the wine and cook for another minute or two, until it's all heated through.

Serves 2-3 people.



The Chinese black beans are really necessary for this; they cost very little, you can get them at any Chinese grocery store and they last virtually forever. They're a classic umami ingredient (they're what soy sauce is made out of), and a great pantry item.

Shaoxing is harder to find, but it's flavor adds a lot to Chinese dishes. In a pinch, substitute dry sherry.

If you don't have fresh chiles, you can substitute dried chile flakes. Or simply forego the bite of heat and leave them out.

If you don't have scallions, a small diced onion will do.

And if you don't have Chinese noodles, you can substitute any other kind of noodle.