



Kitchen Wisdom says . . . Try This!

HONEY SESAME CHICKEN NUGGETS

YIELD: 100 servings

CHICKEN NUGGETS INGREDIENTS

Honey—1 qt., ½ cup
Soy sauce—1 qt., ½ cup
Rice vinegar—1 qt., ½ cup
Ginger, ground—2 cups
Onion powder—1 ½ cups
Sesame seeds—1 gal.
Chicken breast nuggets, boneless, skinless—22 lbs.

DIPPING SAUCE INGREDIENTS

Honey—1 gal., 3 cups
Rice vinegar—1 gal., 3 cups
Apricots, dried, diced—6 lbs.
Salt—¼ cup
Pepper—¼ cup

DIRECTIONS

1. To prepare the chicken: In a bowl, combine well 1 qt., ½ cup of honey, the soy sauce, 1 qt., ½ cup of rice vinegar, the ginger and onion powder. Add the chicken nuggets, coating thoroughly; cover and refrigerate to marinate for 30 minutes.
2. To prepare the dipping sauce: In a small saucepan over medium-high heat, bring 1 gal., 3 cups of honey and 1 gal., 3 cups of rice vinegar to a boil.
3. Add the apricots and return to a boil. Simmer for 2-3 minutes. Remove from the heat. Cool slightly, then purée to the desired consistency in a blender or food processor. Season with salt and pepper; set aside.
4. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
5. Place the sesame seeds in a shallow dish. Remove the chicken nuggets from the refrigerator, drain the marinade and coat each nugget with the sesame seeds, placing them on the baking sheet.
6. Bake for 15-20 minutes, or until fully cooked.
7. For each serving: Use 1 ½ ozs. of dipping sauce, accompanied by 3 ½-4 ozs. of the warm, cooked chicken nuggets.

Photo & recipe: National Honey Board, www.honey.com

*Notes: If this recipe passes the test with a small number of students, conduct a nutrient analysis. If serving as part of the reimbursable meal, adjust the serving size as necessary to meet current meal pattern requirements.

KITCHEN WISDOM SAYS . . .

- I would recommend draining the marinade from the chicken in small batches before coating with the sesame seeds. If drained all at one time, the marinade on the chicken could dry out, causing the seeds not to stick.
- I increased the amount of the sesame seeds by 50%.
- The nuggets and sauce were both tasty. The nuggets are easy to overcook, so take care to avoid that.
- This recipe would work well served with brown rice.
- Apricot preserves or jam could be used for the dipping sauce in place of the honey so as not to repeat the honey flavor already on the nuggets and to gain the apricot flavor without having to use a blender; also, preserves may be less costly than dried apricots. If using apricot preserves instead of honey and dried apricots for the dipping sauce, use 1 gal., 3 cups of preserves and 2 cups of soy sauce (equal to 3 Tbsps. of apricot preserves and 1 tsp. of soy sauce for each portion).
- The sauce can be made a couple of days ahead.
- This recipe would be a good one to try with a student cooking club. It is easy enough to understand and execute and should yield a reliable and gratifying product for the kids.



Rising to the Occasion With

ASIAN



As national interest in varying types of Asian cuisine rises steadily, schools are embracing this menu opportunity with flavorful, appealing and healthy items.

BY BRENT T. FREI

In the Westside Community Schools district in Omaha, Neb., where Diane Zipay serves as director of nutrition and catering services, the population of residents with cultural backgrounds in Asia is less than 1%. Yet Asian cuisine is all the rage in Zipay's school nutrition operation. Offered to elementary and middle school students are such dishes as soy-glazed chicken, teriyaki pork, teriyaki chicken (each served over brown rice) and Asian chicken and greens salad (served with pretzel bites to meet the grains requirement).

A side to accompany main dishes might be a fruit offering of a 50/50 orange-and-pineapple salad that "makes the tray pop" with its bright citrus colors. "You get the sweetness of the orange and the tartness of the pineapple, and they marry well together," explains Zipay, who foregoes adding shredded coconut or sliced banana that is typical of some recipes, because her customers prefer the dish simply "as is."

