

SHRIMP AND CUCUMBER STIR-FRY

(inspired by The Key to Chinese Cooking)

1 pound large shrimp, peeled and de-veined
2 quarts water + 1/4 cup salt + 1/4 cup sugar, fully dissolved
1 large or 2 small cucumbers
shiitake mushrooms, cleaned, stems removed
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon dry sherry
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon sugar
1/4 cup water
1 tablespoon cornstarch dissolved in 1 tablespoon water
2 tablespoons peanut or other vegetable oil
drizzle of sesame oil
fresh cilantro

Brine the shrimp by covering it with the salt-sugar water for 30 minutes. Drain, rinse briefly, set on paper towels to dry. Cut the ends of the cucumber, peel it leaving some peel to form a stripped pattern. Slice in half lengthwise, remove seeds, and slice each half in pieces, not too thin, around 1/4 inch thick. Reserve. Make the sauce combining soy, sherry, salt, and sugar. Reserve.

Heat the oil in a wok or large non-stick frying pan. Add the mushrooms, season lightly with salt, saute for a couple of minutes, then add the cucumbers and saute everything together for a couple of minutes more. Transfer to a bowl. If needed, add a little more oil to the pan, when very hot add the brined shrimp, cook until they turn pink. Add the prepared sauce, coat well the pieces of shrimp with it, add the reserved mushroom-cucumber mixture. The shrimp should be fully cooked by now, pour the 1/4 cup water in, then the dissolved cornstarch, and cook on high heat until the sauce thickens. Add a drizzle of sesame oil, the fresh cilantro, and serve over white rice.