



Tang Yuan (Rice Ball) Recipe

Making rice balls, or tang yuan, is a popular Winter Solstice Festival tradition in southern China. The balls, prepared with sweet or savory fillings, represent unity and togetherness.



Recipe courtesy of Belinda Zhuo and Ann Chen of the Lafayette Chinese American Association
Photos by Chris Soria

Ingredients

Makes 12 big rice balls; 6 servings

Rice ball dough:

2 cups (250 g) sweet rice flour (glutinous flour)

1 cup (240 ml) warm water (can substitute with ½ cup milk instead of water for a richer taste)

Cook without filling, or choose from one of three filling options below:

Filling Option 1: Ground Pork (Savory)

4 tablespoons (75 g) ground pork

½ teaspoon dark soy sauce

½ teaspoon light soy sauce

¼ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon oyster sauce

2 drops sesame oil

Pinch of ground white pepper

2 tablespoons of ginger-scallion water

(To prepare the ginger-scallion water, cut 1 scallion and some fresh ginger. Add water. Mix the scallions, ginger, and water together or use blender for stronger flavor. Strain the big pieces of scallion and ginger leaving just the water. Add the water to the ground pork).

Filling Option 2: Sesame Seeds (Sweet)

1/2 cup (50 g) ground black or white sesame seeds

¼ cup (~ 50 g) sugar

2 tablespoons vegetable or sesame oil

Filling Option 3: Ground Peanuts (Sweet)

1/2 cup (50 g) ground peanuts

¼ cup (50 g) sugar

2 tablespoons peanut butter

2 tablespoons vegetable oil (can substitute oil for pork lard or butter)

Preparing the Rice Ball Dough



Ms. Belinda rolls the dough into long strips before cutting them into twelve small pieces.



Ms. Belinda stuffs the flattened dough with ground pork before rolling it into a ball.



Ms. Belinda rolls the filled dough into a ball.



Preparing the Rice Ball Dough

Mix 2 cups sweet rice flour and 1 cup warm water (or ½ cup water & ½ cup milk.)

Knead the dough until it becomes smooth.

On a flat surface, roll the dough into two long strips.

Cut the dough into 12 pieces.

Between your palms, roll each piece into a small ball. You should have 12 small flour balls.

To add filling, flatten each small ball into a mini pancake.

Add your filling of choice to the center of the flattened dough, then carefully fold the dough around the filling.

Gently roll the stuffed ball between your hands until you have a ball. No worries if you don't get it right the first time. It takes practice!

Preparing the Pork Filling:

Combine the pork, soy sauces, salt, oyster sauce. Stir in one direction until ingredients are combined. Next, add the sesame oil, white pepper, and ginger-scallion water. Stir until the liquid is completely incorporated and the mixture resembles a paste.

Preparing the Sesame Seed Filling:

In a pan (or wok), lightly toast the black or white sesame seeds on low for 3 to 5 minutes. Remove the seeds from the heat and let them cool. Then, use a small blender or mortar and pestle, to crush the sesame seeds until they resemble a powder.

Mix crushed sesame seeds with sugar and oil. Add some water if needed until the mixture forms a paste.

Preparing the Peanut Filling:

This process is the same as the one used for making the sesame seed filling. Simply substitute finely ground peanuts for sesame seeds.

Cooking the Rice Balls

Step 1:

Add water to a large pot leaving at least four inches between the surface of the water and the pan's rim. This is important so that the rice balls have room to float as they boil without spilling out of the pot.

On high heat, bring water to a boil.

Step 2:

If making pork-filled rice balls, add a few drops of oil to the water to prevent the balls from sticking together.

If making sesame seed or peanut-filled rice balls, add a cup of palm or granulated sugar to the boiling water. Wait until the water returns to a boil before adding the sesame or peanut rice balls. The sugar prevents the balls from sticking together.

Step 3:

Carefully slide rice balls into boiling water. Cook rice balls for three minutes on medium heat (a low boil) until they are floating on top of the water. Be careful not to overcook the rice balls. If over-cooked, they will break or stick together. If the water is boiling too fast, adding some cold water to pot to lower the temperature.

Step 4:

To serve, place two rice balls in a bowl and add broth. *Enjoy!*



After three minutes, the rice balls float to the surface. This means that they are done.

Additional Tips:

You can add osmanthus fragrance, goji berry, or fermented sweet rice to the sesame seed or peanut rice ball broth for more flavor.

For pork-filled rice balls, you can also add vegetables to the broth (napa cabbage, onion, shiitake mushrooms, celery, cilantro, dried shrimp, etc.) for a richer taste.



Examples of frozen rice balls that can be purchased at local Asian markets.

No time to make rice balls from scratch? Buy pre-made frozen rice balls from the store.