But it's the popularity of Westside's Asian beef and broccoli when offered to elementary students that might surprise some school nutrition managers. Younger customers like broccoli when it's prepared "correctly," Zipay reports. This means steaming it and not holding it too long, ensuring the florets are richly green and crisp when served. Along with the pleasing contrast of tender grilled beef with crunchy green broccoli, part of the dish's successful kid appeal can be credited to a seasoning mix that Kikkoman Sales USA custom developed for Zipay's operation.

If Asian dishes appeal to elementary customers in the district, high school kids positively clamor for it, Zipay says. Every Friday at Westside High School is Asian-Inspired Day at lunch. More than 25% of the 2,000 students will queue in the Asian line, which features exhibition cooking with large commercial woks over live flame. Her staff takes advantage of delivered, ready-to-eat pizzas on Thursdays so they have more time to prep chicken, pork, beef and vegetables needed for the next day's Asian service. On Fridays, food is stir-fried to order in batches, and the woks are manned furiously until every customer is served.

Steady As She Grows

Is the popularity of Asian dishes found in Zipay's Omaha district typical among K-12 students across America? Let's see what the numbers say. A recent Y-Pulse study of kids' eating habits asked approximately 500 customers ages 8-13 to name their favorite foods and drinks. Only 4% mentioned an Asian dish (such as chicken fried rice, egg rolls and cashew chicken) or cited "Chinese" and "Chinese food" and "sushi."

Nonetheless, interest in Asian cuisine among school-age customers is growing. SNA's 2013 *Back to School Trends Report* revealed similarly low percentages: Just 2.5% school nutrition respondents identified Asian as the most popular lunch entrée in their operation among kids. But it ranked above hamburgers and Salisbury

BAO (STEAMED BUNS)

YIELD: 32 servings (1 bun with 2 ozs. of dipping sauce per serving)

PER SERVING: 290 cal., 9 g pro., 36 g carb., 0 g fiber, 13 g fat, 3 g sat. fat, 10 mg chol., 1,030 mg sod.

BUN INGREDIENTS

Biscuit dough, prepared, frozen, 2.2 ozs.—4 lbs., 6 ½ ozs. or 32 pieces

Flour, all-purpose—9 ozs. or 2 cups

Pork barbecue filling, prepared—2 lbs., 4 ozs.

DIIPPING SAUCE INGREDIENTS

Sesame oil, toasted—4 ozs. or ½ cup

Soy sauce, low-sodium—8 ozs. or 1 cup

Rice wine vinegar—12 ozs. or 1 ½ cups

Chili sauce, Chinese garlic—4 ozs. or ½ cup

Water, room temperature (approximately 70°F)—8 ozs. or 1 cup

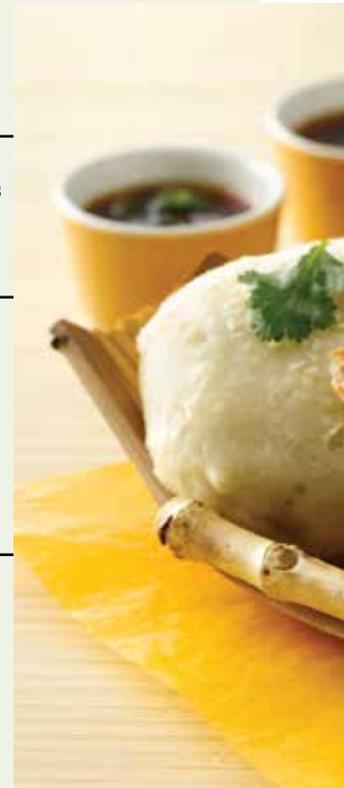
Green onions—2 ozs. or ½ cup

DIRECTIONS

1. To prepare the buns (*bao*): Thaw the frozen, packaged biscuit dough "pucks" under refrigeration overnight or for 30 minutes covered at room temperature.
2. Flatten the thawed biscuit dough pieces evenly into 3-in. circles on a board lightly dusted with flour.
3. Scoop one #40 scoop of the barbecue filling onto the center of each dough piece.
4. Crimp the edges of each *bao* together to form a ball around the filling.
5. Place the filled *bao* on parchment paper (or on a flattened muffin pan liner) in a steamer basket, smooth side up, and steam for 18-20 minutes. (Filled *bao* can be stored in a refrigerator up to 24 hours before steaming.)
6. To prepare the dipping sauce: Mince the green onions. Whisk together the sesame oil, soy sauce, rice wine vinegar, chili sauce, water and green onions.
7. For each serving: Serve each *bao* warm with 2 ozs. of dipping sauce or another condiment of your choice. Note: Excess dipping sauce should be held under refrigeration.

