

Singapore Cooks



Lace Zhang with her grandmother, Madam Ong Keow Lan, whom she learnt to cook porridge kueh from.

ST PHOTOS:
MATTHIAS CHONG

A taste of heritage



(Clockwise from top left) Tapioca starch in a bowl, dried prawn with garlic and chilli, cookbook, porridge cake strips and a plate of coriander and bean sprouts.

Use leftover porridge to make porridge kueh – a simple, rustic dish financial consultant Lace Zhang learnt from her grandmother



Hedy Khoo

Porridge kueh is her grandmother's favourite dish to cook and eat, but it was only last year that 29-year-old

financial consultant Lace Zhang got to taste the dish for the first time.

Her maternal grandmother, Madam Ong Keow Lan, 74, says in Mandarin: "Although I love this dish, I did not cook it for my grandchildren as I always felt that young people would not like such simple, rustic food."

Porridge kueh is made from leftover porridge. Tapioca starch is added to the leftover porridge and the mixture is kneaded into a dough, shaped into flat pieces, then boiled into white-coloured cakes, which are then sliced up and fried with ingredients such as bean sprouts.

Madam Ong last year cooked the dish for Zhang's mother and Zhang tasted and liked it.

At her request, Madam Ong taught her how to cook it and she included the recipe in her first cookbook, *Three Dishes One Soup* – Inside The Singapore Kitchen,

which was published in March.

The book is inspired by her grandparents' home cooking and comprises 40 recipes.

Zhang wanted to document her family recipes and encourage readers to create food with the taste of heritage in their own homes.

She started work on the book in 2016 after watching her grandmother cook festive meals for their family of almost 30 people during Chinese New Year.

She says: "I realised it was important to learn to cook from my grandmother and record her recipes as nobody else in our family knows how to cook her repertoire of dishes."

Zhang fell in love with baking at age 19, when she was a business student at Singapore Management University. She baked during her spare time and sold cupcakes to earn extra pocket money.

After graduating in 2013, her interest shifted to cooking, starting

with Western food, then Chinese food, which she ate at family gatherings or whenever she visited her grandparents.

After eating porridge kueh last year, she particularly liked it as it is not a commonly known dish and is based on the principle of not letting food go to waste.

Madam Ong, who learnt to cook porridge kueh from her late mother-in-law in the 1980s, recalls: "Whenever we had porridge, my mother-in-law would remind me to keep the leftover porridge and use it to make porridge kueh. This way, nothing is wasted."

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• *Three Dishes One Soup* – Inside The Singapore Kitchen is published by Marshall Cavendish and is available at \$34 from Zhang's website (bit.ly/2yhw5v9). It retails for \$34.24 at major bookstores.

PORRIDGE KUEH

INGREDIENTS

For the porridge

75g raw long-grained rice

250ml water

For the dough

150g rice porridge (thick and not watery)

160g to 200g tapioca starch

1.5 litres of water

40g dried prawns, soaked for 20 minutes

2 garlic cloves

1 red bird's eye chilli

3 Tbs cooking oil

100ml water

1 Tbs light soya sauce

30g bean sprouts

10g coriander

METHOD

1. Cook 75g of rice in 250ml of water over low heat for 25 minutes. Allow it to cool down.

2. To prepare the dough, place 150g of porridge in a bowl and gradually add the tapioca starch as you knead the mixture into a smooth dough. The end product should be slightly tacky, but easy to work with.

3. Divide the dough into eight portions and use your hands to shape and flatten each portion into 2cm-thick pieces.

4. Bring 1.5 litres of water to a boil in a pot and place three to four pieces of the dough into the pot to cook at a time. Cook each batch of dough pieces for one minute or until the pieces turn opaque and float. Drain the water and set aside the porridge cakes to cool.

5. Place the porridge cakes in a dish and cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight for a firmer texture.

6. Slice the porridge cakes into strips of 5cm by 1.5cm.

7. Using a mortar and pestle, pound the dried prawns until fine. Add the garlic and chilli to the dried prawns and pound into a paste.

8. Heat the oil in a wok over medium-high heat. Add the dried-prawn mixture and fry over medium heat until lightly golden. Add the porridge cake strips and stir-fry.

9. Add 100ml of water and the light soya sauce. Mix well and cover the wok. Allow the porridge cake strips to cook for one to two minutes.

10. Uncover the wok and toss in the bean sprouts and coriander. Turn off the heat and allow the vegetables to continue cooking in the residual heat for one minute. Serve hot.

Serves three