

BROWN ÂHU or CARAMELIZED SUGAR YOUNG COCONUT DUMPLING SOUP

White âhu is more prevalently served than brown âhu, but both are delicious. Of course, fresh young coconut meat is preferable to canned young coconut, but when off-island, canned is better than nothing. Here's a link to my white âhu recipe.

Brown âhu is made by caramelizing some of the granulated sugar. Caramelized sugar changes the perception of sweetness thus you need to use a little more sugar in brown âhu compared to white âhu. However, adding more sugar reduces the effectiveness of the tapioca starch to gelatinize, or thicken.

To resolve these issues, I use a little bit of salt. Salt helps maintain the ability of the starch to thicken in the presence of too much sugar, and salt enhances the flavor and the perception of sweetness. Also, I use a bit more cornstarch and water to thicken the brown âhu than my white âhu recipe.

Some people like using the fresh mânia juice in âhu – some don't. My grandma Cruz did, but my mom doesn't. If you are using fresh mânia and the juice is sweet, you may use the juice in place of some of the water in set 4. You'll also have to adjust the amount of sugar you'll need in set 4. If you are using canned mânia, discard the solution it comes in and use regular water.

INGREDIENTS

Set 1

2-15 ounce or 2-425 gram cans young coconut meat, or about 2 generous cups meat only, measured then chopped

1 ½ to 2 cups or 183 to 244 grams tapioca starch

Set 2

3 tablespoons or 22.5 grams cornstarch

3 tablespoons or 44.36 milliliters room temperature water

Set 3

¾ cup or 150 grams granulated sugar

Set 4

8 cups or 1.89 liters warm water

½ teaspoon or 3 grams regular table salt

½ cup or 100 grams granulated sugar

Tools: medium bowl, large pot, long wooden spoon, ladle

DIRECTIONS

In a medium bowl, mix young coconut and tapioca starch together to form a cohesive mass. If you like very thick nuggets of gelled mânia pieces in your âhu, use all the two cups of starch. If you like it somewhat thick, use only 1 ½ cups. If the mixture doesn't make a thick paste, add a bit of water to pull it all together. Set aside.

In a small bowl, mix cornstarch and water together. You'll start out using half of this then add more if you want it thicker. Set aside.

Pour $\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar into a large pot. Heat on medium heat until sugar melts. This will melt fast. Stir when most of the sugar is melted as your pot/burner might have a hot spot where the sugar can burn. Caramelize sugar to a rich, dark brown. Once the sugar starts to form foamy bubbles on the surface, it's time to add a bit of water.

Using a measuring pitcher and **keeping your other hand out of the pot as it will bubble like crazy**, pour a little bit of the warm water into the caramelized sugar, about a small splash – 2 tablespoons-ish. Stir vigorously to incorporate. Continue to add just a bit of water to the caramel, standing back at first, then stirring very well.

When the bit of water does not cause a bubbling reaction in the pot, add all the remaining water for a total of 8 cups only. Stir to combine well.

Add a $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of salt and a $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of granulated sugar. Stir to mix. Bring to a boil then reduce to a simmer.

Use your fingers to grab a bit of the coconut-tapioca starch paste and drop in small pieces into the simmering water. Work quickly to reduce the total length of time the áhu is at a simmer. Simmering too long can cause the áhu to lose its thickness. Stir only when needed to move the gel pieces around that settle on bottom of the pot – to keep them from burning. Stirring too much can also reduce the gel-like consistency of the starch, making your áhu runny.

When you have about one-fourth of the paste left in the bowl, turn the heat up and bring the áhu to a gentle boil – more than a simmer. Quickly work to finish up the paste. Once all the paste is in the pot, boil for 5 minutes.

Stir the cornstarch mixture then add **HALF OF IT** to the pot. Stir and gently boil for 30 seconds. If you want it thicker, add the rest. Boil 2 minutes to cook out the cornstarch flavor. Leave uncovered for 10 minutes to set before serving. This will thicken as it sets. It will thicken even more if you place it in the fridge overnight.

LEAVE UNCOVERED until it's at room temperature before storing in fridge. If you cover while it's hot, it can make your áhu runny.

Once fridge-cold, you may freeze this áhu. It thaws and reheats wonderfully in the microwave or stovetop. Sometimes I thaw on counter overnight, sometimes I use the defrost button on the microwave. Either way it's great.

Recipe courtesy Paula Quinene of Paulaq.com.