

Chinese Lion's Head Meatballs

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2 lbs. (1 kg) ground pork
1 cup (100 g) green onions, minced
1/4 cup (23 g) ginger, minced
1 cup (220 g) Chinese black mushrooms, rehydrated, trimmed, and minced
1 cup (155 g) bamboo shoots, minced
1/4 cup soy sauce
2 tbsps sesame oil
2 tbsps Chinese cooking sherry (*shao xing*)
dash white pepper
salt to taste (I used about 1 tsp)
2 tbsps flour
2 cups chicken broth
1 cup flour for dredging
vegetable oil for frying
8-12 whole leaves of Napa cabbage

sauce

3 stalks green onions, cut into 1-inch slices
2-inch piece ginger, cut into thin slices
2 tbsps soy sauce
dash sesame oil
1/2 tsp sugar
1 tbsp Chinese cooking sherry (*shao xing*)
3-4 cups chicken broth
1 cup Chinese tree ears, roughly chopped
1-2 tbsps cornstarch

Make the meatballs: In a large bowl, mix the pork, green onions, ginger, mushrooms, bamboo shoots, soy sauce, sesame oil, Chinese cooking sherry, white pepper, and salt together. Sprinkle the 2 tablespoons of flour over the pork and mix well. Pour a little chicken broth in at a time, mixing the liquid into the filling. Keep adding and mixing – it should hold together. Cover the pork and place in the freezer for 20 minutes. Heat 2-3 inches of vegetable oil in a medium saucepan or a large wok to 350°F. Place a cup of flour in a shallow bowl. Remove the pork from the freezer and quickly mold 4 large meatballs or 8 smaller meatballs. Gently coat a meatball in flour and use a large spoon to ease it into the hot oil. It will bubble and splatter, so be careful (this is when you really don't want to have used a pan that is too small or it will boil over). Let it fry for 3-4 minutes and then gently turn it over to fry the other side for another 3 minutes until the outer layer holds the shape of the meatball. Remove from the oil with a slotted spoon and set on paper towels. Repeat with the remaining meatballs making sure they don't break apart when you handle them.

Make the sauce: In a clean medium saucepan over high heat, heat a tablespoon of the frying oil and sauté the green onions and ginger together until fragrant. Add the soy sauce, sesame oil, sugar, sherry, and chicken broth. When the liquid comes to a boil, toss in the tree ears. Mix the cornstarch with a little water (like a few tablespoons of water) and add it to the sauce – stirring the mix in to help thicken it. Turn off the heat.

Assemble: In a large baking dish with a lid or an ovenproof pot with a lid (Dutch oven works), arrange the cabbage leaves on the base so that the leafy parts radiate outward. Place the meatballs on top of the leaves and pour the sauce including all of the tree ears, ginger, and green onions over the meatballs. The liquid should cover 1/2 way up the meatballs. Close the lid. You can either bake in a 350°F oven for an hour or set the pot over a stove to simmer for an hour. Serve hot with rice.