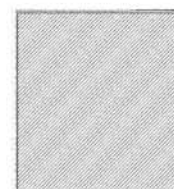


FOOD | DAY

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Healthy building blocks

CHEF SHOWS TOFU CAN BE TASTY **PAGE A2**



WHAT TO DO WITH

tofu

By Kristen J. Tsetsi

Journal Inquirer

When vegan chef Ken Bergeron of Berlin, former owner of It's Only Natural restaurant in Middletown, first gave up meat and considered cooking with tofu, he bought a package and put it in his refrigerator.

The block of soybean curd sat there for some time.

"I would look at it and think, 'What am I going to do with this stuff?'" he says.

He was so intimidated that it stayed on the shelf untouched until it started expanding in the package.

At that point, of course, it was time to throw it away, but he eventually tried tofu again and eventually became so familiar with it that he was able to include a number of tofu recipes among the 200 in his cookbook, "Professional Vegetarian Cooking." The award-winning chef also taught a class at Manchester Community College (and hopes to, again) called, "Tofu: Now that I bought it, what do I do with it?"

Many people are afraid of tofu, primarily because, like Bergeron, they have no idea what to do with it the first time they bring it home. Is it a side dish? A main meal? What does it taste like?

If you ask Bergeron, he'll say it's delicious—especially if you get it fresh from a good tofu maker. His first choice, after having sampled tofu in five countries and many places in the US, is the tofu he finds at The Bridge in Middletown.

If buying tofu elsewhere, Bergeron recommends looking in natural food stores, such as the It's Only Natural market in Middletown or a Whole Foods store, found in Glastonbury and Hartford. (These stores are also great places to find the many natu-

ral ingredients—such as soy margarine—listed in Bergeron's vegan recipes.)

Wherever you buy your tofu, once you bring it home, you still have to try to figure out what's next while undoubtedly wondering what it tastes like (and probably afraid to try it).

That Bergeron calls it "delicious" doesn't necessarily point to a particular flavor.

"I often compare it to pasta," he says, referring to its subtlety. "We wouldn't serve pasta without sauce or anything on it." Like pasta, tofu, he says, is the "vehicle for the sauce and the flavor."

Because it's so absorbent, tofu takes on surrounding flavors well, making it extremely versatile. It's often used as an ingredient in a number of recipes — a hot broth served in Japan contains tofu chunks, and it's found in many Chinese soups — and it can also be the center of the plate around which a dish is built.

Tofu skeptics clinging to a commonly-held belief that tofu is just for vegans or vegetarians may be surprised to learn that when Bergeron still ran his restaurant, customers would come in not because they were vegetarian or vegan, although some of them certainly were, but because they liked the food.

They also came because, he says, "Maybe they wanted to eat lighter a couple times a week."

Even if you have no plans to swear off meat, tofu makes a healthful, flavorful, and summer-friendly (in its lightness) addition to a standard diet.

First, Bergeron recommends selecting an extra firm tofu, which he says is best for cooking.

"What you're getting is more tofu and less water," he says.

To remove excess water from tofu, wrap it in paper towels and place it in a container with a light weight on top. Nothing that would flatten it, but just enough to press it down and push out the water. Let it sit for about 20 minutes.

Once dry, it's ready to be turned into Seasoned Baked Tofu, which Bergeron calls "recipe ready" because it can be used as an ingredient in salad, rice, and anything you might ordinarily complement with chicken or beef strips.

Note: Bergeron halved these recipes, from his cookbook, to make 4-6 servings. Recipes in the cookbook each makes 10 servings.

SAVORY TOFU SALAD

1 pound seasoned baked tofu
2 teaspoons soy sauce
1 cup celery, finely diced
¾ cup soy-based, eggless mayonnaise
¼ cup dill pickles, finely diced
¼ cup minced parsley
2 teaspoons prepared mustard, country style or Dijon (or personal favorite)
Pinch of ground black pepper
½ teaspoon lemon juice
FOR THE GARNISH:
¼ cup sliced toasted almonds
¼ cup dried cranberries
Spring mix lettuce, 4-6 cups, as needed

► Combine all the salad ingredients with the tofu and place them on top of the lettuce. Garnish with toasted almonds and cranberries.

Ah, but the ever-versatile tofu isn't just for afternoon or evening meal — it's also what's for breakfast. Scramfu, anyone?

SCRAMBLED TOFU: COLOMBIAN STYLE

1 pound tofu
1 tablespoon cornstarch
¼ teaspoon curry powder
¼ teaspoon turmeric
¼ teaspoon salt
Pinch black pepper

1 teaspoon soy sauce
2 teaspoon lemon juice
1 teaspoon maple syrup
FOR THE GARNISH:
½ cup scallions, thin bias (at an angle) cut
1 cup halved cherry tomatoes
1½ teaspoon 100% or extra virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon Smart Balance Original soy margarine

- Crumble tofu well to make small curds and mix it with the main ingredients (everything but the garnish).
- In a pan, sauté the scallions and tomatoes in oil over medium heat for 3-5 minutes, until softened. Set aside.
- Sauté the tofu mixture in soy margarine for about 5 minutes. Add half the sautéed scallions and tomatoes to the tofu mixture and cook a few minutes longer.
- Season to taste, and garnish with the remaining scallions and tomatoes.

SEASONED BAKED TOFU

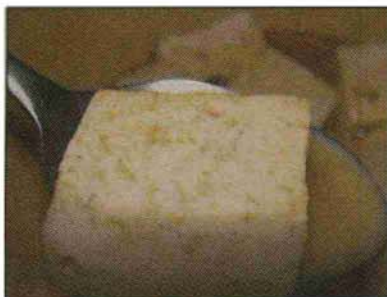
1 pound extra firm tofu
3 tablespoons soy sauce
1½ teaspoon toasted sesame oil
1 teaspoon crushed garlic
1½ teaspoon crushed ginger

- Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
- Cut the block of tofu into ¼-inch cubes. Toss with all the ingredients.
- Depending on the strength of flavor desired, you can let it sit in the marinade or, because tofu is so absorbent, it will also be ready to go into the oven right away.
- Spread the tofu pieces on a rimmed baking sheet and bake for 15 to 20 minutes.
- Note: When the tofu comes out of the oven, it can be served as is on salad, grains, or vegetables. Bergeron says, "In winter, I'll just roast a bunch of vegetables and serve that with the tofu." Or, it can be used in his Savory Tofu Salad, which he

says is especially nice in summer.

"I often compare it to pasta. We wouldn't serve pasta without sauce or anything on it."

Ken Bergeron
chef, cookbook author



Scrambled Tofu



Savory Tofu Salad



Seasoned Baked Tofu