Photo, recipe & recipe analysis: General Mills Foodservice, www.generalmillsfoodservice.com

***Notes:** In order for this recipe to better meet K-12 sodium requirements, experiment with substitutes for the dipping sauce that will still offer an Asian flavor. The use of crushed pepper flakes or sesame seeds can be used for variety and added flavor. The key to getting even filling placement in the middle of the bun is not to manipulate the bun too much. If serving as part of the reimbursable meal, adjust the serving size as necessary to meet current meal pattern requirements.



steak and not too far behind pasta and macaroni and cheese. More telling: That percentage more than doubled from the previous year's study! Indeed, while lunch entrée categories such as pizza and Mexican foods lost a little ground from 2012 figures, the only category with a greater percentage increase than Asian in 2013 was sandwiches and wraps.

The rising popularity of Asian dishes at

school lunch tracks with greater demand for Asian among the U.S. population as a whole, evidenced by sales in the fast casual Asian/noodle segment. According to Technomic, a research firm for the food industry, Panda Express, the segment's leader, recorded sales growth of 19.8% in 2012, placing it as the third-fastest-growing fast-casual chain for the year; it stands at No. 30 overall on Technomic's list of the

THAI CHICKEN AND BROWN RICE LETTUCE WRAPS

YIELD: 50 2-wrap servings
PER SERVING: 292 cal., 21 g pro., 39 g carb., 3 g fiber, 8 g fat, 2 g sat. fat, 859 mg sod., 2 mg iron, 66 mg ca.

INGREDIENTS

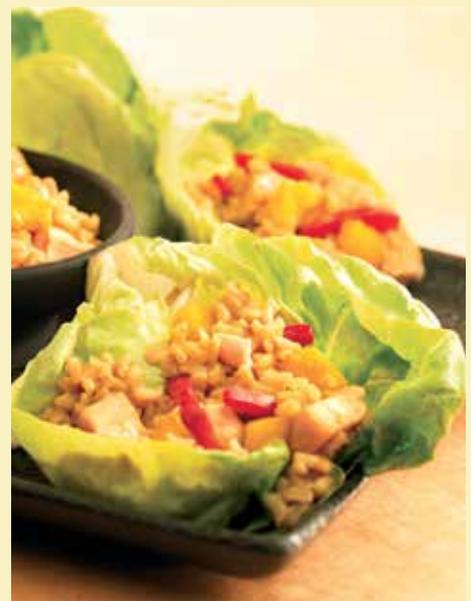
Food release spray—as needed
Chicken fajita meat, cooked—6 lbs., 4 ozs.
Mango, fresh or frozen*—4 lbs. or 3 qts.
Bell peppers, red, raw—2 lbs. or 2 qts.
Peanut sauce, prepared*—1 qt., 1 cup
Brown rice, medium- or long-grain, cooked—8 lbs. or 6 qts., 1 cup
Cilantro, fresh—3 ozs. or 2 cups
Lettuce, iceberg or Boston—100 large, whole leaves

DIRECTIONS

1. Peel and dice the mango. Cut the red peppers into 2-in.x $\frac{1}{2}$ -in strips. Chop the cilantro. Cook the rice according to package instructions and hold at a safe temperature.
2. Lightly coat two 4-in. full-size steamtable pans with food release spray. Place 3 lbs., 2 ozs. of chicken fajita meat into each pan.
3. Add 2 lbs. (or 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ qts.) of diced mango*, 1 lb. (or 1 qt.) of red pepper strips and 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups of peanut sauce to each pan.
4. Cover and cook in a preheated 350°F oven for 30 minutes, or until the internal temperature reaches 135°F or above. Critical Control Point: Heat to 135°F or higher for at least 15 seconds.
5. Stir 4 lbs. (or 3 qts., $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) of hot, cooked brown rice into each pan. Critical Control Point: Hold for service at 135°F or higher.
6. Sprinkle 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ozs. (or 1 cup) of cilantro over each pan just before service.
7. For each serving: Portion 1 cup of the chicken and rice mixture and plate with two lettuce leaves for each serving so that students can make their own lettuce wraps.

