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# Chinese New Year with Ying Compestine

By arnoe44 on February 7, 2013



*Ying Compestine is an award-winning Chinese author who has written a wide range of cookbooks, novels and children's books inspired by her love of food and growing up in China. We love how Ying's books are rich with detail about Chinese traditions and celebrations, so with Chinese New Year just around the corner, we asked Ying to share her experience—along with a few useful tips and recipes:*



I've always been obsessed with food. As a child, I experienced the political unrest of the Cultural Revolution that left the nation of China starving. Food was tightly rationed and I felt I never had enough to eat. So, I always anxiously awaited Chinese New Year because every family received an extra food allowance for the festival and I knew we would have enough to cook a big meal.

Although I have lived in the United States for over twenty years, I still hold to the tradition of celebrating Chinese New Year. After all the hubbub of the Western holiday season has faded, it's nice to host a party and give everyone another chance to enjoy wonderful food and company. Also, my guests appreciate a second chance to make resolutions!



Instead of working by myself in the kitchen for days, as my mother did back in China, I always enlist the help of my son, who started helping me in the kitchen

when he was just five years old. Many of my children's books and the recipes featured in them are inspired by both my childhood memories and the memories made cooking with my son.

Here are some traditions I adhere to when preparing for New Year's and tips for you to follow for an authentic celebration. Xīn Nián Kuài Lè! 新年快□! Happy New Year!

**Sweep out the old and welcome in the new:** Clean your house and get rid of old, unused stuff to make room for the new.

**Make a fresh, clean start:** Pay bills and collect debts. For children, finish homework, wash hair, get a new haircut and have a set of new clothes ready for New Year's Day.

**Decorate your home:** Put out a red tablecloth and cushion covers. Hang red and gold banners and lanterns, with Chinese good wishes written on them. Display Chinese dragons. The dragon will scare away the evil spirits.

**Bowing and the Red Envelope:** Children bow to pay respect to the elders. In return they are given Red Envelopes which contain money. These bring prosperity to them for the New Year.

**Fireworks:** Set off firecrackers to scare away evil spirits.

**Sweet Treats:** Exchange treats and fruit with friends and neighbors. Melon seeds and candied melon represents growth and prosperity; Oranges and tangerines stand for instant wealth and health. Candies and sweet rice cake are also traditional—see Ying make a rice cake on Home Matters:



For more on Ying, check out her novel [Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party](#) which chronicles her life growing up during the Cultural Revolution and her more lighthearted [The Runaway Wok](#) and [Crouching Tiger](#)—children's books filled with bright illustrations and easy-to-prepare recipes.

**Don't know what to cook? Here is Ying's traditional Chinese New Year menu.**