

SOFT SHELL CRAB WITH GINGER, SCALLIONS, AND CILANTRO

REALLY GOOD SOFT-SHELLED CRAB IS WONDERFUL. THE SHELL IS NOT CHEWY IN THE SLIGHTEST AND THE MEAT IS SWEET AND SUCCULENT. THERE ARE A VARIETY OF SOFT-SHELLED CRABS AVAILABLE BUT I AM ONLY FAMILIAR WITH THE MARYLAND BLUE CRAB. THE CRAB'S MOLTING SEASON BEGINS AFTER THE FIRST FULL MOON IN MAY AND CONTINUES THROUGH SEPTEMBER. WHEN IT SHEDS ITS HARD SHELL, THE SOFT SHELL IS TENDER FOR ONLY A FEW HOURS SO THE CRAB MUST BE REMOVED FROM THE WATER IMMEDIATELY IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE SHELL FROM HARDENING.

THIS RECIPE BEGINS WITH A BASIC FRIED SOFT-SHELLED CRAB AND ADDS CHINESE-STYLE FLAVORING OF GARLIC, GINGER, SCALLIONS, AND CILANTRO. FOR A SPICY KICK ADD SLICED FRESH BIRD'S EYE PEPPER. IF YOU WOULD LIKE A LITTLE SPICE BUT NOT QUITE A TONGUE BURNING HOT TRY DRIED MARAS (OR TURKISH) RED PEPPER, WHICH HAS A NICE SWEET-HOT FLAVOR.

- 4 Soft Shelled Crabs, cleaned
- ½ cup Buttermilk
- ½ cup Cake Flour (cake flour tends to be lighter but regular flour can also be used)
- ½ tsp. Baking Powder
- ½ tsp. Black Pepper, ground, separated
- ¾-1 cup Vegetable Oil
- 1 Tbls. Garlic, chopped
- 1 Tbls. Ginger, fresh minced
- ¼ cup Scallions, chopped
- ¼ cup Cilantro, fresh coarsely chopped
- 1 Tbls. Fresh Bird's Eye Chili Pepper (or Chiltepin Pepper), chopped, optional or a lighter option is a ½ to 1 tsp. Maras (or Turkish) Red Pepper, dried

- ☞ Soak crabs in the buttermilk. Keep refrigerated for 20-30 minutes.
- ☞ In a shallow bowl, combine cake flour, baking powder, and ¼ tsp. black pepper. One at a time, coat each crab with the flour mixture.
- ☞ In a frying pan (I recommend using a non-stick pan), heat ¾-1 cup of oil. There should be enough oil to form a 1/8 to 3/16-inch depth of oil across the entire bottom of the pan. On medium-high heat, carefully place crabs in a single layer, with no overlapping, into oil and cook on one side for 3 minutes. The crabs should brown but not burn. Turn the crabs over and cook for another 1½ minutes. Remove crabs and place them on a paper towel. Using a pair of kitchen scissors cut the crabs in half (tail to head) and set aside. Carefully pour the hot oil from the frying pan into a bowl. Remove any residual browned flour crumbs with a paper towel, being careful not to burn your hands. Lower heat to medium and return 3 tablespoons of the hot oil back into the frying pan. Add garlic and ginger, stirring lightly for 30 seconds so it sizzles but does not burn. Put crab back into pan sautéing lightly, flipping them over so the garlic and ginger coats the crab pieces. Add scallions, cilantro, ¼ tsp. black pepper, and Bird's Eye Peppers or Maras Red Pepper. Sauté lightly so the crab is coated evenly with herbs. Serve while hot.