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THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

Yang's, a 6,000-unit, one-dish chicken chain from China, opens first U.S. outlet in Tustin



Yang's features one clay pot chicken dish with three flavor choices: regular (no spice), authentic (one chili) and spicy (two chilies). For \$9.99, you get a large clay pot of chicken served with a side of rice. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By NANCY LUNA | nluna@scng.com | Orange County Register

Yang's Braised Chicken Rice, a fast-food chain from China that serves just one dish, opened its first U.S. restaurant in Tustin.

Local VIPs and Chinese media outlets were among the first to taste the clay pot specialty chicken dish known by millions of fans all over China. Chef Xiaolu Yang founded the first Yang's in 2011 in the Shandong province of China, known for its Confucian heritage.

Yang, whose family ran several restaurants in the 1930s, inherited his grandmother's secret recipe used for the regional dish known as "huang men chicken." The dish, cooked in a clay pot, is 1 pound of chicken thigh meat marinated in the secret sauce, which includes ginger, Shiitake mushrooms and Serrano chilies.

Through a translator, Yang, dressed in white chef's coat, said he hopes American diners will embrace the umami flavors of the traditional Northern Chinese dish. "It has very complex flavors to the palate."

The chicken (thigh meat) is cooked in a pressure cooker, then placed in a clay pot. The spices simmer on a burner to lock in flavors. The dish is served in the same clay pot. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)
Expand

At first glimpse, the 40-seat restaurant in the Red Hill Plaza shopping center looks like a modern fast-casual restaurant. White walls. Aluminum chairs. Polished concrete floors.

But when you walk up to the counter, it's unlike any other fast food chain in Southern California. Instead, of facing endless options, Yang's features one chicken dish with three flavor choices: regular (no spice), authentic (one chili) and spicy (two chilies).

For \$9.99, you get a large pot served with a side of rice. The portion is big enough for one person with a healthy appetite or good for sharing.

Yang said he's not concerned about giving Americans only one type of dish. Outside of China, he's opened Yang's in Australia, Singapore and Japan. With 6,000 restaurants across the globe, Yang said the one-dish concept has "conquered" a wide variety of cultures.

"It's been this way since 2011," he said.

When Yang opened his first restaurant, he modified the dish slightly by adding white rice as a side dish. In the first week, Yang's had lines out the door. To maintain the integrity of the dish, Yang's will continue to make the secret sauce in China with shipments sent to Tustin. The thighs, typically the juiciest and most flavorful part of the chicken, are marinated in the sauce and partially cooked in a high-pressure cooker.

The Tustin kitchen is equipped with 20 burners. The chicken simmers in the clay pot, cooking over direct heat to lock in all the flavors. Yang says the "authentic" flavor is the one he recommends for first-timers because it most closely resembles the meal he ate as a child.

The authentic version is simmered with Serrano chilies, which provides the right balance of flavors, Yang said. (The spicy version incorporates a second dry red chili.)

Though the rice is served on the side, Yang's staff recommends mixing the white rice into the piping hot clay pot.

The result is a chicken stew with intoxicating aromas guaranteed to clear any stuffy nose.

Yang said one bite of the dish “speaks for itself.”

“Once you taste it, you know.”

The Tustin restaurant is corporate-owned and the first under the Yang Ming Yu Braised Chicken USA Group based in Southern California. The company plans to open more locations through franchising. They’ve had interest from potential franchisees in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and Canada.

The Tustin restaurant is at 13824 Red Hill Ave.



SHOW CAPTION

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The chicken (thigh meat) is cooked in a pressure cooker, then placed in a clay pot. The spices simmer on a burner to lock in flavors. The dish is served in the same clay pot. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



SHOW CAPTION

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Chef Xiaolu Yang founded Yang's as a fast food restaurant in 2011. A sensation with one item on the menu, the chain has grown to 6,000 units. Tustin is the company's first U.S. outlet. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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Yang's features one clay pot chicken dish with three flavor choices: regular (no spice), authentic (one chili) and spicy (two chilies). For \$9.99, you get a large clay pot of chicken served with a side of rice. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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Chef Xiaolu Yang has been in Orange County since mid-summer training cooks to make the Northern Chinese chicken dish. Shown: A cook delicately places a clay pot on one of 20 burners in the kitchen. 9/10/2017 (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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Towards the end of the cooking process, the dish is sprinkled with chili peppers. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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The authentic flavor is closest to the original dish made by Yang's grandmother. It contains slices of serrano chilies. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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Once served, it is recommended you mix the rice with the piping hot chicken which is marinated in a secret sauce with. The dish, cooked in direct heat in a clay pot, is one pound of chicken thigh meat marinated in a secret sauce that includes ginger, Shiitake mushrooms and Serrano chilies. The extra spicy version contains Serranos and dry red chilies. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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The dish, cooked in direct heat in a clay pot, is served with a black Wonton-style soup spoon. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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Chef Xiaolu Yang believes the one dish menu is a proven success, and will do well here in the U.S. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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One dish Chinese wonder, Yang's, opens first U.S. outlet in Tustin on Sunday, Sept. 10. Early guests, who signed up for a special preview, received rose boutonnieres. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)



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Yang's is located at Red Hill Plaza on Red Hill, near the (5) Freeway. The Chinese fast food chain said they chose this location because it was centrally located in Orange County near Irvine. (Nancy Luna, Orange County Register/SCNG)