



The round shape of *tangyuan* denotes *tuanyuan*, or reunion. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

FULL MOON PARTY

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With the first full moon of the lunar year, the 15 days of celebrations for the Spring Festival wound down and life has returned to normal. On March 2, *yuanyaojie*, there would have been one final round of eating and drinking.

Symbolism is very important in Chinese culinary traditions, and so, to reflect the full moon, glutinous dumpling balls are eaten first thing in the morning. *Tangyuan* and *yuanyao* are made and eaten throughout the country.

Tangyuan is popular in southern China and is made by mixing fine glutinous rice powder with water to form a dough, which is then molded around fillings like red bean paste, sesame paste and crushed peanuts. They are cooked in sweet soups, sometimes scented with osmanthus flowers or flavored with sweet rice wine.

Yuanyao, named after the day itself, is a northern delicacy. Its production is more complex and involves a ball of filling tossed onto damp glutinous flour in a tray. The tray is rhythmically rolled around until the filling is coated with layers of rice flour and becomes nice and round. These dumplings are then cooked in water.

Both are sticky dumplings with round shapes that denote *tuanyuan*,

Recipe

Prawn and squid braised noodles

(A festive noodle dish from Fujian)
(Serves 4)

- 500g medium prawns
- 500g large squids, cleaned
- 300g pork belly
- 4 eggs
- 1 kg fresh yellow noodles, loosened
- 500g beansprouts, tailed
- 2-3 stalks Chinese chives
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic
- Soy and fish sauce
- Pepper

Prepare the stock. Heat up about 3 liters water in a large pot. Cook the prawns, squid and pork belly in it. Once cooked, ladle up the ingredients and reserve the stock, keeping it on a low simmer.

Peel the prawns, devein, and



place the heads and shells in a muslin bag and throw it back into the stock.

Cut the squid tubes into rings, reserve.

Cut the pork belly into slices, then into strips and reserve.

Wash and dry beansprouts and reserve.

Clean the chives and cut into 4-5 cm lengths.

Prepare to fry the noodles.

Fire up a wok on high heat and add oil. Quickly fry the garlic till it is fragrant and add the noodles. Toss to mix well. Add the pork strips, followed by the prawns and squid and the beansprouts.

Break the eggs and stir into the noodles.

Ladle in the reserved stock, adding more as the noodles absorb the liquid. The braised noodles should be moist but not too watery. Finally toss in the chives.

Season with soy sauce, fish sauce and pepper to taste.

Serve with cut red chili and lime or lemon wedges to squeeze over the noodles.

or reunion. Many family members will once again depart from home with the sweet taste of the dumplings in their memories as they return to the cities to work. It may be a full year before they again get the chance to see home and hearth.

But before they go, there is still one more day to relax.

In many parts of the country, *yuanyaojie* is marked with lantern parades and exhibitions. Intricately made lanterns of all shapes, sizes and colors are gathered in parks and town squares and brightly lit.

Everyone competes to see who comes up with the prettiest, tallest, biggest and longest lanterns.

Often, these have poems on them that are riddles, and groups of friends will make the rounds to see who is best at solving the word puzzles.

Culture parades featuring folk dances, stilt walkers, costumed opera characters, choirs and modern day singers and dancers add to the final

festive air. This is also the last day of the lunar new year temple fairs, a traditional fairground for holiday makers.

On this day, lion and dragon dancers will be doing their best to impress their audiences, ending a fortnight of performances that have earned them considerable amounts of lucky money in red packets, or *hongbao*.

It is also around this period that the various clan or village associations have competitions among them to find the most able lion or dragon dance teams. These can get pretty intense in the heat of firecrackers, loud drums and martial arts moves.

When it comes time to eat, all the auspicious dishes that marked the first new year meals return to the table, including the festive chickens, pig trotters, whole fish and vegetarian specials.

In addition, *jiaozi* dumplings and noodles are served. It is a northern tradition to have *jiaozi* on all major occasions, and a farewell meal definitely needs *jiaozi*.

Noodles, for good health and longevity, will also be on the table. Different communities will serve their regional specialties, from light soup noodles to rich braised noodles topped with seafood and meat.

Once the evening meal is finished, many will opt for an early night to prepare for their long journeys the next day. Life goes back to normal.