

The Wisdom of the Chinese Kitchen by Grace Young

Dried Fig, Apple, and Almond Soup

Mo Fa Guo Gawn Ping Guo Hung Yen Tong

Mo fa guo is the Cantonese name for a variety of dried figs used in cooking. They are reputed to be good for moistening the lungs, and therefore recommended to combat coughs. These figs are different from the figs eaten in the West. They are ivory colored and are smaller, with more delicate seeds. If these figs are not available, regular dried or fresh figs can be substituted in this recipe. However, there is no substitute for the almond seeds; there are two different almond seeds called for here. For an explanation, see the introduction to Almond Soup.

I have tried this soup with Granny Smith apples, but I prefer the Red Delicious apples. This is the soup that helped cure a persistent cough I had after months of trying codeine cough syrups, throat-coat teas, and every lozenge on the market.

¼ cup peeled almond seeds (*nom hung*)
4 to 5 peeled almond seeds (*buck hung*)
3 medium Red Delicious apples, unpeeled
8 ounces pork loin, well trimmed
10 Chinese dried figs (*mo fa guo*), rinsed

Rinse all of the almonds in several changes of cold water, and soak them in ½ cup cold water overnight to soften.

Core the apples and cut into 1-inch-thick wedges.

In a 4-quart saucepan, bring 2 quarts water to a boil over high heat. Add the pork and return to a boil, skimming any scum that rises to the surface. Add the apple wedges, dried figs, and almonds with their soaking water. Return to a boil over high heat. Cover, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer 3 hours. Serve piping hot (no more than 1½ cups per person).

Makes 6 servings as a tonic.

Almond Soup

Hung Yen Woo

Almond Soup is one of the most delicious yin-yang concoctions. The flavor of this combination of almond seeds (which actually are not almonds at all, but apricot kernels) is fragrant and unique. *Nom hung* almonds are from Southern China and are marginally bigger in size and are known for their sweetness. *Buck hung* are from the North and are slightly bitter, but they bring out the flavor of the *nom hung* almonds. (See “Foods with Medicinal Attributes” in the photo insert). When you buy these almonds in Chinatown, the two varieties are not distinguished in English. You must ask for them by their Cantonese names. These almonds are excellent for lubricating one’s system, moistening the lungs, and clearing the skin. Traditionally, this mixture was strained through cheesecloth after it was cooled, but my family doesn’t mind the ground almonds and feels that it’s more nutritious to eat everything.

1 cup peeled almond seeds (*nom hung*), 4½ ounces, rinsed
10 to 15 peeled almond seeds (*buck hung*), rinsed
1 tablespoon long grain rice, rinsed
3 pieces rock sugar, about 1½ ounces or 1/3 cup

Soak all the almonds and rice in 1½ cups cold water overnight to soften almonds and rice. Drain, reserving

the soaking water.

Place the almonds and rice in a blender or food processor and process, adding the reserved water in $\frac{1}{4}$ —cup increments; the mixture will be a smooth paste.

In a 3-quart saucepan, bring 3 cups cold water to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium, and gradually stir in the almond paste. The mixture should be the consistency of a light pureed soup, so add more water, if necessary. Cover, reduce heat to medium-low, and simmer 30 to 40 minutes, stirring frequently, or until the almonds lose their raw flavor. If the mixture becomes too thick, add more water. Set aside and cool completely. Strain through cheesecloth or muslin, discarding the solids. Return to the saucepan over medium heat, add the rock sugar, and cook until sugar has melted, about 3 to 5 minutes. Serve piping hot (no more than 1 cup per person).

Makes 4 servings as a tonic.