



ANDREA NGUYEN'S

Pass the Fish Sauce

recipe

Garlic-Black Pepper Crab | Cua Rang Tỏi Tiêu

Crab seems delicate but it can take lots of garlic and spice. Use the freshest crab possible. Serve with cold beer and keep plenty of napkins handy.

Serves 2

- 1 large (1 3/4 pound) cooked crab
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1 tablespoon chopped shallot
- 1 tablespoon coarsely chopped garlic
- Chubby 1/2-inch section ginger, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
- 1 tablespoon water plus more as needed
- 1 teaspoon cornstarch
- Reserved crab tomalley, or 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon oyster sauce
- 1/2 to 1 teaspoon fish sauce (use maximum if not using MSG)
- 1/2 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon MSG (optional, but encouraged for sending the dish over the top)
- 1 large egg (if tomalley is omitted)
- 1 tablespoon neutral oil
- 1 1/2 tablespoons salted butter
- 1 large handful cilantro sprigs, coarsely chopped

Break down the crab

Pull off the legs and claws, then remove the shell. If you like to eat the tomalley and fat, scrape it out from the shell, reserving for the seasoning sauce. Remove the crab apron and any other shell bits.

Use a knife to quarter the crab body. Set aside on a plate. Use a nutcracker to crack the legs and claws at the joints. As you prep, discard any bits of shell that come flying off or feel loose. Add the legs and claws to the body sections.

Make the seasoning paste

To crack the peppercorns, put them into a small zip-top plastic bag, seal it up, then tap and whack with a meat tenderizer or similar heavy blunt object. Aim for a coarse, fragrant result. Transfer to a small bowl.

Use a mortar and pestle to pound the shallot, garlic, ginger, and turmeric into a paste, adding the 1 tablespoon water gradually. Alternatively, use a small food processor, pulsing and scraping down the side as needed. Add the yellow seasoning paste to the cracked pepper.

Mix the seasoning sauce

In a measuring cup, combine the cornstarch, tomalley (or egg), oyster sauce, fish sauce, sugar, MSG, and enough water to make $\frac{3}{4}$ cup. Whisk to combine well. Set the sauce near the stove with the crab and seasoning paste.

Cook the crab

Set a large wok or wide Dutch oven over medium heat, then add the oil and butter. After the butter melts, scrape in the seasoning paste and pepper. Cook, stirring frequently for 2 to 3 minutes, until toasty and you see golden bits. Turn down the heat if you fear things burning. Cook longer, if needed to coax flavor.

Add the crab, increase the heat to high, and swiftly stir-fry the crab for 2 to 3 minutes to heat the crab through and evenly coat with the seasoning paste. The crab will take on a golden-orange hue.

Slightly lower the heat to slow cooking, give the seasoning sauce a stir, then pour over the crab. Swiftly stir the crab to coat it in the sauce, which should cohere to look somewhat scambly, resembling lots of crab tomalley and fat. After the mixture sets, turn off the heat and throw in the cilantro, stirring to mix it in and slightly wilt. Transfer to a serving platter. Present with an extra bowl for shells. Eat immediately.

Notes

Ingredients: Want to skip cleaning a whole crab? Use 1 1/4 pounds of cooked crab legs and body sections. Start the recipe from where you cut and crack the crab parts.

Timing: The crab can be prepped a day ahead and refrigerated. Let sit at room temperature for 30 minutes before cooking.