It’s a wrap!

When it comes to making these delectable dumplings, the more the merrier!

By Madeleine Greer  Photography by Donald Nausbaum
When Kaerynne and Kaz Nakamura first met trading kicks and punches practicing kendo in Toronto, they may have thought martial arts was their only passion in common. But all it took was a meal or two together to realize that food was the real fatal attraction. “On our trips to Japan together,” recalls Kaerynne, “it was all about food.” Her eyes roll in ecstasy recounting three-hour meals, consuming tempura as light as air, trading kicks and punches, and karate schedule, she’ll have no trouble kicking it off. Nakamura first met Kaz, who has been known to polish off 50 in a sitting. “They’re just as good the next day heated up over rice – for breakfast,” he says, smiling.

FAMILY LEGACY

In House

SPRING 2006

BECOME A WRAP STAR

Your first attempts at gyoza-wrapping are bound to feel clumsy and awkward. Many Japanese learn this fiddly art as children, gaining a lifetime of experience. Here are some tips:

EASY ON THE FILLING. Add too much and your gyoza will not seal properly. Add no more than 1 1/2 teaspoons of filling per gyoza.

STICKY FINGERS MAKE CREASING A CHALLENGE. Keep a clean, wet cloth nearby for wiping fingers as you go.

BEGINNER ATTEMPTS MAY STRAY FROM VISUAL PERFECTION but will taste just fine. As long as dumplings are tightly sealed, anything goes. Without a tight seal, gyoza will split open when cooking.

BEWARE OF DRYING. As you wrap, keep a damp towel over wrappers and formed gyoza.

INGREDIENT GLOSSARY

GYOZA WRAPPERS are usually sold frozen in Japanese food stores, about 50 sheets per package. Look for round, white, flour-dusted wrappers. While purists may disagree, it’s okay to use Chinese dumpling wrappers – slightly thinner than their gyoza counterparts. Look for beige-coloured round wrappers, not square, which are designed for wontons. Chinese wrappers can often be found refrigerated in large supermarkets.

MIRIN is sweet cooking wine, used in countless Japanese dishes such as teriyaki and sukiyaki.

NAPPA CABBAGE is an oblong, white and light-green cabbage now sold in most supermarkets. It’s milder and more tender than Western cabbage.

AN EGGPLANT is a dark, golden hue as its flesh is made from toasted sesame seeds (not raw). To protect the oil from going rancid, store in the fridge.

FAMILY WRAPPERS. From left: Kaz adds his signature filling; Kaerynne and Ursula are on folding detail; Kaz and his mother Kayoko get ready to sample the nearly-cooked delicacies.

The Nakamura family enjoy their gyoza dumplings. Back row, left to right: Kayoko, Takahiro, Kaerynne and Kaz, with daughters Astrid (left) and Ursula in front.
Gyoza Dumplings

Makes 100 dumplings.

Kaz Nakamura’s toothsome, pan-fried Japanese dumplings are a crowd-pleasing favourite. Have several helpers around for the “wrap session.”

1 lb Nappa cabbage, coarsely chopped 500 g
1 1/2 lbs lean ground beef 625 g
1 1/2 lbs lean ground pork 625 g
1/4 cup soy sauce 50 mL
1/4 cup Mirin* 50 mL
2 green onions, green part only, minced 2
2-inch piece ginger, grated 5 cm
3 garlic cloves, minced 3
1 tbsp sesame oil 15 mL
1/8 tsp white pepper 0.5 mL
100 gyoza wrappers, defrosted 100

Dipping Sauce
1/2 cup soy sauce 125 mL
1/2 cup white vinegar 125 mL
2 tsp sesame oil 10 mL

* Can be substituted with cooking sherry if necessary

1. In a large pot of boiling, salted water, blanch chopped cabbage for 1 minute. Drain and rinse under cold water. Over a bowl or sink, squeeze cabbage (in cheesecloth if desired) to remove any excess water. Chop finely.

2. In a large bowl, combine cabbage, beef, pork, soy sauce, mirin, green onions, ginger, garlic, sesame oil and white pepper. Stir to combine.

3. To prepare for wrapping, line a tray with waxed paper, place gyoza wrappers on the counter (covered with a damp tea towel to prevent drying) and fill a small bowl with water.

4. Place a gyoza wrapper in your left hand, dip your right index finger into the water and moisten the outer rim of the wrapper. Place a heaping teaspoon of meat filling in the middle of the wrapper and fold into a half-moon shape, bringing the sides of the wrapper together at the center top. Pinch 5 to 6 creases all going in the same direction. Note that the interior side of the dumpling will have creases, the outer side remains flat and smooth, creating the dumpling’s distinctive crescent moon shape with a flat, plump bottom perfect for sitting stable in the frying pan. Repeat.

5. Heat a large, deep frying pan at medium, add one tablespoon of oil, arrange dumplings in the pan fitting snugly. Cook 2 minutes. Add 1/2 cup water (expect splattering) and cover immediately. Cook 5 minutes. Remove cover, if water still remains, cover again for a minute. Cook until water is gone and dumplings are golden brown underneath. Repeat 2 times, or until all dumplings are cooked.

6. To make sauce, combine soy sauce, vinegar and sesame oil in a small bowl. Makes 100 dumplings.