Photo, recipe & recipe analysis:
USA Rice Federation, www.menurice.com

*Notes: Drained pineapple tidbits can be used as a substitute for the mango. For a peanut-free sauce alternative, consider whisking together 1 pt., 2 ozs. of prepared sweet chili sauce and 1 pt., 7 ozs. of pineapple juice. According to the company, one serving of this recipe provides 1 oz. equivalent meat and 1 oz. equivalent grains. Fifty servings yields ~20 lbs. or 3 $\frac{1}{8}$ gals. If serving as part of the reimbursable meal, adjust the serving size as necessary to meet current meal pattern requirements.



KITCHEN WISDOM SAYS . . .

- This is a straight-forward recipe to follow. The sauce is the star.
- The biscuit “pucks” can be flattened ahead during the day and refrigerated (maybe even the day before) before actually beginning to fill them, which would expedite the assembly process.
- Replace half of the soy sauce in the preparation of the dipping sauce with low-sodium chicken broth to help reduce the sodium.
- The buns steamed up nicely in 15 minutes in a pressure steamer with the buns placed directly onto the perforated pan. (The use of parchment paper in the pan would collect water.)
- It may be possible to credit this recipe for both a grain and a protein, if a whole-grain biscuit dough is used.

KITCHEN WISDOM SAYS . . .

- Depending on the peanut sauce you use, a little rice vinegar may be necessary to cut through the thickness of the sauce.
- I recommend *not* mixing the rice with the chicken, fruits, vegetables and sauce and instead mixing those ingredients together and portioning them separately on top of a portion of rice on the lettuce leaf. The result would look less goopy than if the rice were mixed in with the sauce and other ingredients; also, the creditable portion of protein and grain can be more accurately served.
- Using leaf lettuce tends to yield a more uniform leaf than Boston (which can be expensive) and iceberg (which tears easily when separating leaves from the head).

Top 500 Chain Restaurants. Meanwhile, Noodles & Company moved up to No. 2 in the segment, with sales increasing 18.5% in 2012. Momentum has only accelerated for Noodles & Company in recent years; the chain’s sales grew 14.9% in 2011 and 13.5% in 2010.

Consumers’ evolving palates and a growing familiarity with the flavors of Thailand and, to a lesser extent, Vietnam

and Korea, might mean greater menu opportunities for fast-casual Asian/noodle operators, cites Technomic. These concepts’ extensive use of fresh vegetables also can help to position them as an option for health-conscious diners. But virtually *all* foodservice segments are exploring the opportunities created by Americans’ increasing interest in Asian cuisine, particularly authentic cuisines

from specific countries and regions. That’s why the theme of the next international Worlds of Flavor Conference (scheduled for April 2015 at The Culinary Institute of America [CIA] in California’s Napa Valley) will be “Asia and the Theater of World Menus.” This event draws chefs from across the United States and around

the world for an advance look at projected foodservice industry trends.

“One of the biggest drivers we see is [interest in] health and wellness,” says Amy Myrdal Miller, MS, RDN, the CIA’s senior director of programs and culinary nutrition. “Asian cuisines, right or wrong, have an allusion of health and wellness. The Japanese diet, for example, is exceedingly low in fat and rich in seafood, but really high in sodium. Vietnamese cuisine is abundant in fresh vegetables and herbs and fruits, but is also very high in sodium. So, how do we take interest in these flavors and cultures and the potential for delicious, healthful menu development and translate it to foodservice across the spectrum?” That’s the challenge for chefs and food manufacturers eager to capitalize on increased global demand for such menu items.

Asian That Wows

One person rising to that challenge is Chef Coleen Donnelly, a K-12 culinary specialist based in San Francisco, who owned an Asian restaurant in Delaware in the late 1990s. Today, a good deal of her research and development focuses on Asian-inspired concepts; for instance, Donnelly’s currently perfecting a pork adobo featuring bound and tied fresh ham (uncured hind leg) that a school in her community



YIELD: 96 servings
PER SERVING*: 420 cal., 5 g sat. fat, 480 mg sod.

