

THE "TRICK" TO TOFU

As I mentioned in CHAPTER ONE, my husband and I had been eating tofu for over two years before a friend of ours shared a totally simple, tasty way to prepare and cook it. Trust me; this was a tough two years. Nothing against tofu, I love it, but I can only eat it when it's prepared like I am about to share with you.

First of all, what exactly is tofu? Answer: it is a sort of "cheese" or curd made from soy beans. In fact, Asian food restaurants normally refer to tofu as "bean curd" on their menus. It is a soft, "cheese like" substance made from the milk of soybeans that have been soaked and cooked. Just think of the process used to make dairy cheese. Making tofu is essentially the same; only the "milk" is from soybeans and is completely vegan. In addition, tofu is a complete protein in that it contains all eight amino acids and receives the same protein "score" of egg whites and milk, yet has no cholesterol since cholesterol only comes from animal sources. Tofu is so packed with nutrients and can be used in so many ways that it is often referred to as "miracle meat."

Second, is all tofu created equal? Answer: NO. It comes in many different textures and flavors. Typically, you will see the texture range from soft to extra firm, and you may see several different style such as textured, dehydrated, spiced, bar-be-que'd, etc. I tend to use extra firm in most of my recipes. Also, you want to use organic tofu, or at least tofu that does not contain any GMO's (Genetically Modified Organisms) or genetically modified soybeans. This was explained in CHAPTER TWO, *What's Really in Our Food?*

Third, what does tofu look like and where can I find it? Answer: most tofu is packed in small plastic tubs filled with water (tofu should stay hydrated until ready to cook). The tofu looks like a block of soft white cheese in this plastic tub and is always in the refrigerated sections of the store, perhaps near the produce or where Asian products can be found. In its natural state it is soft, squishy, and quite tasteless. I myself was totally unimpressed with it until I learned this simple trick to cooking it. For purposes of this section, I am going to discuss the most common type of tofu which you can find in virtually any grocery store.

As far as common tofu goes, I have a favorite brand and type. My favorite brand is Nasoya®, and I like the "Extra Firm" consistency. This is perfect for stir-fry's, scrambled breakfast dishes, or sautéed to make a light alternative to meat. It is also a great way to add a little extra protein to dishes such as lasagna and macaroni and cheese. If things are tight and I

“Throwin’ Down” Vegetarian Style!

need to “stretch” things to make a complete dinner, I will often sauté tofu, onions, brown rice and spices and mix it with rice to make a nutritious meal in itself. OK, here is the “trick” to tofu.

1. Freeze the tofu overnight. Leave it in its original container.
2. Let the tofu thaw, still in its original container. For example, if you want to cook a tofu dish for dinner, take the frozen tofu out of the freezer in the morning and let it thaw, un-refrigerated, during the day. If you do not cook the tofu that evening, simply refrigerate it and it will stay fresh for several days.
3. After it thaws, remove the tofu from the plastic tub. You may decide to cook some now and some later. If you want to cook some later, put it in airtight Tupperware and add enough fresh water to cover the tofu. Re-refrigerate.
4. For tofu that you are ready to cook now, squeeze out the excess water. I like to do this by placing the block of tofu between two small plates and GENTLY pressing out as much of the water as possible. The tofu will take on a sponge-like consistency and is now ready to use in your favorite recipe! (See CHAPTER SEVEN for several of my favorites).

And that’s it! The “Trick” to tofu!