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3.3.1 Tea Eggs

By Chuan C. Chang

Even fresh eggs have an unpleasant sulfur smell because eggs are rich in sulfur and tea eggs solve this problem. Tea eggs are one of the most versatile foods; you can eat them for breakfast, lunch, or dinner, and they are especially great for picnics, barbecues, parties, fishing or camping trips, part of a cold dish platter, etc. They are made by boiling eggs in a marinade based on black tea and spices. The iron in tea chemically ties up all the free sulfur in the egg and eliminates the unpleasant flavors, thus greatly enhancing the egg taste and allowing the spices to do their jobs.

Ingredients: first, decide how many eggs you want to make. This decision is critical because tea eggs keep only one week in the refrigerator, after which they will deteriorate. To make:

12 eggs, you will need
5 Lipton tea bags (remove the paper at the end of the string)
2 tbsp soy sauce (or similar, such as A1 steak sauce)
2 large star spice clusters (anise)
4 cloves
1 tsp sesame oil (optional)

How to buy fresh eggs: eggs taste much better when they are fresh. The only way I know of to test freshness (besides eating it) is to boil and peel it. If it peels easily, it is fresh; if the shell sticks to the white, it is old. If you test eggs from a particular brand in a specific store and they are fresh, you can usually count on the eggs to be fresh when you purchase that brand at a later date in that store. Inspect each egg and make sure that the pointy end is down in the carton because there is an air space in the rounded end. If the egg is “upside down” for too long, the air space may migrate to a new location; this location is important in the next step.

How to boil eggs: Eggs often crack when boiled. The best way to prevent cracking is to take a pushpin and poke a hole into the shell in the rounded end where there is an air bubble (do not push the pin all the way in as this will puncture the membrane holding the contents; stop “drilling” as soon as the shell is pierced). Leave the eggs in the carton for making the holes as that is the easiest way to hold them in place. When successfully pierced, you will see bubbles coming out of the hole as you start to boil the egg. Some claim that adding salt to the water will prevent cracking, but I have not observed this, because cracking results from differential thermal expansion between the shell and its contents, not osmosis; moreover, eggs absorb salt efficiently and you don’t want tea eggs that are too salty. Make hard boiled eggs by starting with cold water, bringing the water to a boil, and then simmering about five minutes.

Keep the eggs wet until you peel them; once dried, the shells will be more difficult to peel. Shell the boiled eggs and place them in a pot together with all the ingredients and add just enough water to cover the eggs. Now heat to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes, then turn off heat and let it cool naturally. This will result in eggs with a nice tan color.

Alternatively, crack the egg shells all around the boiled eggs without shelling them and boil them according to the above paragraph, for fifteen minutes. Peel the eggs just before serving. This will create

a fancy marbled pattern on the egg white, but the tea flavor will be milder than if the eggs were shelled before boiling in the tea. If you plan to eat the eggs over several days, keep them in the refrigerator together with the tea liquid in which they were boiled, but remove the tea bags. After two days, drain the liquid to delay spoilage; the eggs will keep in the fridge for a week without any noticeable change in taste. Tea eggs can be served cold or at room temperature. They are quite decorative when shelled and halved or quartered.