SHANGHAI SWEET AND SPICY SPAGHETTI

YIELD: 100 servings (9.2 ozs. each)
PER SERVING: 368 cal., 17 g pro., 56 g carb., 8 g fiber, 9 g fat, 2 g sat. fat, 260 mg chol., 473 mg sod.

INGREDIENTS

Spaghetti, whole-grain enriched—12 ½ lbs.
Olive oil—as needed
Pineapple chunks*—6 ½ No. 10 cans
Soy sauce, reduced-sodium—1 qt., 1 pt.
Sriracha sauce—2 cups
Pan spray—1 oz.
Scrambled eggs, pre-cooked—12 ½ lbs.
Stir-fry vegetable blend, packaged—36 lbs.



DIRECTIONS

1. Cook the pasta for 5 minutes. To cool, place the pasta flat on sheet trays or steamtable pans, then spray lightly with olive oil and cool in a blast chiller. Or cool it down in a walk-in cooler.
2. Drain the pineapple juice from the pineapple chunks and keep separate. The juice yield should be 2 gals., plus 2 qts.
3. In a large mixing bowl, add all of the pineapple juice, soy sauce and sriracha. Whisk well. Cover and set aside.
4. Lightly spray four steamtable pans with pan spray and place 6 qts., 1 cup of pasta into each pan.
5. Pour the pineapple juice mixture over the pasta, using 3 qts. per pan. Toss lightly to mix.
6. Place the sauced pasta into a preheated 350°F convection oven or a 375° conventional oven. Bake for 20 minutes or until the liquid is absorbed and the pasta is glazed.
7. Cover the pasta and place in a warming cart and hold above 135°F.
8. Steam the scrambled eggs in bags per package instructions. Place in a warmer and hold above 135°F.
9. Place the vegetable blend in a steamer. Steam for 15 minutes or until the vegetables have reached 140°F. Place vegetables in the warmer and hold for service.
10. For each serving: Start with 1 cup spoodle of pasta, then top with 1 cup spoodle of stir-fry vegetables and ¼ cup (#16 scoop) of scrambled eggs.

Photo, recipe & recipe analysis: Barilla Foodservice, www.barillafoodservice.com

***Notes:** The packaged stir-fry vegetable blend should include sugar snap peas, broccoli, carrots, water chestnuts and red peppers. Consider serving the canned pineapple chunks as a side. Chunks *not* included in nutrient analysis or meal pattern calculation. According to the company, one serving of this recipe provides 2 ozs. equivalent grains, 2 ozs. equivalent meat/meat alternate and 1 cup other vegetable. If serving as part of the reimbursable meal, adjust the serving size as necessary to meet current meal pattern requirements.

ASIAN-STYLE MEATBALL SANDWICH

INGREDIENTS

Sweet-and-sour sauce, low-sodium—6 lbs.
Meatballs, prepared, fully cooked—16 lbs.
Hoagie* rolls, whole-wheat—96

DIRECTIONS

1. Cook and prepare meatballs to package instructions or use your own recipe. Critical Control Point: Hold for service at 135°F or higher.
2. Place the meatballs in a sauce pan and cover with the sweet-and-sour sauce. Over heat, bring to a low boil.
3. For each serving: Place two meatballs

with sauce on the bottom half of a hoagie roll, then top with the other half of the roll and serve.

Photo, recipe & recipe analysis: Schwans Food Service, Inc., www.schwansfoodservice.com

***Notes:** If this recipe passes the test with a small group of students, conduct a complete nutrient analysis. According to the company, one serving of this recipe provides 2 meat/meat alternate equivalents and 2 ½ whole-grain equivalents. If the term “hoagie” is unfamiliar to you, note that in various parts of the country, this sandwich is called a submarine, hero, grinder, wedge or torpedo.

with a high Filipino concentration receives as USDA Foods commodity product.

