

Minced Chicken in Lettuce Cups *Pictured on page 66*

Classic and simple to prepare, this beautiful dish is easy to serve, healthy and delicious. Although this is usually served in lettuce cups, we suggest that you try serving it in hearts of romaine lettuce leaves or Belgian endive for an eye-catching presentation.

Makes: 6 to 8 servings

Cooking time: 15 minutes

- 4 or 5 dried black mushrooms
- 1 whole chicken breast, split, boned and skinned

MARINADE

- Pinch white pepper
- 1 egg white
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cornstarch
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

SAUCE

- 1 tablespoon dry sherry
- 1 tablespoon oyster sauce
- 3 tablespoons Hoisin sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- 1 head iceberg lettuce (or 3 to 4 heads Belgium endive or hearts of romaine, leaves separated)
- Vegetable oil, for deep-frying
- 1 ounce rice sticks, separated into smaller amounts
- 1 green onion (white part), chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup coarsely chopped bamboo shoots
- 2 water chestnuts, coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped red bell pepper
- 2 tablespoons toasted pinenuts or crushed peanuts

Soak mushrooms in warm water for 20 minutes; remove, drain, and dice.

Mince chicken and combine with MARINADE ingredients in the order listed; let stand for 10 minutes. Combine SAUCE ingredients in a bowl.

Cut 1 inch off the core end of lettuce head. Peel off large leaves and trim with scissors or pinking shears to make circles about 4 or 5 inches in diameter.

To deep-fry, heat 2 cups oil in a wok to 350°. Fry rice sticks in batches, a small amount at a time, for a few seconds until puffed, but still white. Remove immediately, drain well.

To stir-fry, remove all oil from wok except 3 tablespoons. Reheat oil until hot. Add chicken and stir-fry for 1 to 2 minutes until opaque. Add green onion, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, water chestnuts and red bell pepper, and stir for 30 to 45 seconds. Add SAUCE, tossing vigorously to coat thoroughly.

To serve, mound chicken mixture in the center of serving platter. Sprinkle pinenuts over the mound. Sprinkle rice sticks around the edge of the mound. Place lettuce cups around outside edge of mound or on a separate plate. Spoon 2 tablespoons of chicken mixture into each leaf. Sprinkle some rice sticks on top. Eat out-of-hand.

Alternative Serving Method: To serve at a buffet or cocktail party, spoon chicken mixture into each leaf, sprinkle with pinenuts and rice sticks and arrange decoratively on a platter or tray for each person to serve himself.

• Notes •

1. Vegetarian version: Omit the chicken and increase the amount of bamboo shoots to 1 cup and water chestnuts to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup. You can also add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup coarsely chopped celery, squash or fresh mushrooms to the mixture. For a spicy version, add 1 seeded, thinly sliced jalapeño with the vegetables.
2. Rice sticks will expand greatly in size when deep-fried; cook only a little at a time. Do not brown.