



EAT AN OLD FRIEND

SUBLIMELY SOUR AND SPICY, OLD FRIEND NOODLES ARE A CURE FOR ALL THAT AILS YOU

在炎热的南宁，又酸又辣的老友粉是当地人的至爱。怎样在家制作正宗的老友粉？

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One of the most well-loved and famous dishes in Nanning, Guangxi Province, Old Friend Noodles (老友面 *lǎoyǒumiàn*) or Old Friend Rice Noodles (老友粉 *lǎoyǒufěn*) have been associated with the snack-loving town for generations. A no-frills, deliciously addictive dish, it is a part of the everyday streetscape of life in Nanning. “I guess most local people take it for granted,” says Guangxi native Yang Jie, “but when you haven’t had it for a while, you crave it.” Having eaten the noodles all her life, The Hutong Chef, who can otherwise be found crusading for nature at environmental group Greenpeace, is passionate about food, its science and its ethnography.

Like an old friend, the legendary noodles provide solace and comfort to the weary eater and, as an added benefit have much vaunted health properties. This, the most quintessential of Nanning nibbles, is revered as the go-to snack in a city renowned for its food.

Like so many provincial dishes, its unusual moniker is derived from a folktale, its true origins lost with legend and time. The story goes that a loyal customer drank tea at a Nanning teahouse



every day at a set time, with almost religious devotion. Absent for a day after falling afoul with a bad cold, the concerned teahouse proprietor cooked a simple bowl of noodles with garlic, hot and sour chilli sauce, fermented bamboo shoots and beans and pork, and sent them over to the convalescing customer. While eating the noodles, the potent spicy, sour mixture caused the loyal customer to perspire profusely, allowing him to “sweat out” the cold. He made a quick (and tasty) recovery. Grateful for the intervention, the noodles became known as an “Old Friend.”

Sharing a border with Vietnam, Nanning faces Southeast Asia and is home to more than 30 ethnic groups—making for an exciting fusion of flavours. Not unlike the nearby neighbouring province of Guangdong, the food of Nanning places a particular emphasis on freshness, a tender texture and nourishing properties. Humid sub-tropical weather also makes hot, sour and salty essential appetite stimulating flavours.

Laoyoufen ticks all the right boxes—tantalizingly sour pickled bamboo stimulates the tastebuds and aids digestion. The curiously simple fermenting process doesn't use an added pickling agent, but instead uses pure water to draw out the natural

sourness in young bamboo shoots. In a hot climate, this was the go-to method for preserving vegetables before modern refrigeration. Custom has persisted through to the present day because of the delicious results. Hot chilli raises a sweat and helps the body cool down to cope with the heat. Combining the hot and sour flavors, “helps clear the sinuses and provides relief for the common cold.” Yang Jie asserts. Silky rice noodles, no doubt are easier to eat and rather soothing for a tired sore throat.

Quite possibly Nanning's answer to the famous Chicken Soup penicillin, think of your Old Friend Noodles as a universal panacea in a bowl!

“WHEN YOU HAVEN'T HAD THEM FOR A WHILE, YOU CRAVE THEM.”



Old Friend Rice Noodles

INGREDIENTS

150g fresh or 250g dried
flat rice noodles
米粉 mǐfěn

100g sliced pork shoulder
or 3 Tbsp minced pork
猪肉 zhūròu

2 Tbsp chopped pickled
bamboo shoots
酸笋 suānsǔn

1 Tbsp finely chopped
garlic
蒜泥 suànní

1 Tbsp preserved black
beans
豆豉 dòuchǐ

1/2 Tbsp garlic chili sauce
蒜茸辣椒酱
suànróng làjiāojiàng

1/2 medium tomato,
roughly chopped
西红柿 xīhóngshì

1 Tbsp chopped
spring onion
香葱 xiāngcōng

1 Tbsp rice vinegar
米醋 mǐcù

1 Tbsp soy sauce
生抽 shēngchōu

1 Tbsp Chinese cooking
wine 料酒 liàojiǔ

water 水 shuǐ

2 Tbsp vegetable oil or
2 teaspoons lard
植物油/猪油
zhíwùyóu / zhūyóu



1

If you are using dried rice noodles, soak them in water for about 15 minutes, allow them to expand. Soak preserved black beans in warm water for 10 minutes.

2

Heat oil in wok, stir in pickled bamboo shoots, garlic, chilli sauce and preserved black beans over high heat until fragrant

3

Quickly add in sliced or minced pork, chopped tomatoes and Chinese cooking wine. Fry for a further minute or until the pork is no longer pink on the outside. Mix in soy sauce and vinegar. Stir well.

4

Add just enough water to cover the noodles and bring to a boil

5

Add noodles and cook until soft. Sprinkle chopped spring onions on top before serving.

