

# MARTIN YAN

## DEMYSTIFIES

# CHINESE FUSION COOKING



Mention Chinese cooking instructor Martin Yan's name anywhere in North America today and we immediately think, "If Yan can cook, so can you!" But when I first assisted Martin Yan more than 20 years ago, at the start of his career, the average North American wouldn't have dreamed of attempting to cook Chinese food at home. Most people didn't even know what a wok was, had never heard of hoisin sauce, and lacked the know-how to use either one. Back then, Martin was "wokking" up a storm throughout the United States on a one-man mission to familiarize North Americans with Asian cooking and culture. Whether stir-frying mouth-watering dishes on his award-winning *Yan Can Cook* TV show or waxing poetic about the health benefits of Asian vegetables during one of his energetic personal appearances, Martin worked hard to demystify Chinese cuisine.

His efforts have paid off. Chinese-style wok cooking has become one of busy North America's weekday favorites for homemade fast food. And, as the demand for Asian ingredients and cookware has grown, most supermarkets and department stores have started carrying everything from plum sauce to electric rice cookers.

A world leader in taking Asian cuisine mainstream, Yan is now at the forefront of a surge in fusion cooking—the "fusing" of Eastern techniques and ingredients with those of unrelated international cuisines. Martin's new PBS series, slated for fall of 2002, explores the culinary impact of Chinatowns throughout the world on international cuisine and culture. As a preview, Martin invited me to rediscover San Francisco's Chinatown with him. In between stops at his favorite produce stand, fishmonger, bakery, live poultry store, delicatessen, and restaurant, Martin explained how Chinese cuisine of the past is shaping future cooking trends.

text and Martin Yan photography by  
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THE GRILLED SHRIMP AND GINGERY SALSA IN THIS REFRESHING SALAD INSTANTLY ENLIVEN TIRED WINTER TASTE BUDS.

### Who invented Chinese fusion cooking?

Chinese fusion cooking is not new. It started hundreds of years ago when Chinese cooks began swapping ingredients and cooking techniques with traders who entered China via the silk route. Later, as Chinese people began to immigrate around the world, they adapted their cuisine to embrace the ingredients available in their new homelands. It's only recently that the media labeled this cross-cultural culinary exchange "fusion" cooking. That's because more and more celebrity chefs are creating Western-style dishes that feature traditional Asian ingredients. But years before this media revelation, chefs the world over had used soy sauce, ginger, salted black beans, hoisin sauce, five-spice powder, and plum sauce in everything from Texas barbecue to French haute cuisine.

### Why is San Francisco's Chinatown so special for Chinese fusion cuisine?

San Francisco is the oldest and most historic Chinatown in North America; it was the port of entry for the Chinese immigrants who came to build the mines and railroads in the 1800s. Like every other ethnic group that has come to America, the Chinese brought their culinary traditions. But they were limited to what they could bring: usually a wok, a couple cooking utensils, and few, if any, Chinese ingredients. To make traditional dishes, they improvised with local foods. So, San Francisco is the first place in America where "Asian fusion" cooking was served both at home and at the first Chinese restaurants in the United States. Chinatown is also home to some of the first fast food shops and delicatessens in San Francisco.

### What are some local foods adapted by these first Chinese cooks in America?

Tomatoes, chilies, broccoli, and asparagus are just a few. Having

grown up in China, I never saw asparagus or broccoli before I came to America. Now when you go to any Chinese restaurant, you see both vegetables in a lot of dishes. Early San Franciscan Chinese food was called chop suey ("chop" means "cut" and "suey" means "little pieces") because everything was cut into bite-size pieces so people could conserve precious fuel by fast stir-frying. Egg foo yong, a Chinese omelet made with bean sprouts and mushrooms, was also invented here. Most people living in China today have never heard of it.

### How do you see American Chinese cuisine evolving in the new millennium?

Americans have an amazing willingness, openness, and

CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW LEFT: THE BOUNTY OF CHINATOWN—FRESH CHINESE VEGETABLES; MARTIN EXPLAINS HOW TO SELECT THE BEST PRODUCE; LOTUS ROOTS; THERE'S A CURE FOR WHAT AILS YOU AT THE CHINESE HERBALIST.



savvy to embrace new cuisine and culture. Ten, 15 years ago most people didn't know the difference between dim sum, chop suey, and chow mein. Now as Americans understand and appreciate the subtleties of



"A GREAT DISH TAKES TIME TO PREPARE. EVERYTHING IN LIFE TAKES TIME TO BUILD."

—Martin Yan

regional Chinese and other Asian cuisines, they want to eat at restaurants that specialize in everything from Shanghai dumplings to Sichuan, Hunan, Thai, and Vietnamese food. They also want to cook these cuisines at home. Just look around Chinatown—you see a lot of mainstream Americans shopping here every day, not just tourists.

