

# POPCORN CHICKEN WITH BASIL

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**SERVES 2-4** PREPARATION TIME 20 MINS COOKING TIME 10 MINS

Taiwanese food is a great mix of local dishes with influences from China, Japan and Southeast Asia. Popcorn chicken is a popular street food in Taipei, and once you try it you'll see why. The crunchy texture of the sweet potato flour coating is incredible.

## INGREDIENTS

600g boneless chicken thigh fillets,  
preferably skin-on, cut into 3cm pieces  
3 cloves garlic, peeled and minced  
1 tsp grated ginger  
1 tbsp soy sauce  
1 tbsp Shaoxing wine  
2 tsp sugar  
½ tsp Chinese five spice powder  
1 cup sweet potato flour  
2 litres oil, for deep-frying  
1 cup loosely packed Thai basil leaves

## Spice salt

1 tbsp salt  
¼ tsp Chinese five spice powder  
¼ tsp white pepper  
A pinch chilli powder

## METHOD

- 1 Combine the chicken with the garlic, ginger, soy sauce, Shaoxing wine, sugar and five spice powder and set aside to marinate for at least 10 minutes.
- 2 Coat the chicken pieces in the sweet potato flour and shake off any excess.
- 3 Heat the oil in a wok or saucepan. When the oil reaches 150°C scatter the basil leaves into the wok and stir for about 20 seconds, or until the basil turns translucent. Remove the basil from the wok and drain on absorbent paper.
- 4 Increase the heat of the oil to 170°C and fry the chicken in batches for about 3 minutes, or until golden brown and cooked through, regularly skimming any floating flour bits from the oil.
- 5 For the spiced salt, mix the ingredients together and toast in a dry frypan over low-medium heat for 2 minutes, or until fragrant. Toss the chicken with the fried basil leaves and season with a good pinch of the spice salt. Serve immediately.

## NOTES

Sweet potato flour is sometimes sold as 'tapioca flour'. It's available from Asian grocers. The Taiwanese variety is a coarse-textured but light flour that gives the characteristic crumbly texture to this dish. You could substitute cornflour or rice flour but it won't quite be the same.

When deep-frying, skimming oil is a really important step that many people overlook. It preserves the oil by keeping it clear, and stops burnt flavours creeping in to later batches.