But what makes a dish “Asian”? Donnelly sums up the answer in one word: balance. “Other cuisines tend to showcase one flavor—think tomato sauce—whereas Asian cuisines blend sweet, spicy, sour, salty and sometimes bitter with no one flavor taking the spotlight,” she explains. “Each cuisine under the Asian umbrella will use different ingredients to achieve the flavor balance, but the balance should always be there.” Donnelly cites a number of ingredient sources as examples:

- **Sour:** Lime, vinegar, tamarind
- **Sweet:** Palm sugar, mirin
- **Salty:** Soy sauce, fish sauce, fermented black beans
- **Spicy:** Chiles, ginger, black pepper
- **Bitter:** Certain greens, some eggplants

In addition, *umami* (Japanese for “pleasant savory taste”) is another one of

the basic tastes (along with sweet, sour, bitter and salty). In Asian foods, it can be used strategically to lower sodium in dishes and heighten satiety, Miller says. High-*umami* foods, such as mushrooms, tomato-based products and low-sodium soy sauce, pack a punch because of *umami*’s flavor-enhancing properties. “So use *umami*, understand it, appreciate it,” she urges.

But when it comes to striking a balance with Asia-inspired dishes, can younger customers handle spicy foods? Conventional wisdom seems to assert that elementary kids eschew spicy until their palates develop and don’t crave hotter flavors until they reach middle or high school. But Mary O’Broin, vice president of marketing for Schwan’s Food Service, which sells Asian products to schools under its Minh® brand, disagrees. “We’re all experiencing more food outside the home, so we’re seeing that feistier flavor

profile appeal to even younger kids,” she says, adding that the company’s Minh products sales to elementary schools support that claim.

Ultimately, assert advocates, Asian dishes offer a lot of potential for schools to meet whole-grain and vegetable requirements while using meat proteins more sparingly, as Miller points out. These include menuing *pho* (a Vietnamese noodle soup), handheld items like sushi rolls and noodle bowls. This approach to protein use isn’t “stretching,” she asserts. “It happens in Vietnam. A few strips of pork contributes aroma and draws the eye, but the dish is still mostly plant-based.”

Asian Adoration?

It’s okay if you’re still a little skeptical about the acceptance of authentic Asian and Asia-inspired dishes among your students. Not all kids are jumping on the rickshaw. At Davis School District in

KUNG PAO BEEF WITH ASIAN STIR-FRIED RICE

YIELD: 116 servings (8.3 ozs. each)

INGREDIENTS

- Beef fajita strips, frozen—18 ¾ lbs.
- Green peppers, raw—2 ¼ lbs.
- Red peppers, raw—2 ¼ lbs.
- Hot water (180-190°F)—1 gal., 10 ½ qts.
- Scallions (top and bulb), raw—7 cups
- Kung Pao sauce mix*, prepared—2 15.87-oz. bags
- Rice, brown, long-grain, parboiled—7 ½ lbs.
- Asian Stir-Fried Rice seasoning*—3 6.82-oz. packets
- Butter—9 ozs. (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. To prepare the Kung Pao sauce: Pour 1 gal. of the hot water into a mixing container. Pour the contents of both packages of the prepared sauce mix into the water while vigorously stirring with a wire whisk. Continue stirring until the mix has fully dissolved and the sauce is smooth. Set aside.
2. Chop the red and green peppers into large pieces. Steam the peppers until they

are *al dente* or leave them raw. Chop the scallions. Set aside.

3. To prepare the beef: Place the frozen fajita strips in a single layer on a clean pan. Bake from frozen in a convection oven at 350°F for 15-20 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 165°F or in a conventional oven at 375°F for 25-30 minutes or until the internal temperature reaches 165°F. Critical Control Point: Heat to 165°F for at least 15 seconds.

4. Remove the fajita strips from the oven. Divide the heated beef, as well as the peppers and scallions, evenly into five full-size steamtable pans. Pour the sauce mixture evenly over the beef and vegetables. Place the product in a warming cabinet until served. Ensure that hot food is held at a temperature above 140°F.

5. To prepare the rice: Using three 2-in. full-size steamtable pans, combine 3 ½ qts. of hot water, 2 ½ lbs. of parboiled brown rice, the contents of one rice seasoning packet and 3 ozs. of butter (optional) to each of the three pans. Stir well. Cover with foil or a pan lid and bake in a 350°F conventional



oven for 30-35 minutes. Remove from the oven and stir well. Return to the oven for approximately 10 more minutes, or until the water is absorbed. Place the product in a warming cabinet until served. Ensure that hot food is held at a temperature above 140°F.

