

## TWELVE SICHUAN PANTRY JARS

## MATCH THE CHARACTERS

You don't need to read Chinese to find the right jar. Match the characters on the card to the characters on the label, stroke for stroke.

Screenshot a card, or print it and take it to the store.

- 1 Match the shapes.** Names can run left to right, right to left, or top to bottom. Read them in any direction.
- 2 Read 配料 pèiliào, the ingredient list,** from the top. Chinese and US labels both list ingredients from most to least.
- 3 Labels vary by brand,** so every cue says “typically”. Check your jar, and its allergen line.

## THE TWELVE, AS A SHOPPING LIST

- |                                                            |                                                      |                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 01 郫县豆瓣 Chili bean paste          | <input type="checkbox"/> 05 老抽 Dark soy sauce        | <input type="checkbox"/> 09 芝麻酱 Sesame paste |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 02 绍兴酒·料酒 Shaoxing / cooking wine | <input type="checkbox"/> 06 红花椒·青花椒 Sichuan pepper   | <input type="checkbox"/> 10 宜宾芽菜 Yacai       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 03 镇江香醋 Black vinegar             | <input type="checkbox"/> 07 二荆条·朝天椒 Dried chilies    | <input type="checkbox"/> 11 蚝油 Oyster sauce  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 04 生抽 Light soy sauce             | <input type="checkbox"/> 08 豆豉 Fermented black beans | <input type="checkbox"/> 12 冰糖 Rock sugar    |

## 01 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

郫县豆瓣

pí xiàn dòu bàn  
Pi, the old county bean split half

Píxiàn dòubàn Pixian chili bean paste (doubanjiang)

|                    |                                                                                                                                                             |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LOOK FOR           | 郫县豆瓣 in the name; 辣椒 and 蚕豆 near the top of 配料; typically contains wheat flour — check the allergen line.                                                   |
| DON'T CONFUSE WITH | 豆瓣酱 with no 辣 in the name and no chili on the list: a non-spicy bean paste. Chili bean sauce built on soybean paste, sugar and garlic is a different style. |
| ITS JOB            | Salt, fermented depth, red colour and some heat. Fried in the oil first for mapo tofu and twice-cooked pork.                                                |
| BEST SWAP          | Miso with chili flakes. <b>You lose:</b> the fermented chili depth and the red colour.                                                                      |
| ALLERGENS          | Typically wheat. Some chili bean sauces add soy.                                                                                                            |
| SALT               | Very salty, and brands differ. Taste first; start with two-thirds of the recipe's amount.                                                                   |
| STORAGE            | Follow the label.                                                                                                                                           |

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

## 02 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

绍兴酒 料酒

Shàoxīng jiǔ liào jiǔ  
the city wine seasoning wine

Shàoxīng jiǔ · liào jiǔ Shaoxing wine vs cooking wine

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LOOK FOR           | 绍兴 in the name for Shaoxing wine. 配料 typically water, 糯米 (glutinous rice) and 小麦 (wheat). 食用盐 on the list means salted; 食用酒精 (edible alcohol) points to a blended seasoning wine. |
| DON'T CONFUSE WITH | 料酒 is the broad word for cooking wine: always salted, sometimes spiced, often milder. 米酒 is a lighter, clear rice wine.                                                           |
| ITS JOB            | Softens fishy and gamey smells in marinades and blanching water, and adds aroma splashed down the side of the wok.                                                                |
| BEST SWAP          | Dry sherry, 1 : 1. <b>You lose:</b> very little in a splash. Supermarket cooking sherry adds salt.                                                                                |
| ALLERGENS          | Wheat.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| SALT               | Salted cooking wines are often about 1.5% salt. Taste before salting.                                                                                                             |
| STORAGE            | Follow the label.                                                                                                                                                                 |