### Why do you think Chinese cuisine and Chinese fusion cooking have become so popular?



People the world over are drawn to Chinese cuisine, ingredients, and cooking techniques for several reasons. First, it's healthy. Chinese cooking is based on seasonal fresh ingredients grown locally, rather than on processed, frozen food. Second, Chinese cuisine offers a unique balance of contrasting flavors, textures, and colors that follows an ancient philosophy known as yin and yang. By

harmonizing the yin and yang, or contrasts, within a single dish, cooks create a delicious balance between sweet and sour, crunchy and soft, cold and hot, fatty and dry. Third, Chinese food is fun and easy to cook because it is not an exact art. Anyone with a stove, frying pan, or wok can successfully improvise a Chinese-style dish by mixing seasonal ingredients with just a few basic Chinese condiments like soy sauce and sesame oil.

### How would you suggest home chefs start fusion cooking at home?

It's easier than most people think. Begin by mixing some familiar Chinese condiments into your favorite non-Chinese dishes. Try blending a little soy sauce into your ground meat to perk up your hamburgers or meat loaf. Season your favorite vinaigrette dressing with a touch of sesame oil, or mix some hoisin sauce into your favorite barbecue sauce. Then, after you get some confidence, don't be afraid to experiment with unfamiliar condiments and vegetables. For example, opt for Chinese cabbage to make a lighter version of your favorite coleslaw. In fusion cooking, you are only limited by your imagination.

### Which are the don't-miss spots in San Francisco's Chinatown?

San Francisco's Chinatown is one of the most dynamic, flavorful, and colorful in the world because it is condensed into a couple of square blocks. I suggest visiting a typical grocery store, delicatessen, herb shop, and bakery. I also recommend eating at a dim sum restaurant like The Golden Dragon (816 Washington Street, 415/398-3920), and visiting a hardware store, like Ginn Wall Company (1016 Grant Avenue, 415/982-6307), that sells traditional cooking equipment.

To get a good overview of Chinatown, take a Wok Wiz tour (650/355-9657). To learn more about Chinese cooking, visit [Yancancook.com](http://Yancancook.com).

The following recipes are from *Martin Yan's Feast: The Best of Yan Can Cook*.

### SHRIMP SALAD WITH TROPICAL FRUIT SALSA

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 30 minutes

NOTES: Serve this as a delightful appetizer or double the recipe to make a filling main dish salad.

MAKES: 4 servings

#### Shrimp

- 1 tablespoon rice wine or dry sherry
- 1 teaspoon Asian (toasted) sesame oil
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon white pepper
- $\frac{3}{4}$  pound medium raw shrimp, shelled and deveined

#### Dressing

- 3 tablespoons lime juice or rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons plum sauce
- 2 tablespoons peanut or canola oil
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon Asian (toasted) sesame oil
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon white pepper

#### Salsa

- 1 mango or papaya
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup golden raisins
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup diced red bell pepper
- 1 tablespoon chopped cilantro
- 1 tablespoon chopped crystallized ginger
- 3 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon chili garlic sauce
- 4 cups mixed salad greens

1. Prepare shrimp: In a medium bowl, whisk the rice wine, sesame oil, salt, and white pepper. Add shrimp and stir to coat. Let stand for 10 minutes. Place shrimp on a preheated oiled grill pan or an oiled electric tabletop grill set to 375°. Cook until shrimp turn pink,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 minutes on each side. Remove to a bowl and let cool. Cover and refrigerate until chilled.

2. Prepare dressing: In a bowl, whisk lime juice, plum sauce, peanut oil, honey, sesame oil, and white pepper; set aside.

3. Prepare salsa: Peel the mango. Cut one-half of the flesh into 4 slices and reserve for garnish. Cut the remaining fruit into  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch cubes and place in a bowl with golden raisins, bell pepper, cilantro, crystallized ginger, rice vinegar, and chili garlic sauce.

4. Place salad greens in a large bowl; add dressing and toss to coat. Divide greens among 4 salad plates. Arrange shrimp on one side of greens; spoon salsa on greens opposite the shrimp. Garnish each salad with a slice of mango.

Per serving: 309 cal., 37% (114 cal.) from fat; 16 g

IT'S THE UNUSUAL SAUCES—CHILI GARLIC, HOISIN, AND CHAR SIU—THAT MAKE MARTIN'S SPICY CHICKEN PIZZA SO DELICIOUS.



protein; 13 g fat (2 g sat.); 34 g carbo (2 g fiber); 315 mg sodium; 105 mg chol.

