

SERVES 4
(MAKES 20)

Pork & Leek Sheng Jian Baos

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PREP: COOK:
1 HOUR* 30 MINS

This is the classic Shanghai pan-fried bao with crispy bottom and fluffy top - my (and my family's) all-time favourite when growing up in the city. I prefer this juicy pork and fragrant leek filling over most others and like to serve the buns with a generous amount of Chinese black vinegar and chilli (chile) oil drizzled over. The dough is half-yeasted, meaning the buns puff up a little when cooked. They are different to the bao buns you may be familiar with, which are fully yeasted and very fluffy with a springy texture when steamed.

- MAKING THE DOUGH** Combine the flour with the yeast and sugar in a large mixing bowl. Gradually pour in the water, mixing with a wooden spoon to make a ragged dough. Knead on a lightly floured surface for a minute until it comes together into a rough ball. Return the dough to the bowl and cover with a damp tea (dish) towel or cling film (plastic wrap). Leave the dough to rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1–2 hours depending on the room temperature.

MAKING THE FILLING Meanwhile, in a mixing bowl, mix all the ingredients for the filling, stirring continuously with a fork in one direction for 4 minutes, until combined. Stirring in one direction helps the protein strands to bind together more quickly. If you want to taste test at this point, fry a spoonful of the mixture until cooked through and adjust the seasoning, if needed.

SHAPING THE WRAPPERS Once the dough has risen, punch out the air and knead several times on a lightly floured work surface until a smoothish ball of dough. Pierce a hole all the way through the centre of the dough with your thumb and begin to stretch out the hole until it forms a large ring doughnut shape. Make a cut in the “doughnut” with a knife to open it out into a log. Roll the log out until the same circumference as your forefinger at its fattest point, then divide it into 20 pieces. Cover the dough pieces with a damp tea towel or cling film to prevent them drying out.

FILLING AND PLEATING Place the rolled-out wrapper in the middle of the palm of your non-dominant hand, spoon 1 tablespoon of the filling into the middle. If a beginner, leave a 2.5cm (1in) border around the edge of the dough to allow for pleating. (More experienced dumpling makers can leave a narrower border!)

Repeat until all the wrappers are filled and pleated. Cover the filled and shaped baos as you work through the rest to prevent them drying out – they may rise a little since the dough is yeasted.

Once all the baos are cooked, place them on a serving plate and scatter the spring onions and sesame seeds over. Enjoy with the dumpling sauce on the side.

