Char Kway Teow

The order matters

Chris Choo with guest Eddie Rivera

The film does not specify weights or measured amounts. Use it to follow the order and judge proportions; season to taste.

The ingredients and cooking order follow the film. The noodle preparation, heat management and doneness cues below are additional guidance for cooking at home.

What goes into the wok

- ☐ Pork lard
- ☐ Garlic
- ☐ Crispy pork-lard pieces
- ☐ Fish cake slices
- ☐ Lap cheong (Chinese sausage)
- ☐ Flat rice noodles (kway teow)
- ☐ Soy sauce
- ☐ Fish sauce
- ☐ Stock
- ☐ Chinese chives
- ☐ Chilli paste
- ☐ Sugar
- ☐ Bean sprouts
- ☐ Egg
- ☐ Pre-cooked prawns
- ☐ Pepper

Before the wok gets hot

Have a seasoned, uncoated wok suitable for very high heat, a wok spatula and small ingredient bowls ready. Turn on the extractor or ventilate the kitchen before heating the wok.

Heat for wok hei

Wok hei needs very high heat and brief contact with the hot wok. Use a small enough batch to keep a strong sizzle during the noodle-frying stage; lower the heat whenever garlic, chilli paste or sugar begins to scorch. Use a seasoned, uncoated wok suited to this heat. For a coated or nonstick pan, follow the maker’s heat limits and never preheat it empty.

Build the base

Prepare, brown, coat. The wet seasoning comes after the noodles meet the fat.

01 Get everything ready

Set out all 16 ingredients before heating the wok, with the sauces and stock within reach. Gently separate the flat rice noodles; if using dried noodles, prepare them according to the packet first. Drain away free water so the noodles do not enter the wok dripping, and drain the washed chives and bean sprouts well. Plan smaller complete batches if the noodles would sit in a deep, crowded pile; follow the same ingredient order for each batch.

02 Brown the garlic

Preheat the seasoned, uncoated wok until very hot, then add the pork lard and swirl it across the cooking surface. Add the garlic and keep it moving at a steady sizzle until golden brown and fragrant. If it darkens rapidly or the fat smokes heavily, lower the heat or briefly lift the wok from it; do not let the garlic turn black. Once the garlic has browned, add the crispy pork-lard pieces.

03 Add fish cake and lap cheong

Add the fish cake slices and lap cheong and stir them through the garlic and lard. Scoop and turn so the slices meet the hot wok and heat through evenly. Keep the garlic moving with the other ingredients so it does not sit against the bare metal and burn while you prepare the noodles.

04 Coat the noodles

Raise the heat to very high for the noodle-frying stage, then add the flat rice noodles. Scoop from underneath, spread and gently fold them through the fat until evenly coated, before adding any wet seasoning. Keep a brisk sizzle and let the noodles touch the hot wok without leaving them still long enough to burn; handle the ribbons gently so they stay broad rather than breaking up. If the sizzle fades and the noodles remain wet and steamy, let the wok recover its heat while you keep folding, and use a smaller batch next time.

Season and finish

Chilli paste joins the sauces and stock; then chives, sugar, sprouts, egg, pre-cooked prawns and pepper.

05 Season at the side

Push the coated noodles to one side to expose a hot area of the wok. Add the soy sauce, fish sauce, chilli paste and a little stock together onto that exposed side; let them sizzle briefly, then promptly fold the noodles through. Keep scooping and turning until the seasoning coats the noodles evenly. Avoid leaving the seasoning on the bare metal to burn or adding so much liquid that the noodles sit in a pool.

06 Add the chives and bean sprouts

Add the Chinese chives first, followed by a little sugar and then the bean sprouts, in that order. Fold each addition through the noodles, keeping everything moving across the hot wok. Cook until the chives begin to wilt and the sprouts are hot while retaining some crunch. If the chilli paste or sugar starts sticking and blackening, ease the heat and keep folding rather than allowing it to scorch.

07 Egg first, prawns last

Move the noodle mixture aside to expose an oiled area of the wok and add the egg there. As it starts to set against the hot metal, quickly break it up and fold it through the noodles until no clear liquid egg remains. Only then add the pre-cooked prawns and gently stir until they are hot throughout. They are already cooked; this is a final heating step, not a raw-prawn cooking stage.

08 Finish with pepper

Finish with pepper and give the noodles a final fold so the seasoning and toppings are evenly distributed. The noodles should be hot and coated, the egg set and the pre-cooked prawns heated through, with no puddle of seasoning left underneath. Transfer to the serving dish and eat immediately while the noodles are hot and the wok aroma is fresh.

Watch and read

HOTPLATE film
Recipe article
NHB heritage: Char Kway Teow
MICHELIN Guide - What is...wok hei?
The Kitchn / Grace Young - How To Stir-Fry Noodles
Serious Eats - Wok Skills 101: Stir-Frying
Singapore Food Agency - Safe Practices for Non-Stick Pans