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

### 03 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 镇江香醋

Zhènjiāng  
the city

xiāng  
fragrant

cù  
vinegar

**Zhènjiāng xiāngcù** Chinkiang (Zhenjiang) black vinegar

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LOOK FOR           | 镇江香醋 in the name; 糯米 (glutinous rice) near the top of 配料, typically with 麸皮 (wheat bran).                                                                                    |
| DON'T CONFUSE WITH | 山西老陈醋 (Shanxi aged vinegar): sorghum-based, more intense. 米醋 and 白醋: pale rice and white vinegars, sharper, with no malt.                                                    |
| ITS JOB            | The black vinegar on the tray. Dumpling dips, cold dishes, hot-and-sour flavours.                                                                                            |
| BEST SWAP          | Another Chinese black vinegar, such as Shanxi aged or Sichuan 保宁醋 Baoning. Next best: rice vinegar. <b>You lose:</b> with rice vinegar, the malty depth and the dark colour. |
| ALLERGENS          | Typically wheat.                                                                                                                                                             |
| STORAGE            | Follow the label.                                                                                                                                                            |

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

### 04 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 生抽

shēng  
fresh, raw

chōu  
to draw off

**shēngchōu** Light soy sauce

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LOOK FOR           | 生抽 on the label, and 酿造酱油 (brewed soy sauce). 配料 typically water, 大豆 (soybeans), 小麦 (wheat) and 食用盐.                                                                               |
| DON'T CONFUSE WITH | 老抽, dark soy, which colours rather than seasons. “Premium”, “Superior” and “Golden Label” don't tell you which: read the word after them. 蒸鱼豉油 is a sweeter seasoned soy for fish. |
| ITS JOB            | The everyday seasoning: salt and savoury depth, by the tablespoon. When a Chinese recipe says just “soy sauce”, it means this one.                                                 |
| BEST SWAP          | All-purpose naturally brewed soy sauce, 1 : 1. <b>You lose:</b> a little. It is a shade darker, with a different aroma.                                                            |
| ALLERGENS          | Soy, wheat.                                                                                                                                                                        |
| SALT               | Taste before adding any salt after it.                                                                                                                                             |
| STORAGE            | Follow the label.                                                                                                                                                                  |

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

### 05 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 老抽

lǎo  
old

chōu  
to draw off

**lǎochōu** Dark soy sauce

|                    |                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LOOK FOR           | 老抽 on the label; typically 焦糖色 (caramel colour) or sugar on 配料. 草菇老抽, straw mushroom dark soy, is still dark soy.                          |
| DON'T CONFUSE WITH | 生抽, light soy. Light seasons, dark colours: don't swap them one for one.                                                                   |
| ITS JOB            | Colour and gloss, by the teaspoon: red-braised dishes, fried rice, noodles.                                                                |
| BEST SWAP          | Mushroom dark soy, 1 : 1. Without it: 1 tsp light soy + ¼ tsp molasses + a pinch of sugar. <b>You lose:</b> with the mix, depth of colour. |
| ALLERGENS          | Soy, wheat.                                                                                                                                |
| SALT               | Treat a teaspoon of dark soy as at least as salty as light.                                                                                |
| STORAGE            | Follow the label.                                                                                                                          |

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

### 06 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 红花椒

hóng  
red

huā  
flower

jiāo  
pepper

# 青花椒

qīng  
green

huā  
flower

jiāo  
pepper

**hóng huājiāo · qīng huājiāo** Red and green Sichuan pepper

|                    |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LOOK FOR           | 花椒 on the bag: 红花椒 red, 青花椒 green. Red may say 大红袍 or 汉源; green may say 藤椒. Split husks, few black seeds, a strong citrus smell, and a recent 生产日期 (production date) where one is printed. |
| DON'T CONFUSE WITH | 胡椒, black or white pepper, and 辣椒, chili. Neither one numbs.                                                                                                                               |
| ITS JOB            | 麻, the numbing tingle. Red is warm and woody; green is bright and lemony.                                                                                                                  |
| BEST SWAP          | The other colour, the same amount, then taste. <b>You lose:</b> red for green, some warmth; green for red, some brightness.                                                                |
| STORAGE            | Follow the label.                                                                                                                                                                          |