### MARTIN'S CHINESE PIZZA

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 2 hours

NOTES: If you can't find char siu sauce in your supermarket, substitute hoisin sauce, for a total of 3 tablespoons hoisin. Save time by putting toppings on a baked store-bought crust, and baking per directions below. To reduce the heat in this recipe, use the chili garlic sauce sparingly or eliminate.

MAKES: Two 12-inch thin crust pizzas; 6 to 8 servings

- 1 package ( $\frac{1}{4}$  oz.) active dry yeast
- 2 tablespoons cooking oil
- 1 tablespoon honey

- 3 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons vegetable oil
- $\frac{2}{3}$  cup tomato sauce
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons char siu sauce
- 1 to 2 tablespoons chili garlic sauce (see Notes)
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 1 cup shredded roasted chicken meat
- 8 medium mushrooms, thinly sliced
- 1 medium red bell pepper (about  $\frac{1}{2}$  lb.), julienned
- 4 green onions, thinly sliced
- $1\frac{1}{2}$  cups shredded mozzarella cheese

1. In a small bowl, combine  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup warm (110°) water and yeast; let stand in a warm place until bubbly, about 10 minutes. Combine  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup cold water, cooking oil,

MOVE OVER  
MCDONALD'S: ONE TASTE OF  
THESE CHINESE FUSION  
BURGERS AND YOU'LL SAY  
GOODBYE TO PLAIN  
OLD BEEF PATTIES.

7. Bake pizzas, one at a time, in lower third of oven until cheese melts and bottom of crust is browned, about 15 minutes. Serve immediately.

Per serving: 472 cal., 28% (132 cal.) from fat; 19 g protein; 15 g fat (5 g sat.); 66 g carbo (3.7 g fiber); 1,145 mg sodium; 43 mg chol.

### ASIAN BURGERS

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 30 minutes

NOTES: These burgers taste great in buns drizzled with plum sauce instead of catsup. Or serve them up bunless with steamed or stir-fried veggies and hot noodles tossed with Safeway SELECT Cook 'n' Grill Spicy Ginger Sauce.

MAKES: 4 servings

- 2 dried black or shiitake mushrooms
- 1 pound lean or extra lean ground beef
- ½ medium onion, finely chopped
- ¼ cup finely chopped canned water chestnuts
- 2 green onions, coarsely chopped
- 1 tablespoon garlic, pressed or minced
- 2 tablespoons lite soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon oyster-flavored sauce
- 1 teaspoon Asian (toasted) sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon peanut or canola oil
- 4 hamburger buns

1. Soak mushrooms in warm water to cover until softened, about 20 minutes; drain. Slice off stems and finely chop caps.
2. In a large bowl, crumble meat. Add mushrooms, onion, water chestnuts, green onions, garlic, soy sauce, oyster-flavored sauce, and sesame oil; mix well. Sprinkle cornstarch over meat mixture; mix well. Divide mixture into 4 equal portions; lightly shape each portion into a patty about 1 inch thick. Place on a plate and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate for 20 minutes or up to 24 hours before grilling.
3. Preheat a gas or electric tabletop grill to 370°. Or light the fire in your charcoal grill and wait until the coals are white and the heat is medium-high (you can hold your hand at grill level only 3 to 4 seconds). If using a charcoal grill, brush with cooking oil. Place patties on grill and cook, turning once, 4 to 5 minutes per side until the internal temperature reaches 160° on an instant-read thermometer.
4. Serve on buns with your favorite condiments.

Per serving: 406 cal., 44% (174 cal.) from fat; 25 g protein; 19 g fat (6.7 g sat.); 31 g carbo (2.2 g fiber); 786 mg sodium; 70 mg chol.

and honey in a measuring cup.

2. Place flour and salt in a food processor fitted with a metal chopping blade; process for 10 seconds. With the motor running, pour the water-honey mixture, then dissolved yeast down the feed tube. Process until a soft dough ball forms.

3. Carefully remove the dough from the food processor to a lightly floured board and knead until smooth and elastic, about 5 minutes. Pour vegetable oil into a medium-sized bowl. Roll dough around in the oil to cover all surfaces, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.

4. In a small bowl, mix the tomato sauce,

char siu sauce, chili garlic sauce, and hoisin sauce. In a separate bowl, mix ½ cup sauce mixture with cooked chicken and set aside.

5. Preheat oven to 450°. Punch down dough, then divide in half. On a lightly floured board, roll each half to form a 12-inch circle. Transfer each circle to an oiled 12-inch pizza pan; pat dough firmly into pan edge.

6. On each pizza, spread half of remaining sauce mixture evenly over dough, leaving one inch around the edge free of sauce. Arrange half of the toppings—chicken, mushrooms, bell pepper, and green onion—on each pizza then sprinkle each with half of the cheese.