6. For each portion: Serve ½ cup of rice with 4 ¾ ozs. of beef.

Photo & recipe: Kent Precision Foods Group, www.precisionfoods.com/foodservice

***Notes:** Foothill Farms® Kung Pao Sauce Mix and Foothill Farms Asian Stir-Fried Rice Seasoning can be used for this recipe. If this recipe passes the test with a small group of students, conduct a nutrient analysis. According to the company, one serving of this recipe provides 2 ozs. equivalent meat/meat alternate, ¾ cup vegetables and 1 oz. eq. whole grains. If serving as part of the reimbursable meal, adjust the serving size as necessary to meet current meal pattern requirements.

Clearfield, Utah, which serves 34,000 students in a rural part of the state, Pam Tsakalos, SNS, nutrition services director, has found herself removing several Asian dishes from the lunch menu rotation. That's partly because of certain commodity processing issues that she's experienced, but also because the dishes simply weren't very popular with her customers, she says, noting that more traditional American fare, like roast turkey with mashed potatoes and gravy, still reigns supreme at home and at school.

But even in rural Utah, Asian is making some inroads. For example, Tsakalos says she is seeing success with orange chicken served with brown rice and stir-fried vegetables and offered to younger customers every three weeks in a six-week menu cycle. "Elementary [students] love the orange chicken," she reports. It probably helps that Tsakalos makes the dish fun by serving it in a traditional Chinese takeout container with an egg roll and fortune cookie.

Another way to encourage kids to try the flavors of Asian cuisine is to find approaches to adapt those dishes in ways that resonate with your particular customer base. For example, Benjamin Guggenmos, district chef for the School District of Hillsborough County, serving more than 200 schools in the greater Tampa, Fla., area, features *yellow rice* in Asian-inspired dishes. To do this, brown rice and whole-grain barley are seasoned with blends that include turmeric or saffron (depending on the dish), both of which change the color of the grain and make it more appealing to his customers, especially those from Tampa's extensive Cuban and Latin neighborhoods, who may not be as familiar with brown rice.

In Hillsborough middle and high schools, such dishes include a Thai bowl featuring shredded chicken or pork over yellow "barley rice," which is a commercial whole-grain blend. To address peanut allergies among students, Guggenmos replaces traditional Thai peanut sauce with a blend of SunButter (a peanut butter alternative made from sunflower seeds)

and sweet chili sauce. The protein is mixed in the sauce before it's served atop the grains. Another menu item, a teriyaki chicken dish, also features the yellow barley topped with unbreaded whole muscle chicken strips.

Asian-inspired cuisine can be great menu options to help you meet various local priorities. Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) in California's Bay Area serves approximately 36,000 students. Like Omaha's Westside Community Schools, OUSD offers Asian beef and

broccoli with great success—on Meatless Mondays, the recipe is tweaked to offer Asian *tofu* and broccoli. Recently, OUSD introduced rice noodles with bok choy with a choice of chicken or tofu to its elementary schools on "California Thursdays," when everything served is grown or processed in the state, a promotion coordinated with help from the district's partnership with the Center for Ecoliteracy based in nearby Berkeley.

Don't be afraid to make recipe adjustments based on cost. Last fall, OUSD's

ONION BAHJI

YIELD: 24 servings

PER SERVING: 250 cal., 4 g pro., 24 g carb., 2 g fiber, 16 g fat, 4 g sat. fat, 35 mg chol., 10 mg sod., 8 mg iron, 2 mg ca.

INGREDIENTS

Vegetable oil—as needed
Onions—6
Eggs—3
Flour, chickpea or all-purpose*—4 ½ cups
Sparkling water—as needed
Clarified butter—6 Tbsps.
Cilantro, fresh—3 Tbsps.
Cumin, ground—1 ½ tsp.
Turmeric, ground—¾ tsp.
Cayenne—¼ tsp.
Oregano, dried—¼ tsp.