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

## 07 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 二荆条 朝天椒

èr  
two

jīng  
thorn-bush

tiáo  
strip

cháo  
facing

tiān  
sky

jiāo  
pepper

èrjīngtiáo · cháotiānjiāo Two Sichuan dried chilies

**LOOK FOR** 二荆条 (a variety name): long and slender, about 4–6 in, with a slightly hooked tip; deep red. 朝天椒, “facing the sky”: short and pointed, about 1½–2½ in; 子弹头, “bullet”, is a common kind. Typically dried chili and nothing else.

**DON'T CONFUSE WITH** 小米辣, a smaller, hotter chili. 辣椒面 is ground chili, not whole.

**ITS JOB** 二荆条 brings colour and fragrance with mild-to-moderate heat: the red in red oil, and the chili in Pixian paste. 朝天椒 brings more heat, by the handful.

**BEST SWAP** Chile de árbol or other small dried chilies. **You lose:** 二荆条's fragrance and colour. Árbol can run hotter, so use fewer.

**STORAGE** Follow the label.

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

## 08 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 豆豉

dòu  
bean

chǐ  
salted,  
fermented beans

dòuchǐ Fermented black beans

**LOOK FOR** 豆豉 in the name; 配料 typically 黑豆 or 大豆 (soybeans) and 食用盐. Some add ginger or spices.

**DON'T CONFUSE WITH** Canned or dried black beans, which are not fermented. Jarred black bean sauce, with garlic and oil, is a different product.

**ITS JOB** A salty, savoury punch. Chop or crush them and fry them with the aromatics.

**BEST SWAP** Jarred black bean sauce, about the same amount. **You lose:** the whole-bean bite. The sauce brings garlic and oil, often sugar.

**ALLERGENS** Soy. Check for wheat.

**SALT** Very salty. Rinse them if you like, and hold back other salt.

**STORAGE** Follow the label.

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

## 09 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 芝麻酱

zhīma  
sesame

jiàng  
paste

zhīmajiàng Chinese sesame paste

**LOOK FOR** 芝麻酱 or 纯芝麻酱 (pure) in the name; 芝麻 as the only item on 配料; no 花生 (peanut) unless you want a blend.

**DON'T CONFUSE WITH** Tahini: paler and milder, from raw or lightly toasted seeds. 二八酱, a sesame and peanut blend. 黑芝麻酱, black sesame paste, for sweets.

**ITS JOB** Roasted, nutty body in dan dan noodles, cold noodles and hot pot dips.

**BEST SWAP** 1 tbsp tahini + ½ tsp toasted sesame oil for each tablespoon. **You lose:** some of the deep roast.

**ALLERGENS** Sesame; peanut in a blend.

**STORAGE** Follow the label. Stir the oil back in first.

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

## 10 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 宜宾芽菜

Yíbīn  
the city

yá  
shoot,  
sprout

cài  
vegetable

Yíbīn yácai Yibin preserved mustard greens (yacai)

**LOOK FOR** 宜宾芽菜 on the pack; 碎米芽菜 is the finely chopped kind. 配料 typically 芥菜 (mustard greens), sugar, salt and spices.

**DON'T CONFUSE WITH** 榨菜, a crunchier, sharper pickled mustard stem. In some shops, 芽菜 on its own means bean sprouts.

**ITS JOB** Savoury-sweet depth in dan dan noodles, dry-fried green beans and Sichuan fried rice.

**BEST SWAP** Finely chopped 榨菜, used sparingly; a chopped dill pickle in a pinch. **You lose:** yacai's sweet, spiced depth.

