

Tasty Dumplings at Dragon Boat Festival

 Jane Wong

Of all the festivals celebrated throughout the year, the Dragon Boat Festival is most certainly my favourite. I love this day not for the exciting spectacle at the Dragon Boat Race but for the delicious rice dumplings that Mom makes.

One can always have a rice dumpling any time of the year but it is not the eating that really matters to me. In my family, the preparation of rice dumplings is an annual affair that involves everybody, even my little brother of ten.

The day before the festival, Mom would buy all the ingredients from the market – the best pork belly, glutinous rice, dried shrimps, dried mushrooms, salted egg yolks, green beans, spices and the fragrant bamboo leaves. On the day, my brother would help soak the bamboo leaves, dried shrimps and mushrooms while I wash the rice and green beans. Dad is responsible for boiling the green beans until they are soft and blend them into a puree. Mom is the real chef who does most of the work – marinating the pork in salt and spices; wrapping all the ingredients with the leaves and cooking all the dumplings in a large pot.

Although my brother and I do not help a lot, Mom would let us stay in the kitchen and watch. She even teaches us how to make small some ones for ourselves. My attempts are

usually unsuccessful but that never stops me from having fun. I love the smell of the bamboo leaves and I enjoy watching Mom do her work very skillfully. All of her dumplings are perfect pyramids of the same size. The knots are tied very quickly and tightly with strings so none of the content would spill from the leaves.

Once all the dumplings are wrapped, Mom puts them in a big pot of boiling water to steam for about 2 hours. As there are usually more than 25 dumplings to cook, Mom has to cook them in two rounds. The lovely smell of cooked rice mingled with bamboo leaves often makes my belly roar with hunger. I often get so excited that our chef has to give me the honour of opening the first rice dumpling. Once cutting into the soft rice, the lovely smell of pork would hit my nose and the golden egg yolk would appear as brilliant as the setting sun. All the delicious ingredients come together in perfect harmony. Even the green bean puree that Dad has so carefully prepared would melt in my mouth, leaving an aromatic aftertaste.

Out of the 25 dumplings, Mom would give away more than 15 of them to relatives and friends. When they praise her for the tasty food and excellent cooking skills, she would always say, "It's really the work of the whole family. I don't think I can do it without their help, especially my two children." I guess it is these heart-warming words that make the Dragon Boat Festival so special for me.