Make these toothsome noodles with shreds of tender chicken

By America's Test Kitchen

TOOTHSOME & TENDER. *Pictured is a serving of Sesame Noodles with Chicken. The recipe appears in the cookbook* Revolutionary Recipes. *(Carl Tremblay/America's Test Kitchen via AP)*

Much like a Chinese finger trap that lures by appearing to be a toy, sesame noodles are not what they seem. You may think of them as merely a humble bowl of cold noodles, but don't be fooled — just one bite and you're hooked on these toothsome noodles with shreds of tender chicken, all tossed with the fresh sesame sauce.

The real problem is, good versions of this dish can be hard to find. The cold noodles have a habit of turning gummy, the chicken often dries out, and the sauce is notorious for turning bland and pasty. We wanted a recipe that could not only quell a serious craving but could do it fast.

Though drawn to the softer texture of fresh Asian-style noodles, we conceded that dried spaghetti could serve as a second-string substitute. The trouble with both types of noodle, however, was that after being cooked and chilled, they gelled into a rubbery skein. After trying a number of ways to avoid this, we found it necessary to rinse the noodles under cold tap water directly after cooking. This not only cooled the hot noodles immediately but also washed away much of their sticky starch. To further forestall any clumping, we tossed the rinsed noodles with a little oil.

Boneless, skinless chicken breasts are quick to cook and easy to shred; the real question is how to cook them. The microwave seemed easy in theory, but we found the rate of cooking difficult to monitor — 30 seconds meant the difference between underdone and overdone. Many recipes suggested poaching the chicken in water or broth, but this chicken had a washed-out flavor. Nor was roasting the answer; it caused the outer meat to dry out before the interior was fully cooked. Cooking under both gas and electric broilers, however, worked perfectly. The chicken cooked through in minutes, retaining much of its moisture and flavor.

To be authentic, the sesame sauce should be made with an Asian sesame paste (not to be confused with Middle Eastern tahini), but most recipes substitute peanut butter because it's easier to find. Somewhat surprisingly, tasters preferred chunky peanut butter over smooth, describing its flavor as fresh and more peanutty. We had been making the sauce in a blender and realized that the chunky bits of peanuts were being freshly ground into the sauce, producing a cleaner, stronger flavor. We found the flavors of both fresh garlic and ginger necessary, along with soy sauce, rice vinegar, hot sauce, and brown sugar. We then stumbled on the obvious way to keep the sauce from being too thick or pasty: Thin it out with water.

Although the sauce was tasting pretty good, tasters still complained that there was not enough sesame flavor. Tossing the rinsed pasta with toasted sesame oil helped a bit, as did garnishing the noodles with toasted sesame seeds. But tasters were still not satisfied; they wanted more. Finally, we tried adding some of the toasted sesame seeds to the sauce. Blended into the sauce along with the chunky peanut butter, the sesame seeds added the final kick of authentic sesame flavor we were all hankering for.

America's Test Kitchen provided this article to The Associated Press. More recipes, cooking tips, and ingredient and product reviews are available at <www.americastestkitchen.com>.

Sesame Noodles with Chicken

Servings: 4 ◆ Start to finish: 1 hour

5 tablespoons soy sauce
1/4 cup chunky peanut butter
1/4 cup sesame seeds, toasted
2 tablespoons rice vinegar
2 tablespoons packed light brown sugar
1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger
2 garlic cloves, minced
1 teaspoon hot sauce
1/2 cup hot water
4 (6-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed
Salt and pepper
1 pound fresh Chinese noodles
2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
4 scallions, sliced thin on bias
1 carrot, peeled and grated

Purée soy sauce, peanut butter, three tablespoons sesame seeds, vinegar, sugar, ginger, garlic, and hot sauce in a blender until smooth, about 30 seconds. With machine running, add hot water, one tablespoon at a time, until sauce has consistency of heavy cream (you may not need entire amount of water).