DIRECTIONS

1. Beat the eggs; set aside. Mince the cilantro. Crush the oregano.
2. In a wok, heat the vegetable oil to 350°F.
3. Cut the onions in half from stem to root and slice about ¼-in. thick. Break into rings or cut into slivers.
4. In a bowl, combine the eggs, flour and enough water to create a batter that has a similar thickness to a pancake batter.
5. Into the batter, whisk in the butter, then add the cilantro, cumin, turmeric, cayenne and oregano. Let rest for 30 minutes.
6. Stir the onions into the batter and let sit another 5 minutes.
7. Place small mounds of the batter-covered onions into the hot oil in the wok. Cook on one side until crisp and brown, then turn over and cook the second side.
8. Remove the onions as they are done; drain on a rack or paper towel before serving.
9. For each serving: Portion ⅓ cup per serving. Serve with a yogurt dip or mango chutney.

Photo, recipe & recipe analysis: National Onion Association, www.onions-usa.org

*Notes: If serving as part of the reimbursable meal, adjust the serving size as necessary to meet current meal pattern requirements. All-purpose flour was used in conducting the nutrient analysis.



ASIAN CHICKEN AND SHIITAKE TACOS

YIELD: 200 tacos

INGREDIENTS

Sushi vinegar—2 cups
Katsu sauce—4 cups
Chili sauce, Thai-style—2 cups
Garlic—4 ozs.
Chicken thighs, boneless,
skinless, large dice—35 lbs.

Vegetable oil—4 ozs.
Shiitake mushrooms—5 lbs.
Cilantro—2 cups
Scallions—2 cups
Tortillas, soft corn—200

DIRECTIONS

1. Slice the garlic and mushrooms. Chop the cilantro and thinly slice the scallions and mix together before setting aside.
2. To create the marinade: Mix the vinegar, katsu sauce, chili sauce and garlic together. Marinate the chicken in the mixture overnight under refrigeration.
3. Heat 1 oz. of the vegetable oil and sauté the mushrooms until they are dry and slightly crispy. Reserve.
4. Remove the chicken from the marinade and drain all of the excess.
5. Heat the remaining oil and sauté the chicken until it is cooked through.
6. Warm the tortillas.
7. For each serving: On each taco, place 3 ozs. of chicken and ½ oz. of mushrooms in a tortilla and top with 1 tsp. of the cilantro and scallion mixture. For a spicier taco, top with additional chili sauce.

Recipe: Developed by Chef Ann Cooper for Kikkoman Sales USA, Inc., www.kikkomanusa.com/foodservice

***Notes:** If this recipe passes the test with a small group of students, conduct a nutrient analysis. If serving as part of the reimbursable meal, adjust the serving size as necessary to meet current meal pattern requirements.

school nutrition team offered a California Thursday kung pao chicken made with locally grown broccoli instead of bell pepper, because the broccoli was more economical. OUSD also recently began sourcing brown rice grown in the state, which is not only local, but less expensive than the rice it had been purchasing from a national supplier.

In keeping with the health and wellness mindset of the area, *not* appearing on OUSD menus is anything featuring a cloying sweetness, like the sweet-and-sour chicken served at most mom-and-pop

Chinese restaurants. “We’re not working to a sweet palate,” says Amy Glodde, MPH, RD, menu planner for the district. “I don’t think we have to add sugar to get kids to eat something.” Glodde recently tested a cherry blossom sauce for a brown rice Hawaiian bowl that she’ll introduce to menus soon. “It was a little sweet, but not as much sugary as sweet and sour,” she reports. “The kids loved it.”

A new concept that Glodde is particularly excited about is one she’s still developing: a “kung fu taco” featuring a *bao*, a Chinese dumpling gaining popular-

ity as a sandwich bread in certain U.S. markets; it tested well with district kids last summer. Slit open and stuffed with chicken, a complementing Asian sauce and shredded carrot and cabbage, Glodde believes her kung fu taco featuring a brown rice *bao* and offered as a handheld item will be flavorful, healthy and fun to eat for all ages.

The most important thing to keep in mind when working to gain customer acceptance for Asian cuisine is patience. Two decades ago, tacos, burritos and quesadillas were literally a foreign concept to most districts far from the American Southwest; today those dishes are cafeteria mainstays from coast to coast. And with the mandate given to K-12 foodservice operations to lead kids to healthy options, Asian-inspired dishes—more than those of most other ethnic cuisines—offer a platform from which to showcase a lot of fresh vegetables and whole grains in appealing, flavorful ways. **SN**

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