

TOFU AND TEMPEH

Tofu, also known as soybean curd, is a soft, cheese-like food made by curdling fresh hot soymilk with a coagulant. Traditionally, the curdling agent used to make tofu is nigari, a compound found in natural ocean water, or calcium sulfate, a naturally occurring mineral. Curds also can be produced by acidic foods like lemon juice or vinegar. The curds then are generally pressed into a solid block.

Tofu was first used in China around 200 B.C. Although the discovery of the process for making tofu is lost to the ages, Chinese legend has it that the first batch of tofu was created by accident. A Chinese cook added nigari to flavor a batch of puréed, cooked soybeans; the nigari produced the curd that we know today as tofu.

Buying & Storing Tofu

Tofu most commonly is sold in water-filled tubs, vacuum packs, or in aseptic brick packages. Tofu is usually found in the produce section of the grocery store, although some stores sell tofu in the dairy or deli sections. Tofu is sometimes sold in bulk in food cooperatives or Asian markets. Unless it is aseptically packaged, tofu should be kept cold. As with any perishable food, check the expiration date on the package. Once the tofu package is open, leftover tofu should be rinsed and covered with fresh water for storage. Change the water daily to keep it fresh, and use the tofu within a week. Tofu can be frozen up to 5 months. Defrosted tofu has a pleasant caramel color and a chewy, spongy texture that soaks up marinade sauces and is great for the grill.

Tips For Using Tofu

Tofu is for everyone – and it's very high in protein and other nutrients. Soft tofu that has been pureed with fruits or vegetables is a good protein food for infants. Toddlers can enjoy chunks of cooked tofu for snacks or meals.

Try some of these ideas for introducing tofu to your family.

- Add chunks of firm tofu to soups and stews.
- Create your own tofu burgers with mashed tofu, bread crumbs, chopped onion and your favorite seasonings.
- Marinate tofu in barbecue sauce, char it on the grill and serve on crusty Italian bread.
- Add a package of taco seasoning to pan-fried, crumbled tofu, or a mixture of tofu and ground beef to tofu tacos.
- Blend dried onion soup mix into soft or silken tofu for a cholesterol-free onion dip.
- Use soy sour cream for a reduced-fat baked potato topper.
- Blend tofu with melted chocolate chips and a little sweetener to make a chocolate cream pie.
- Replace the cream in creamed soups with silken tofu.
- Make eggless egg salad with tofu chunks, diced celery, vegan mayonnaise and a dab of prepared mustard.
- Substitute pureed silken tofu for part of the mayonnaise, sour cream, cream cheese or ricotta cheese in a recipe. Use it in dips and creamy salad dressings.

Tempeh (pronounced TEM pay) is a traditional Indonesian food. This chunky, tender cake of soybeans is consumed daily in Indonesia, usually with rice as part of the main meal, or sometimes by itself as a snack. In Indonesia, tempeh-making is a household art that varies somewhat from home to home. Whole soybeans are usually mixed with a grain such as rice or millet. A "starter"- usually a piece of tempeh from a previous batch - is added to begin the fermentation process. In traditional home-based tempeh-making, the mixture is wrapped in banana leaves and left to ferment for 18 to 24 hours. In Western tempeh factories, commercial starters are used to produce tempeh, and the fermentation process takes place under carefully controlled conditions. Whatever process is used, the result is a cake of soybeans with a rich flavor sometimes described as smoky or nutty. The flavor also has been compared to that of mushrooms.

Buying & Storing Tempeh

Tempeh is usually sold in natural food stores, where it is found in the frozen food or refrigerated case. Frozen tempeh keeps well for several months. Tempeh can be kept in the refrigerator for about 10 days. As with other aged or fermented products, like cheese, a little mold on the surface of tempeh is harmless.

Using Tempeh

Tempeh has a tender chewy consistency that makes it an excellent addition to a variety of foods. It is delicious on the grill. First steam cubes of tempeh and marinate them in a lemon marinade or a zesty barbecue sauce. Then grill until browned. Add chunks of tempeh to spaghetti sauce, sloppy joes or chili mix, or to favorite soups and casseroles. Steam and grate tempeh and mix with chopped onions and celery and mayonnaise for a sandwich spread. Pan fry it with mushrooms, onions and bread crumbs for a delightful mushroom stuffing.

Nutritional Value of Tempeh

Since tempeh is made from whole soybeans, it is a fiber-rich food. It is also a generous source of many nutrients such as protein, calcium, B-vitamins and iron.