

# Extension

**Seasonal Eating**  
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**Stir Frying Perfect for Season Transitions**  
**March 2014**

March is one of those unpredictable transitional months that takes us from the cold of winter to the welcome warmth of spring. We go from hearty, warming meals to ones filled with the cool crops of the early spring garden, with fresher, brighter flavors. Stir frying is a perfect technique for cooking during the transitional months. You can adjust your ingredients from root vegetables and beef for the cooler days to chicken with peas, broccoli or asparagus for the beautiful, sunny spring days.

Stir frying is a quick and easy way to cook a meal. Prepare all of your ingredients first and then you're ready for the relatively short cooking time. Cut up all of the vegetables as evenly as you can so they cook in the same time. You can either make your own sauce or there are some really good bottled stir fry sauces. When cutting up the meat or poultry always cut against the grain. Look to see what direction the fibers run in and cut across them to make your protein tender. If using chicken breasts, I like to coat the cut up pieces in a mixture of one egg white and about 1 tablespoon of cornstarch (I just sprinkle some in the bowl). The coating protects the chicken chunks and keeps them tender as they cook.



High heat is essential for stir frying and therefore you want an oil that will withstand the high temperatures such as peanut oil or vegetable oil, not olive oil which has a lower smoking point. Cook the meat first in a little oil and remove to a bowl. Then cook the vegetables, starting the ones that take the longest first such as carrots or roots and mushrooms and then adding the more delicate like greens or peas. Add garlic, ginger or red pepper flakes to the vegetables toward the end to cook but not burn. Finally add your sauce and the reserved meat, heating through and adding a little cornstarch mixed with water (slurry), if needed to thicken. I like to serve my stir fried dishes over a medium grain rice (calrose rice) but long grain will work as well.

When I was in high school, my Dad went to Washington D.C. to go to school for a few months. While there, he bought two Chinese cookbooks. We started making our own Chinese dishes at home and found several favorite recipes. One of those is Kung Pao Chicken. Our original recipe did not have any vegetables in it, but one of my favorite restaurants serves this with sugar snap peas and carrots so I've added those along with some mushrooms. The sauce calls for brown bean sauce which can be hard to find so sometimes I use black bean sauce. Check the Asian section of the grocery store for this along with the hoisin sauce. You could also just use a bottled stir fry sauce with the chicken, vegetables and peanuts, if you wish.

For your transitional meals this month, try stir frying for an easy, quick and versatile method that can match the lion or lamb days of March.

For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website (<https://utextension.tennessee.edu/bedford>) and click on Seasonal Eating. The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstration on “Transitional Meals” will be on March 19 at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call the Office at 684-5971 to sign up and bring \$7.00 to class to cover the samples.

### Kung Pao Chicken and Vegetables

- 1 egg white
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast, cut into 1/2" chunks
- 1/4 cup brown bean sauce (or black bean sauce)
- 2 tablespoons hoisin sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 4 teaspoons sherry
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1/4 cup water
- 2-3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 carrots, sliced
- 4 ounces mushrooms, sliced
- 4 ounces sugar snap peas, cut in half crosswise
- 1 clove garlic
- 1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1/2 cup cocktail peanuts

In a medium bowl, whisk together the egg white and cornstarch. Stir in chicken to coat and set aside. In another bowl, stir together the brown bean sauce, hoisin sauce, vinegar, sherry, sugar and water. In a large skillet or wok, heat the oil over high heat. Add the chicken and cook, stirring constantly until just done. Remove with a slotted spoon to a clean bowl. Pour off all but about 1 tablespoon of oil and add the carrots and mushrooms. Cook, stirring constantly for a couple of minutes, until carrots are almost tender. Add the peas, garlic and crushed red pepper. Cook for another couple of minutes until the peas are just slightly tender but still have some crunch. Add the chicken, sauce and peanuts and heat through. Serve over rice.