Roasted roots with chile-oat crisp

Eating a Chinese meal with chile sauce on the side is a muscle memory for my taste buds, and a fundamental part of the experience. In Asian culture, the type of chile sauce you apply can really change the character of a dish. This chile-oat crisp is similar to my everything oil (see page 25) in that it is a stand-alone sauce. Drizzling it on noodles instantly makes it a meal. At Asian grocers, you can find a product called Lao Gan Ma Spicy Chili Crisp, hailing from China's Guizhou province. This garlicky, spicy, crunchy condiment is served with everything from noodles to ice cream to peanut brittle. The defining characteristic of this chile sauce is the crispness, and in my version I've included old-fashioned rolled oats and coconut flakes for extra crunch. You will find me adding it to pasta, eggs, jook, pizza and, of course, roasted vegetables. Here, I team roasted root vegetables with mung beans, and use the chile-oat crisp as a simple dressing. Vary the amount of spice in your chile crisp according to your tastes.

SERVES 4
VEGAN

2¼ pounds (1 kg) your favorite root vegetables (I use carrots, sweet potatoes, potatoes, turnips and beets)

Extra-virgin olive oil

1 leek, white and pale green parts only, finely sliced

½ cup (100 g) mung beans

1 small garlic clove, peeled

2 scallions, finely sliced

⅓ cup (50 g) roasted peanuts, chopped

Sea salt and black pepper

Chile-oat crisp

3 shallots, finely diced

2 garlic cloves, finely chopped

1-inch (2.5 cm) piece of ginger, peeled and finely chopped

1 cinnamon stick

1 cup (100 g) old-fashioned rolled oats

½ cup (30 g) coconut flakes, roughly chopped

3 tablespoons toasted white sesame seeds

3 tablespoons red chile flakes

1½ cups (375 ml) vegetable or other neutral oil

2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil

About 1 tablespoon sea salt

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C).

Scrub the root vegetables (I don't usually peel them, but please do if you prefer) and cut them into 1-inch (2.5 cm) pieces. Place on a large sheet pan in a single layer, drizzle with olive oil and season with sea salt and black pepper. Roast for 15 minutes, then remove from the oven and add the leek to the sheet pan. Drizzle the leek with a little oil and roast for another 10–20 minutes or so, until everything is soft and golden. Set aside.

Meanwhile, bring a saucepan of salted water to the boil, add the mung beans and garlic and cook for 25–30 minutes, until tender. Drain and mash the very soft garlic into the beans.

To make the chile-oat crisp, place the shallots, garlic, ginger, cinnamon stick, oats, coconut flakes, sesame seeds, chile flakes and oils in a saucepan over medium heat. Bring to a gentle simmer, swirling the pan every now and then, then reduce the heat to medium-low and cook for 20–25 minutes until everything is crispy.

Strain the oil through a sieve over a bowl and leave the oat mixture to cool in the sieve—this will allow it to crisp up further. Set the oil aside. Once the crispy oat mixture is completely cool, stir it back into the oil and season with the sea salt. Leave the cinnamon stick in the oil, as it will continue to flavor it. Store the chile-oat crisp in a sterilized jar at room temperature. It will keep well for several months.

To serve, place the mung beans and vegetables on a serving plate, spoon over a few tablespoons of the chile-oat crisp (enough to suit the level of spice you prefer) and season with sea salt and black pepper. Scatter with the scallions and peanuts.

Substitute

Rolled oats: gluten-free oats for gluten free