

Beef Stir-Fry, Smiling Cow Style

In the past, my preferred method for finding the ideal dish of stir-fried beef and snow peas would be to order in from all the Chinese restaurants in my neighborhood, and sample my way to the best.

But my appetite for Chinese takeout has plummeted with the more I've learned about feedlots and other unsavory cattle-raising practices. And the likelihood of finding takeout made with humanely raised grass-fed beef, even in the food-conscious haven of brownstone Brooklyn, is pretty much nil.

Which means if I want beef stir-fry made from happy, healthy cows, I have to make it myself. I've picked up some tips along the way.

The first is that nearly any lean cut of meat — flank steak, London broil, tenderloin, sirloin or skirt steak — will

Memorize the recipe and forget the takeout phone number.

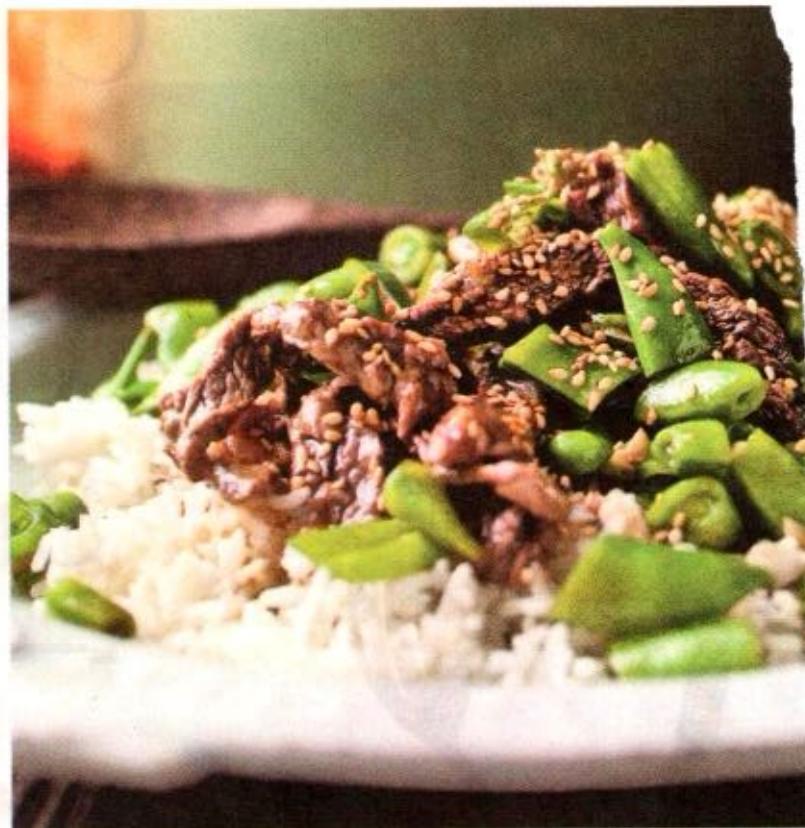
work if it is cut thinly enough against the grain. This is a good thing since there often isn't much choice in the grass-fed meat department of the supermarket, let alone those coolers at the farmers' market.

Another is that although historically my favorite restaurant beef stir-fry has always contained snow peas, sugar snaps are juicier and more succulent, but are just as crunchy. True to their name, they're also deeply sweet, complementing the savory elements — soy sauce, sesame oil, garlic and scallions — in the pan.

Their downside is that they are slightly more work. To get the fat, crisp sugar snaps to cook as quickly as the beef, they need to be thinly sliced; skinny snow peas just need trimming. The upside is you get plenty of pea slivers strewn among the meat, which gives the dish a more integrated flavor.

As for the sauce, I keep it simple, leaning heavily on thick dark soy sauce (tamari works well), sesame oil, chicken broth and Madeira; that last ingredient replaces the more traditional Shaoxing cooking wine (or sherry) and sugar combo, to create a caramelized richness.

I've been making the dish so often that now I've even memorized all the proportions. They've usurped the tiny spot in my brain that used to house the phone number for Szechuan Delight.



ANDREW SCRIVANI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

STIR-FRIED BEEF AND SUGAR SNAP PEAS WITH SESAME OIL AND SEEDS

Time: 30 minutes

- 1 pound lean beef, cut into 1/4-inch strips
- 3 tablespoons tamari or dark soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil, more for drizzling
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 pound sugar snap peas, trimmed
- 3 fat scallions
- 2/3 cup chicken broth
- 2 1/2 tablespoons Madeira or sweet sherry
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 3 tablespoons peanut or olive oil
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- Rice, for serving
- 2 tablespoons toasted sesame seeds (optional)
- Sriracha or other hot sauce, or rice wine vinegar and chili oil, for garnish.

1. In a medium bowl, mix beef, 2

tablespoons tamari, sesame oil, salt and pepper. Set aside.

2. Thinly slice sugar snap peas crosswise into disks. Thinly slice scallions, reserving dark green parts for garnish.

3. In a small bowl, mix chicken broth, Madeira, 2 tablespoons water, remaining 1 tablespoon tamari and cornstarch.

4. Heat a large skillet over high heat. Add 2 tablespoons oil. When pan is hot, stir-fry beef until browned, about 2 minutes. Transfer beef and any liquid to a plate.

5. Add remaining tablespoon oil to skillet and when hot, add garlic and white and light green scallion parts until lightly browned, about 1 minute. Add sugar snap peas and chicken broth mixture, lower heat to medium and cover. Let cook for 2 minutes. Transfer beef and juices to skillet and stir-fry 2 minutes. Serve over rice, garnished with more sesame oil, sesame seeds, dark parts of scallions, and hot sauce or vinegar and chili oil.

Yield: 4 servings.