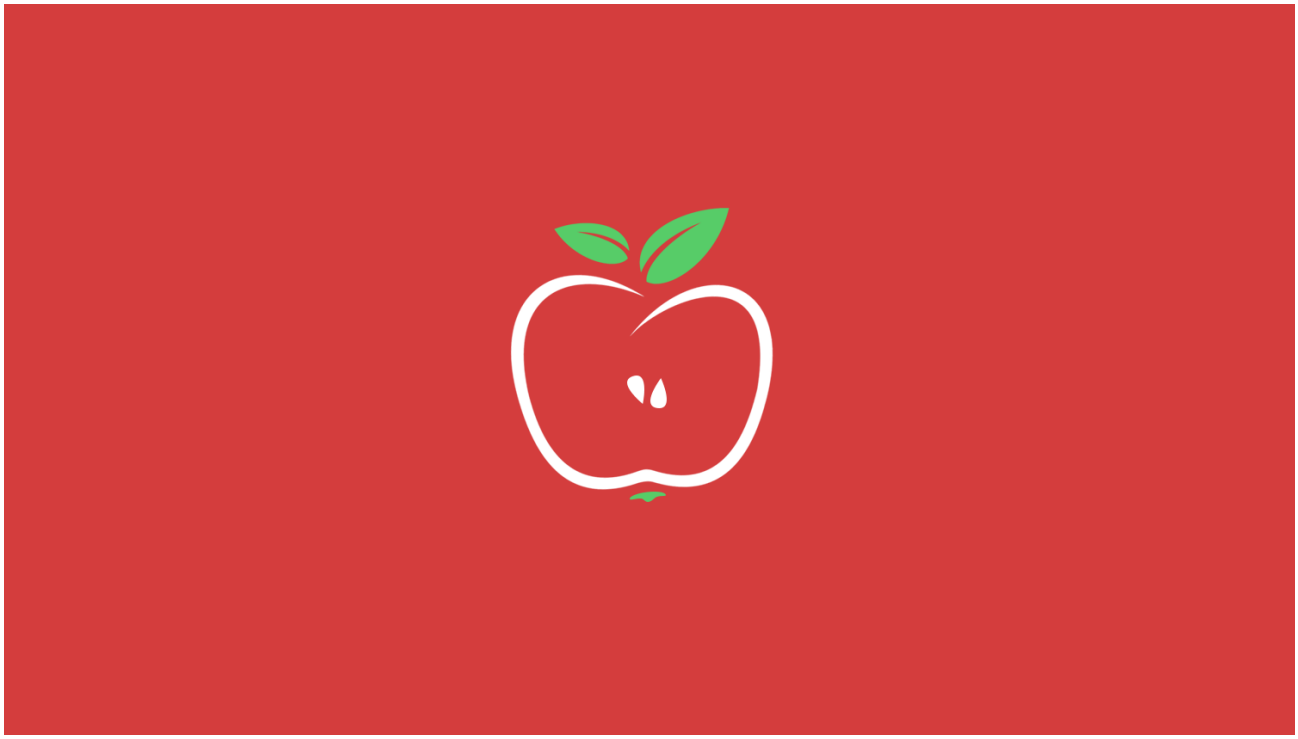
Essential Ingredients for Chinese Cooking Checklist

Stock your pantry with a few basic ingredients to create an authentic Chinese meal.



- [ ] **Chili sauce** - Providing an extra zing, this thick sauce adds a nice punch of chili flavor to a dish.
- [ ] **Chinese mushrooms, dried** - More intense than fresh fungi, dried shiitakes—which should be soaked in water to rehydrate before using—add meaty flavor to a dish. You can even use the leftover soaking liquid in place of water or broth in soups and sauces. If not available in your grocery store, they can be found in Asian markets.
- [ ] **Dark soy sauce** - Fermented longer, this version of the Chinese staple has a slightly sweeter taste. Good in braises and stir-fries, it brings out another layer of flavor in a dish and is less salty than soy sauce.
- [ ] **Fermented black beans** - Found at Asian markets, these are soybeans that have been dried and then often flavored with ginger and tangerine peel. You just need a tablespoon when making your own black bean sauce.
- [ ] **Ginger, fresh** - Part of the holy trinity of Chinese cooking, ginger adds a kick of heat while also tenderizing meat (not to mention neutralizing fish odors and gamey tastes). It should be thin-skinned, heavy, and smooth to the touch.
- [ ] **Hoisin sauce** - This condiment has a mildly sweet, smoky flavor and is often used in stir-fries and on spare ribs.
- [ ] **Oyster sauce** - This Cantonese specialty features oyster extracts and a variety of spices and seasonings. It's mainly used with seafood recipes, although it can sometimes be found in vegetable dishes as well.
- [ ] **Rice** - Make white or brown, depending on how nutty you want it to taste. A rice cooker provides a virtually foolproof way to make perfect rice, but you can also cook excellent rice in a saucepan on the stovetop.
- [ ] **Rice vinegar** - This vinegar provides the acid in Chinese cooking. White rice vinegar is milder and less acidic than American vinegars, while Chinese black vinegar has a deeper flavor (more similar to balsamic vinegar) and is used in dipping sauces and stir-fries.
- [ ] **Rice wine** - In Chinese cooking, rice wine is used in marinades and to flavor dishes. Dry sherry makes an excellent substitute.
- [ ] **Soy sauce** - It's used in marinades, as a seasoning, as a condiment, and more. It adds saltiness and a depth of flavor that comes from umami, often described as a meaty, savory flavor and known as the fifth taste. Soy sauce should taste clean

and fresh, and whatever brand you buy should be naturally brewed to ensure the best quality.

- [ ] **Toasted sesame oil**- This can be the key to flavor in many dishes. It's highly fragrant and needs to be 100 percent pure, because it's used as a flavoring—most commonly drizzled on at the end of cooking a dish to add extra aroma. Avoid inferior brands that use a mixture of vegetable oil and sesame oil.

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