**SALT** Salty. Hold back salt until you taste.

**STORAGE** Follow the label.

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY

## 11 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 蚝油

háo  
oyster

yóu  
oil; here, sauce

**háoyóu** Oyster sauce

|                    |                                                                                                                  |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LOOK FOR           | 蚝油 in the name; 蚝汁 (oyster extract) on 配料. Lists run from most to least, so the higher it sits, the more oyster. |
| DON'T CONFUSE WITH | 海鲜酱 is hoisin: “seafood sauce”, with no seafood in it. 素蚝油 is the vegetarian mushroom version.                   |
| ITS JOB            | Salt, gentle sweetness, savoury depth, body and dark colour in stir-fry sauces and braises.                      |
| BEST SWAP          | Vegetarian oyster sauce, 素蚝油, 1 : 1. <b>You lose:</b> the brine. It is a little thinner and earthier.            |
| ALLERGENS          | Shellfish (oyster); often wheat.                                                                                 |
| STORAGE            | Follow the label.                                                                                                |

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

[GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY](https://gentlehearth.com/pantry)

## 12 MATCH THESE CHARACTERS

# 冰糖

bīng  
ice

táng  
sugar

**bīngtáng** Rock sugar

|                    |                                                                                                             |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| LOOK FOR           | 冰糖 on the bag. 单晶冰糖: clear single crystals. 多晶冰糖: pale yellow lumps, less refined.                          |
| DON'T CONFUSE WITH | 冰片糖, brown slab sugar; 红糖, brown sugar; 白砂糖, granulated sugar.                                              |
| ITS JOB            | Rounded sweetness and gloss in red-braised dishes (红烧) and sweet soy.                                       |
| BEST SWAP          | Granulated sugar, a little less: rock sugar is slightly less sweet. <b>You lose:</b> a little of the gloss. |
| STORAGE            | Follow the label.                                                                                           |

TYPICALLY — CHECK YOUR JAR.

[GENTLEHEARTH.COM/PANTRY](https://gentlehearth.com/pantry)

## WORDS ON ANY CHINESE LABEL

The storage phrases are the sample wording in China's labelling standard, GB 7718. Real jars may word them a little differently.

|      |                                              |        |                                                      |
|------|----------------------------------------------|--------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 配料   | pèiliào<br>ingredients, most to least        | 食用盐    | shíyòng yán<br>salt                                  |
| 小麦粉  | xiǎomàifěn<br>wheat flour                    | 大豆     | dàdòu<br>soybeans                                    |
| 芝麻   | zhīma<br>sesame                              | 花生     | huāshēng<br>peanut                                   |
| 生产日期 | shēngchǎn rìqī<br>production date            | 贮存条件   | zhùcún tiáojiàn<br>storage conditions                |
| 常温保存 | chángwēn bǎocún<br>store at room temperature | 开封后需冷藏 | kāifēng hòu xū lěngcáng<br>refrigerate after opening |

## NOTES FROM THE AISLE

Write down the jar you brought home, so the next shop is quicker.

| JAR | WHAT THE LABEL SAID | HOW IT COOKED | AGAIN?                   |
|-----|---------------------|---------------|--------------------------|
|     |                     |               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|     |                     |               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|     |                     |               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|     |                     |               | <input type="checkbox"/> |
|     |                     |               | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## ABOUT THESE CARDS

Each cue was checked against at least two sources: cookbook authors, specialist grocers, Chinese national standards and labels. No brand is named, ranked or endorsed. On a jar sold in the US, the English “Contains” line is the allergen check that counts.

The full guides, with sources:  
[gentlehearth.com/pantry](https://gentlehearth.com/pantry)

Setting the table for mixed heat? The free Heat Card and the table planner: [gentlehearth.com/table](https://gentlehearth.com/table)

The Aisle Card · Version 1.0 · 2026-09-25 · Chinese reviewed: pending. Free to print for your kitchen; share the link, [gentlehearth.com/free](https://gentlehearth.com/free). © 2026 Gentle Hearth.