

Zha Paigu (Taiwanese Fried Pork Chops)
Recipe from "America's Test Kitchen," Episode 2517

Time: 1-1/4 hours, plus 1 hour marinating

Serves: 4

Ingredients

1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon michiu
2 garlic cloves, minced to paste 1½ teaspoons sugar
1½ teaspoons water
¾ teaspoon five-spice powder
½ teaspoon table salt
¼ teaspoon white pepper
2 (8- to 10-ounce) bone-in pork rib chops, ¾ to 1 inch thick
2 large eggs
1 cup coarse sweet potato starch
3 cups vegetable oil for frying

Before You Begin: If rib chops are unavailable, blade chops may be used. The bones of the chops are great for nibbling, which is why we include them for serving. Coarse (or "thick") sweet potato starch gives the chops their distinct crunch. You can substitute coarse tapioca starch. We developed this recipe with michiu, Taiwanese rice wine; if it's unavailable, clear rice wine and sake make good substitutes. Fry the chops in a 14-inch wok or a Dutch oven that holds 6 quarts or more. To make paigu fan, serve the chops with white rice; a stir-fried vegetable, such as napa cabbage; a pickled vegetable, such as mustard greens; and Lu Dan (Braised Eggs).

Directions

1. Whisk soy sauce, michiu, garlic, sugar, water, five-spice powder, salt, and white pepper together in large bowl.
2. Place 1 chop on cutting board; cover with sheet of plastic wrap; and pound to ¼-inch thickness, being careful to avoid bone. Repeat with remaining chop. Add chops to bowl with marinade and toss to evenly coat. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour or up to 4 hours.
3. Beat eggs in shallow dish. Spread sweet potato starch in second shallow dish. Working with 1 chop at a time, remove from marinade (do not pat dry) and dip into egg, turning to coat well and allowing excess egg to drip back into dish. Coat evenly on all sides with sweet potato starch, pressing on chop to adhere. Transfer chops to rimmed baking sheet.
4. Set wire rack in second rimmed baking sheet. Add oil to wok or large Dutch oven and heat over medium-high heat to 350 degrees. Place 1 chop in oil and cook until just starting to brown on both sides, 1 minute per side. Transfer chop to prepared rack. Return oil to 350 degrees and repeat with remaining chop.
5. Heat oil to 375 degrees. Return 1 chop to oil and cook until golden brown on both sides, about 1 minute per side. Transfer chop to rack. Return oil to 375 degrees and

repeat with remaining chop. Let chops rest for 5 minutes. Carve meat from bone and slice ½ inch thick. Serve meat with bones.

“Why This Works: For juicy, crispy zha paigu, we started with bone-in rib chops because they cook up tender and juicy. Pounding the chops ¼ inch thick ensured that they cooked quickly yet still offered plenty of meaty chew. We soaked the chops in a super flavorful marinade of soy sauce, michiu (Taiwanese rice wine), sugar, salt, white pepper, garlic, and sweetly aromatic five-spice powder. Dipping the marinated chops in beaten egg before dredging them in coarse (sometimes labeled “thick”) sweet potato starch created a substantial, shattery crust. Coarse sweet potato starch is a big part of the magic of the dish: It developed an exceptionally crispy, craggy crust, especially after the chops were double-fried, a technique that ensured that all the moisture had been expelled from the crust.”