

**Food & Drink****Recipe: quick stir-fried squid**

Squid doesn't have to be tricky — or rubbery. Just criss-cross with a knife, stir-fry speedily with a few aromatics and enjoy



Fuchsia Dunlop AUGUST 28, 2015

In culinary terms, squid can be a slippery creature. Lose your grasp of cooking time and you may find it rubbery. Cooked properly, however, it is simply magnificent. One of the best ways of cooking fresh squid is to sling them on a hot grill for a few moments, just long enough for their translucent flesh, streaked with the lines of the grill, to become opaque, and then to anoint them with a little olive oil and lemon juice and eat immediately. The other is to score them with a sharp knife and stir-fry them, fast and hot, with a few aromatic seasonings, as in the following recipe, where the pale elegance of the squid is speckled with colourful morsels of chilli, ginger, garlic and spring onion. On more than one occasion when I've made this for friends, they've pronounced it the best squid they've ever eaten.

**Quick stir-fried squid****Scroll down for method and ingredients**

Serves two

Stir-frying at high heat is one of the most effective strategies for cooking ingredients that can easily become tough and leathery, or what the Chinese call *lao* (literally “old”), including not only squid but delicate offal such as kidneys and gizzards. The criss-cross cutting opens up the pieces of food, maximising their surface area, speeding up the cooking and

encouraging the sauce to cling; it also makes them look pretty and feel delightful in the mouth. With really fresh squid, you should end up with a perfect example of the textural oxymoron the Chinese adore and refer to as *cui nen* (“crisp-tender”), which is to say gorgeously youthful and tender but with a hint of crispness in the bite.

The art of cutting has a particular importance in Chinese cuisine. Every trainee chef will learn a whole gamut of terms for the various ways in which a knife may be used and the different shapes into which food may be cut. Spring onions may be turned into “flowers”, “fish eyes”, “horse ears”, “silken threads” or “blossoming flowers”; garlic transformed into “thumbnail slices” or “rice grains”. In general, criss-cross scoring is known as “flower” cutting, which is why some Chinese restaurant menus offer, for example, the exotic-sounding “fire-exploded kidney flowers”.

When scoring squid, it’s important to lay it on your cutting board with the outer side down and the softer inner side facing up. Make sure your knife blade is keen and try to cut about two-thirds of the way into the flesh, not all the way through. Don’t worry if the cutting is a little uneven: the pieces of squid will curl up anyway, disguising a multitude of imperfections.

Do have all your seasonings measured out and to hand, make sure your wok is really hot before you begin cooking, and, of course, avoid overcooking the squid.

*Fuchsia Dunlop’s most recent book is [‘Every Grain of Rice: Simple Chinese Home Cooking’](#) (Bloomsbury, 2012)*

## Quick stir-fried squid

Serves two with rice and a simple vegetable dish, or more with other dishes as part of a Chinese meal.

### Ingredients

1 large, fresh squid (around 500g, or 350g after cleaning)

For the marinade:

15g unpeeled ginger

1 spring onion, white part only

¼ tsp salt

1 tbs Shaoxing wine

For the sauce:

⅛ tsp salt

½ tsp sugar

½ tsp potato starch

1 tsp light soy sauce

## Ingredients

1 tbs                      stock or water

### Other ingredients:

2 tsp                      finely chopped garlic

2 tsp                      finely chopped ginger

2 tsp                      finely chopped fresh red chilli

2                              spring onions, white part only

2 tbs                      finely sliced spring onion greens

3 tbs                      cooking oil

- 1 Slice open the cleaned body of the squid lengthwise and lay it flat on your board, outer side down. Holding the knife at an angle to the board, score the flesh at 3mm-4mm intervals, taking care not to cut all the way through. Then turn the squid and, with the knife perpendicular to the board, score the flesh again, at right angles to your original lines, so the body is covered with cross-hatched lines. Then cut the body into rectangles about the size of dominoes. Cross-hatch the wings in the same way and cut into similar-sized pieces. Cut the tentacles into bite-sized pieces. Place all the pieces in a bowl. Smack the marinade ginger and spring onion with the side of a cleaver or a rolling pin to loosen their fibres, and add to the squid with the other marinade ingredients. Mix well and set aside for a few minutes.
- 2 Combine the sauce ingredients in a small bowl. Smack the remaining spring onion whites to loosen their fibres.
- 3 Before cooking, remove the ginger and spring onion from the marinade, and drain away any liquid from the squid.
- 4 Heat a seasoned wok until smoking hot. Add 2 tbs oil and, when hot, add the squid and stir-fry until the pieces have curled up and are half-opaque. Remove and set aside.
- 5 Put the remaining oil in the wok, add the garlic, ginger, chilli and spring onion whites and stir-fry briefly. Add the squid and stir quickly until piping hot. Give the sauce a stir, add to the wok, and stir rapidly as it thickens, so the sauce clothes the squid. Swiftly stir in the spring onion greens. Serve immediately.

## How to clean a squid

Gently tug the tentacles, innards and bony blade out of the body. Cut the tentacles away and pull out the beak. Discard head, innards, blade and beak. Peel away the wings. Peel away and discard the membrane covering the wings and body. Rinse everything well in cold water.

*Photograph: Tamin Jones*

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