*Wok & Roll by Peter Kwong, (Frederic) Inter-County Leader*

**Welcome to my tempura haven**

My wife loves gardening, it is good therapy for her to relax and unwind from other responsibilities. Well, it is a good remedy for me also.

While a lot of my married friends complain that after spending all that time with each other, day after day, week after week, they would just drive each other nuts, especially couples who have been married 40, 50 or more years, I smile and count my blessings, as even though my wife and I live in the same house, we hardly see each other at all. She would be busy with her pottery projects, preparing for the weekly sermon, plus taking care of the budding garden; and I would keep myself busy writing my weekly column, working on my third book, and keeping up with playing piano and practicing my guitar.

In a sense, we hardly see each other at all. So, we made a pledge to find time with each other daily, to have lunch and dinner together (of course, that would be my department), and to find time to play some card games or watch a movie together; slumbering time would sneak up in no time flat, and we’ll be happy to call it a day.

While she had a bumper crop last year with tomatoes, she started to plant different varieties this year; and somehow, they all responded accordingly. Every day, with a beaming smile, she would bring in her harvest — kale, cauliflower, aspabroc (it’s like broccoli crossed with asparagus), mutant zucchini, garlic, beets and herbs of different sorts. As a man who loves challenges, I calmly told myself that’s no big deal, I will find different ways to cook them all. I can make pesto with the fresh herbs and garlic, just blend them together with olive oil; slice the beets and marinate them with Italian dressing, it will be a hit after a week. But that still leaves me with a pile of many others — the aspabroc, cauliflower and the zucchini.

Then it dawned on me, why don’t I bread them and deep-fry them? The tempura veggies would make a nice snack, or even dinner by itself. Then I remember one of the recipes that I used for my cooking classes awhile back. So, why not give it a try? And my goodness, just like that, problem solved!

The recipe is quite simple, and the good thing is that it is best when two people make it together; what better way to spend time with your loved one on a lockdown evening?

Well, are you folks ready? First, we’ll need a clean counter; and get three mixing bowls out, quart size is fine. Next, gather all the ingredients:

**Ingredients (for four people)**

* Flour: 1 cup (first bowl) – add salt to taste
* Eggs (beaten): 4 each (second bowl)
* Panko (or other bread crumbs): 2 cups (third bowl)
* Vegetables: 2 pounds (cut in strips)

The reason I suggest that two people should work together is to avoid your fingers getting coated with egg batter and crumbs. Believe me, they’ll “grow” to a point that you won’t be able to move your fingers.

Next, you have to cut your veggies into bite size (the size of your mouth). My wife always rolls her eyes when I tell my old joke – “Well, for some of your friends, you might have to cut it larger.” Oh well, life is short, so just have a little fun, no!?

Anyway, back to work. Put the veggies in the bowl with flour first, one piece at a time, and make sure that it is evenly coated before it goes to the next bowl with egg wash. This would ensure that the third step is successful. Now that your veggie is evenly coated with the panko (tempura) mix, it won’t fall off easily when going through the frying process. Be creative, you can use this process with almost everything. Let your imagination run, what else would you like to eat besides garden vegetables? How about large shrimp? Chicken strips? Fish fry? You get it, you can thank me later. Now back to work.

After all the veggies are prepped, now clean off the counter before moving to the next step. My motto is, clean as you go. There is nothing worse than having to clean up a messy kitchen after an enjoyable meal.

Our next step is to fry them. So here is what to do, we don’t really need a fryer for that, just a large soup pot will do. I use my wok for almost everything, so that’s what I’ll use in my kitchen. Fill the pot with 2” of oil (just vegetable oil will do), and turn the heat on high (about 425 degrees). If you have a thermometer at home, use that. Otherwise, I would use my ancient method — I’ll dip my finger in water and splash it over the oil. When the drops of water sizzle, it is ready. Yes, just like that.

Next is to turn the heat down to medium-high (350 to 375 degrees). The reason is that if you fry a product in high heat, the outside would be brown and cooked, but the inside would be still raw. So now, drop your coated products in the hot oil, 7-8 pieces at a time. Use your strainer to turn them a few times, make sure that they are evenly cooked. Always take a piece out and test it, then pick the batch out and place them on a sheet pan lined with a few paper towels (to absorb the grease). That’s it!

You can make your own dipping sauce, or I would simply use ranch dressing. Also, if you prefer, sprinkle the fried veggies with grated Parmesan cheese while they are hot. With a beer or a glass of your favorite wine (or your favorite beverage), that is simple life at its best. If you have a freezer, you can put the extras in a zip-close bag (make sure you label them, or you’ll end up with bags of mysterious stuff over time).

Instead of panko mix, try it with coconut flakes sometime. I made coconut shrimp for my wife many times — large shrimp, seasoned flour, egg wash and bread them with coconut flakes; the expression on her face redefines what happiness truly is.

Happy wife makes a happy life; believe it. Welcome to my tempura haven, folks; and enjoy every bite.

*If you have any questions, send me a note: phkwong1668@gmail.com*