



THE ART & SOUL OF COOKING

Sesame Balls with Drunken Fig Filling

Yield: makes 25 balls

Drunken Fig Filling:

- 2 1/4 cups dried figs
- 1/2 cup (3 1/2 ounces/98 grams) sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup (2 ounces/56 grams) cognac or dark rum

Drunken Fig Filling:

- 1 cup (7 ounces/200 grams) sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 5 1/3 ounces (150 grams) taro, deeply peeled and cut crosswise into 1/2-inch slices
- 3 1/2 cups (16 1/8 ounces/462 grams) glutinous rice flour
- Canola, vegetable, or other neutral oil for deep-frying
- 1 cup (3 3/8 ounces/96 grams) white sesame seeds

1. To make the drunken fig filling: Put all the ingredients into a large mixing bowl and stir well to coat the figs with the sugar. Cover and set aside at room temperature for at least 30 minutes, or as long as overnight.
2. Transfer the figs and liquid to the bowl of a food processor or an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Process or beat the mixture until mashed to a paste. (You can also mash the mixture by hand with a fork.) Cover and refrigerate until ready to use; the filling can be kept for up to 2 weeks.
3. To make the sesame balls: Put the sugar, salt, and baking soda into the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and mix well; set aside.
4. Fill a large saucepan fitted with a steamer basket or rack with water to a depth of 2 inches and bring to a rolling boil. Put the taro in the basket and steam until very soft, about 10 minutes; it should fall apart if poked with a knife. Immediately add the taro to the sugar mixture, and beat on medium speed until smooth and pasty, about 5 minutes.
5. Meanwhile, bring 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons water to boil.
6. Turn the mixer speed to low and add the glutinous rice flour. When the mixture is crumbly, add the boiling water all at once. (The water must be boiling when added.) Continue beating until the dough is soft and only slightly sticky. Squeeze the dough into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap, and set aside until it cools to room temperature.

Recipe Courtesy of Sur la Table

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7. Shape the dough into a log 1 inch in diameter, and cut the log into 2-inch lengths. One at a time, flatten each piece of dough with your palm into a circle 4 inches in diameter and 1/4 inch thick. Put 1 tablespoon of the chilled fig filling into the center of the circle, then bring the edges together to form a half-moon and pinch to seal. Pinch off the excess dough at the two ends and roll the filled dumpling into a ball. Set aside.

8. Fill a deep, heavy saucepan with oil to depth of at least 3 inches and heat to 300°F. Fill a shallow dish with 1/8 inch of water and another shallow dish with the sesame seeds. Roll a sesame ball in the water, just enough to moisten, then roll in the sesame seeds until well coated. Press the seeds so they stick to the balls, if necessary. Carefully lower the coated ball into the oil and cook, without stirring, until it floats and is crisp and light golden brown, about 5 minutes. You can cook about 8 balls at a time, but do not overcrowd the pan. Carefully remove from the oil and drain on paper towels. Repeat with the remaining balls. Serve hot or at room temperature.