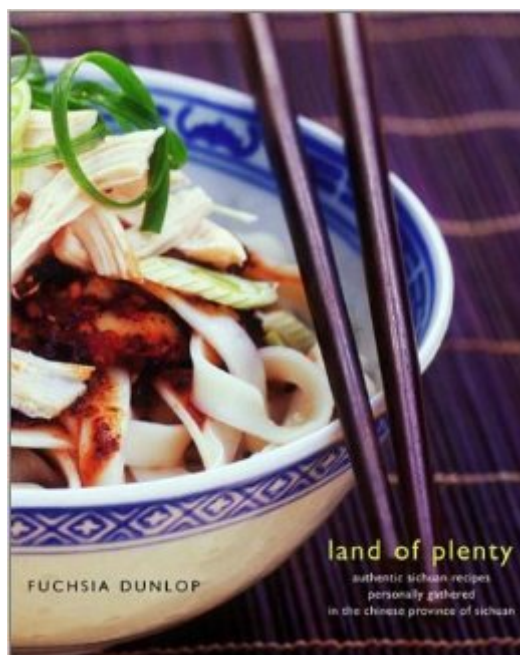


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Land Of Plenty: A Treasury Of Authentic Sichuan Cooking



Synopsis

"It is a very long time since I saw a book which is so patently an absolute 'must.'" — Alan Davidson, author of *The Oxford Companion to Food* The food of the Sichuan region in southwest China is one of the world's great culinary secrets. Many of us know it for its "hot and spicy" reputation or a few of its most famous dishes, most notably Kung Pao chicken, but that is only the beginning. Sichuanese cuisine is legendary in China for its sophistication and astounding diversity: local gourmets claim the region boasts 5000 different dishes. Fuchsia Dunlop fell in love with Sichuanese food on her first visit to the province ten years ago. The following year she went to live in the Sichuanese capital Chengdu, where she became the first foreigner to study full-time at the province's famous cooking school, the Sichuan Institute of Higher Cuisine. Now she has given us a cookbook gathered on the spot from the kitchens of Sichuan, filled with stories and colorful descriptions of the region itself. Useful for the enthusiastic beginner as well as the experienced cook, *Land of Plenty* teaches you not only how to prepare the Sichuan recipes but also the art of chopping and to appreciate the textures of dishes. Among this book's unique features: a full glossary of Chinese terms; Chinese characters useful for shopping; a practical introduction to the art of cutting; detailed lists of the 23 recognized flavor combinations and 56 cooking methods used in Sichuanese cuisine; 16 color pictures of the ingredients and finished dishes; double-page maps of the region; and Chinese characters for every recipe

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Customer Reviews

I was very surprised when I found this book in this library, because authentic Chinese cookbooks

are difficult enough to find, and anything regional and non-Cantonese even rarer. I myself had never been to Sichuan, though my family did often dine at excellent Sichuan restaurants in Taiwan. Before I proceed to the recipes, let me state that having read the book several times already (!), this is by far the best regional cookbook on Chinese cooking I've read in English. The author has a talent for combining the precise instruction needed for writing a cookbook and a poetic flair for capturing the local attitude to food. Knowing that most of her audience would likely be unfamiliar with daily life in Sichuan, often a mystery even to outside Chinese, she details the street life there. One of my favorite parts is that consequently, her cooking is mostly based on home style and street food rather than haute banquet cuisine (though there are a few recipes of those too). I find this a prudent choice, as banquet food are almost always too elaborate for home cooks, and few things reflect regional cuisine as well as street food. Most of the recipes are pretty straightforward, and addictively delicious. I've made some from the noodles section are my favorite, as I'm a big fan of snack food. Most of these foods do not require more than a good cleaver, wok, and standard kitchen equipment to make. However, the Sichuan peppercorn is an absolute essential. Regarding to another reviewer's warning, I believe the ban on fagara has been lifted, given that the pepper be subjected to high heat before import. Simple googling will turn up the sources. Another caveat, though it's not really the author's fault, is that there were surprisingly few vegetable dishes, and even fewer vegetarian. This may be surprisingly given that most of China subsides on primarily vegetable-based diets. However, there are actually not that many famous Sichuan vegetarian dishes, probably because they are seen as peasant affairs. For vegetarians, I'd recommend borrowing this from the library or friend and copying down the dozen or so relevant recipes (after reading the entire book of course). Lastly, there are very few sweet dishes. This may bother some people, but sweets really are not part of daily traditional meals anyways, save for the complicated holiday specialities, so in a way I'm glad she left them out. I really am glad this book came to being. I don't have much actual complaints except that I wish there were more pictures. There are some here but not many, and given the unfamiliarity of most people to these cuisines I think photos would help. But otherwise, a new favorite and a real standout.

There are no steamed dishes but mostly require wok frying so the recipes aren't the healthiest but they are not that oily either (two teaspoons of oil in the wok and one teaspoon of sesame oil in the sauce for the Kung POW!) The layout of the book is encouraging and I had no problem reaching for it when I am at a loss over what to cook for dinner. Luckily I have chili peppers and Sichuan peppercorn in my larder now so I am well-prepared to tackle these recipes which call for simple

ingredients but the resulting flavors are complex and addictive. Once that ginger meets the sichuan pepper infused oil, one can taste the deliciousness of the dish by fragrance alone. I also understand what Chinese takeout food is all about now. These flavors are crowd pleasers and an unskilled cook like myself enjoys a 100% pass rating from picky eaters when these dishes are served. This is a perfect book and I laugh at Fuschia Dunlop's photo because I think her smile is like my inner smile when I see or think of something good to eat. My only regret with the layout is that the order of the ingredients for the marinade and the sauce are not in the same order so that if I need cornstarch in both liquids, I can use one measuring spoon for two ramekins. Because of this book, I purchased sichuan peppercorns, my first ever pricey knife, a Krups coffee grinder, more sesame oil, two bottles of Jonesy port and more cutting boards. The lip smacking flavors of Sichuanese cuisine are that motivating.

The mark of a good cookbook is that it get used a lot, and in just a few months my copy of Land of Plenty has acquired a variety of drips, splotches, and stains from its very frequent trips into my kitchen. I was fortunate enough to spend several weeks in Chengdu and Chongqing a few years ago, and the recipes in this book do a fantastic job of recreating the smells and flavors I remember from my trip. Literally every single recipe I've tried from this book has been a winner, and the Gong Bao Ji Ding (Kung Pao Chicken) has become a weekly standard around our place. My girlfriend, a native Chinese, has repeatedly commented that the flavors of these recipes taste authentic to her memories of eating at Sichuanese restaurants in China. As previous reviewers noted, Sichuan peppercorns, which are a key flavoring ingredient in some of these dishes, are indeed slowly making a comeback in the US. However, they still seem to be very hard to find outside of major Chinatowns like NYC and San Francisco. I eventually found a few Internet sources, such as the CMC Company, and was able to purchase them that way (and it was well worth it).

After cooking every single recipe in this book, I can confidently say that this is probably the best cook book ever written. Fuschia's commitment to tradition and authenticity is evident and her instructions are clear and concise. Even more challenging recipes such as tea-smoked duck are remarkably simple if you plan ahead accordingly.

One reviewer warned that the U.S. Dep't of Agriculture's ban on the importation of Sichuan peppercorns limited the utility of this terrific book. Be advised that in the three years since that review was written, the U.S. has lifted the ban. I know because I bought some today, at a spice

store in Chicago.

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