

Air Fryer Char Siu

BY JOANNA CHUNG | @CHUNGEATS

Growing up in Hong Kong, char siu was one of those dishes that always felt familiar and comforting to me. After moving to New York, whenever I passed by the glossy red char siu hanging in the windows of Chinese barbecue shops in Chinatown, I felt comforted by that little sense of home. Though it wasn't until college where I had to navigate being on my own without my family and the familiarity of home for the first time, that I started thinking more deeply about my identity and what my heritage meant to me.

Being away from my family and everything that had always felt like home, I found comfort in teaching myself how to recreate the dishes I grew up eating. Char siu was one of those comfort foods, especially since I couldn't find it nearby in upstate New York. Learning to make it myself became more than just satisfying a craving but a way to feel closer to home while also learning more about my heritage through cooking. This air fryer version is the one I taught myself to make during that chapter of my life, adapting a Cantonese dish to my own kitchen and the way I cooked as a college student. Even now, making dishes like char siu reminds me that home doesn't have to be one place but it can sometimes be a familiar flavor you carry with you. To me, being Asian American means carrying those pieces of home with you while continuing to shape what home and culture means wherever life takes you.

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SERVES: 4-6

INGREDIENTS

1½–1¾ lb pork shoulder or pork butt
1 tbsp garlic, minced
½ tbsp ginger, minced
1½ tbsp honey, plus 1–2 tbsp for basting
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp dark soy sauce
1 tbsp oyster sauce
2 tbsp brown sugar
1 tsp Chinese five-spice powder
1 tbsp Shaoxing cooking wine
White pepper, to taste
1 cube red fermented tofu
Optional: a few drops of red food coloring for a brighter red color

INSTRUCTIONS

01 Mince the garlic and ginger.

02 In a medium to large bowl, combine the garlic, ginger, 1½ tbsp honey, soy sauce, dark soy sauce, oyster sauce, brown sugar, five-spice powder, Shaoxing cooking wine, white pepper, and red fermented tofu. Mix until well combined. If desired, add a few drops of red food coloring for a brighter color.

03 Cut the pork shoulder into long strips approximately 1½ inches wide. Using a fork, poke holes all over each piece of pork to help the marinade penetrate.

04 Mix pork with the marinade evenly. Then cover the top of the pork with a paper towel to ensure the top is covered with marinade as well and marinate in the fridge for at least 6 hours or best overnight.

05 Preheat the air fryer to 400°F. Remove the pork from the marinade, reserving the remaining marinade.

06 Air fry at 400 °F for ~13-15 minutes. Flip every 4-5 minutes. While the pork is airfrying, reduce leftover marinade in a small pan over medium/high heat until it's a thicker sauce. On the first flip, baste the pork with more marinade, and for the last two flips, baste with honey.

07 Once the pork is fully cooked, remove it from the air fryer and let it rest for 10 minutes before slicing.

08 Slice and serve with fresh rice and leafy greens, then drizzle with the reduced sauce. Enjoy!