Adjust oven rack six inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Spray broiler pan top with vegetable oil spray. Pat chicken dry with paper towels, season with salt and pepper, and lay on prepared pan. Broil chicken until lightly browned and registers 160° Fahrenheit, 10 to 15 minutes, flipping chicken over halfway through broiling time. Transfer chicken to a cutting board, let cool slightly, then shred into bite-size pieces.

Meanwhile, bring four quarts of water to a boil in a large pot. Add noodles and one tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until tender. Drain noodles, rinse with cold water, and drain again, leaving noodles slightly wet. Transfer to large bowl and toss with oil. Add shredded chicken, scallions, carrot, and sauce and toss to combine. Sprinkle with remaining one tablespoon sesame seeds and serve.

Nutrition information per serving: 700 calories (194 calories from fat); 22 g fat (3 g saturated, 0 g trans fats); 101 mg cholesterol; 2205 mg sodium; 79 g carbohydrate; 6 g fiber; 12 g sugar; 45 g protein.

Toyota robot can't slam dunk but shoots a mean three-pointer

By Yuri Kageyama
AP Business Writer

REMARKABLE ROBOT. *Cue 3, a 6'10" basketball robot, takes a shot at a gymnasium in Fuchu, Tokyo. To shoot hoops, the robot must have a good vision system, be able to compute the ball's path, then execute the shot. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)*

TOKYO — It can't dribble, let alone slam dunk, but Toyota's basketball robot hardly ever misses a free throw or a three-pointer.

The 6'10" machine made five of eight three-point shots at a demonstration in a Tokyo suburb, a ratio its engineers say is worse than usual.

Toyota Motor Corp.'s robot, called Cue 3, computes as a three-dimensional image where the basket is, using sensors on its torso, and adjusts motors inside its arm and knees to give the shot the right angle and propulsion for a swish.

Efforts in developing human-shaped robots underline a global shift in robotics use from pre-programmed mechanical arms in limited situations like factories to functioning in the real world with people.

The 2017 version of the robot was designed to make free throws.

Yudai Baba, a basketball player likely representing host Japan at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, took part in the demonstration and also missed a couple of shots. If the robot could learn a few more tricks, he was ready to accept the robot on the team, he said.

"We human players are still better for now," he said.

Right after missing, the robot slumped over. It wasn't disappointment, but a temporary power failure.

Cue 3's name is supposed to reflect the idea the technology can serve as a cue, or signal of great things to come, according to Toyota.

The company plays down how the technology might prove useful. It's more about boosting morale among engineers, making them open to ideas and challenges.

In making the robot's outer covering something like that of an armadillo, the engineers said they were just trying to avoid the white metallic look often seen on robots.

The maker of the Camry sedan, Prius hybrid, and Lexus luxury models has shown off various robots, including one that played a violin. Another, resembling R2-D2 of *Star Wars*, slides around and picks up things. At the demonstration, it handed the basketball to Cue 3.

Experts say robots that can mimic human movements, even doing them better, could prove useful in various ways, including picking crops, making deliveries, and working in factories and warehouses.

Stanford University professor Oussama Khatib, who directs the university's robotics lab, said Cue 3 demonstrates complex activities such as using sensors and nimble computation in real time in what he called "visual feedback."

To shoot hoops, the robot must have a good vision system, be able to compute the ball's path, then execute the shot, he said in a telephone interview.

"What Toyota is doing here is really bringing the top capabilities in perception with the top capabilities in control to have robots perform something that is really challenging," Khatib said.

Japan has been aggressive in developing humanoids, including those that do little more than offer cute companionship.

Toyota's rival Honda Motor Co. has its Asimo, a culmination of research into creating a walking robot that started in the 1980s. It not only can run, but also recognize faces, avoid obstacles, shake hands, pour a drink, and carry a tray.

When will such robots be able to slam dunk, a feat that will require running, dribbling, and jumping?

"In 20 years, with technological advances," said Tomohiro Nomi, a Toyota engineer who worked on Cue 3.