Honey prawns

Ingredients

300g prawns, peeled and deveined

1/2 tsp kosher/cooking salt (halve for table salt)

Dredging:

1/2 cup cornflour

Ultra-crispy fry batter:

9 tbsp cornflour

6 tbsp flour, plain/all-purpose

1/2 tsp baking powder (NOT baking soda)

1/2 tsp salt , kosher/cooking (halve for table salt)

2/3 cup + 1 tbsp COLD soda water, club soda or seltzer water (NOT sparkling mineral water)

Oil, for frying:

3 – 4 cups vegetable or canola oil (~4cm depth in a pot)

Honey Sauce:

1/3 cup (100g) honey

1.5 tbsp (25g) glucose OR corn syrup (light) (Note 4)

1 tbsp light soy sauce (or all-purpose)

2 tsp Chinese cooking wine (or mirin)

Garnish / serving:

25g Vermicelli rice noodles (optional), a wad of it

Sesame seeds, finely sliced green onions

Instructions

Season and dust prawns:

Salt prawns: Mix prawns with salt. (Don't do this ahead, salt makes prawns sweat = compromise crispy coating!)

Dust: Place 1/2 cup cornflour in a bowl. Dip prawn in, shake off excess then put on a plate. Repeat with all prawns.

Cold batter and fry #1:

Chill dry ingredients: Whisk together flour, cornflour, baking powder and salt in a bowl. Place in fridge while oil heats up. (Helps keep batter cold, cold batter = crispier prawns)

Heat oil: Fill small pot or large saucepan with 4cm oil, heat to 160°C on medium high stove.

Make cold batter: When the oil is near target temp, add soda water into the dry ingredients. Then do the minimum whisks to just combine (10 or so) – a few lumps ok, better than whisking too much (changes coating texture).

Batter thickness: Should fully coat prawns easily, not be see-through, but not thick and heavy. Use extra soda water 1 teaspoon at a time to achieve right thickness.

Dredge: Holding a prawn by the tail, dip into the batter then hold up for a 2 seconds to let the excess batter drip off. Then carefully place in oil. Repeat with another 5 prawns (6 per batch).

3 minutes Fry #1: Cook for 3 minutes until light golden and crispy. When you pick them up, you can tell it's very crispy.

Drain and repeat: Place prawns on a tray with paper towels. Repeat with remaining prawns. I cook in 4 batches. Don't crowd the pot as it brings oil temperature down too much.

Cool prawns for 20 minutes (Note 5). Meanwhile, make Sauce.

Honey Sauce:

Simmer: Place ingredients in a small saucepan over medium heat. Bring to simmer, turn down stove to medium low then leave to simmer for 3 minutes.

Syrupy consistency: The consistency should be like maple syrup (see video). Turn off stove, place lid on to keep warm (when cool, it gets too thick to toss prawns in it).

Fry #2 – for ultra-crispy!

Heat oil to 200°C.

3 minutes Fry #2: Place half the prawns in oil (you can crowd the pot for Fry #2). Cook for 3 minutes or until it changes from pale golden to very golden, then remove to a paper towel-lined plate. You can tell by touching that it's built-to-last crispy! More golden = crispier (but don't overcook the prawns!) Repeat with remaining prawns.

Sauce and serve:

Quickly toss: Transfer prawns to a metal bowl then pour over Honey Sauce. Quickly toss with rubber spatula to coat prawns in sauce. (Sauce starts thickening if you take too long, so be quick!)

Garnish: Pile prawns over crispy rice noodles (if using), scatter with sesame seeds, green onion and serve!

Puffy crispy rice noodles (optional):

At any point while oil is hot, drop a wad of noodles into hot oil, wait 3 seconds until it puffs up, then remove with tongs.

Drain on paper towels, place on plate. Top with prawns! (Note: Crispy noodles stays crispy "forever" so you can do this well ahead. Not for eating – is flavourless.)

Recipe Notes:

1. Prawns – Raw prawns with tail on are best, medium to large in size. 300g of peeled raw shrimp with tails is about 600g unpeeled shrimp, about 17 prawns that are 17g each peeled, 34g whole.

Frozen – You can also use jumbo / large frozen raw shrimp, thawed. These tend to leach lots of water when defrosted, so ensure you drain all the liquid off and dry them very well.

2. Cold soda water, club soda, or seltzer water – It must be fridge cold to ensure crispy coating. Needs to be man-made fizziness to help with the puffiness, do not use sparkling mineral water (ie naturally fizzy) – it's not as strong. It works but not as crispy.

BEST SUB: Ice cold water. Crispiness not as strong so doesn't last as long once sauced, but still excellent if consumed within 20 minutes.

3. Glucose or corn syrup (light) – The key to making the honey sauce "toffee-like" so it coats and semi-sets ON the crispy crust rather than soaking INTO it and making it soggy. Both work just as well.

Find glucose in the baking aisle. Corn syrup is not widely available in Australia – I order it online. Substitute with honey (it does work for crispiness retention, glucose/corn syrup is an extra insurance policy!)

4. Let prawns cool after first fry = crispier crust once double fried. I don't know the exact science, I presume it's like cold batter = crispier prawns! It is still very crispy if fried the second time straight away however.

5. Double fry – Makes the coating ultra-crisp and less greasy, and deepens from pale gold colour to golden. Also means all prawns are piping hot when tossed in sauce.