

1 'Bland', 'soggy', 'flavourless' – a quick ask around my foodie friends and there's no doubt tofu gets a bad rap. So when I announce I'll be serving up a tofu tikka masala at our next gathering, the reaction is dubious, at best.

But, with more of us cutting down on meat, it seems I'm not the only one looking to experiment in the kitchen. With tofu finding its way onto restaurant menus across the country and packing a good amount of protein, it's fast becoming the meat-free go-to for food bloggers and gym-lovers alike.

'People are beginning to appreciate tofu, and for good reason,' says Sasha Gill, chef and author of Asian vegan cookbook *Jackfruit And Blue Ginger: Asian Favourites, Made Vegan* (Murdoch Books, £18.99). 'It absorbs a marinade like a sponge, making it incredibly versatile. It's a delicious way to bulk up your veggie meals and, with a little TLC, can exceed all our soggy assumptions.'

Made from soybean curd, tofu is rich in protein and minerals, including iron, calcium, selenium and magnesium. Particularly useful for vegetarians or vegans, it contains all nine essential amino acids.

The easiest variety to find is firm, which you can marinate or fry with spices. Silken tofu is more delicate and custardy in texture – perfect for making vegan-friendly desserts. Then there are pre-flavoured types, including fermented (great as a feta alternative), smoked and pre-marinated – ideal if you don't want the faff of prepping it. You can even freeze it for a chewier, bouncier texture.

'One of my favourite ways to eat it is in a popular Chinese dish called claypot tofu, which I remember ordering in the stiflingly hot hawker centres [cooked-food markets] of Singapore,' says Sasha. 'Rounds of silky tofu are braised until they're mottled and golden, then cooked in a thick stew with vegetables and shiitake mushrooms. It's a real umami bomb!'

Looking for a simpler recipe to cook at home? Try this standout crispy tofu. 'Start by pressing a block of firm tofu,' says Sasha. 'Wrap it in a kitchen towel

Let's hear it for tofu!

Don't be put off by its wobbly appearance – with a little cooking know-how, tofu can be moreishly crispy or gloriously silken. **Amy Bonifas** unlocks its powers

RECIPES **KATY BESKOW** PHOTOGRAPHS **MARTIN POOLE**

and place something heavy, like a wooden chopping board, on top for about 30 minutes. Chop it into cubes and soak in a marinade of soy sauce, ginger, a pinch of brown sugar, lime zest and sesame oil for half an hour. Then drain, toss it in cornflour and fry it with a splash of oil.'

For something more high-end, try pioneering plant-based restaurant Plates (plates-london.com), where the wobbly white stuff is a delicacy. 'We make our own using vegetable extracts and natural seaweed setting agents for more diverse flavours,' says head chef Kirk Haworth. 'We serve it finely chopped, dressed with sesame seeds and coriander, and mixed through seasonal vegetables.'

However you cook it, the health benefits alone make it worth adding to your recipe repertoire. 'Tofu is rich in feelgood iron and magnesium, while a 100g portion provides roughly the same amount of bone-loving calcium as a yogurt – helpful if you're switching to dairy-free,' says nutritionist Penny Crowther. Soya can also help reduce 'bad' cholesterol, according to the

British Dietetic Association, as it's naturally low in saturated fat.

It doesn't come without controversy – imported soybean is one of the most common genetically modified (GM) crops, which can mean an increased level of pesticides. Some US studies have also linked raw soya to thyroid and hormonal problems. However, Penny says most of these refer to its more processed compound forms, such as soy protein isolate, which are used as bulking and flavour-enhancing agents in foods such as protein bars and powders.

'Choose an organic tofu brand with fewer ingredients,' she recommends. 'Water, organic soya beans and calcium sulphate (added to help separate the curd from the liquid) are all that's needed.

As with anything, eat it alongside a balance of other colourful plant foods.'

Armed with this knowledge, I serve up my tikka tofu to my sceptical friends (one of whom has admitted to bringing a snack bar with them, 'just in case').

A few spoonfuls in and... all is redeemed. The soft, creamy cubes – similar in texture to velvety paneer – are a cooling contrast to my tangy, spicy sauce, and no one feels cheated by the lack of meat. In fact, even the snack-bringer wants the recipe. ►

'The soft, *creamy cubes* – similar to paneer – are a cooling contrast to my *spicy* sauce'





KNOW YOUR TOFU

Feeling overwhelmed by the choice? Choose the right one and you'll unlock tofu's most delicious secrets...

1 SILKEN

TEXTURE: Soft, creamy and unpressed.
PERFECT FOR: desserts, sauces and smoothies. It's also great for dairy-free cheesecakes and chocolate mousse.

2 MEDIUM

TEXTURE: Firm but still fairly delicate.
PERFECT FOR: braising or boiling. Try it in rich stews or miso soup.

3 FIRM / EXTRA FIRM

TEXTURE: Dense.
PERFECT FOR: stir-fries, curries and vegan 'scrambled eggs'. Extra-firm tofu is great baked in breadcrumbs.

4 TOFU PUFFS

TEXTURE: Soft and sponge-like.
PERFECT FOR: lazy cooks (they're already deep-fried). Eat them in a hotpot, or cold, dipped in chilli sauce.

GO ONLINE

The BOSH! vegan boys have the perfect recipe for tofu 'fish and chips'. Find it online at [SAINSBURYSMAGAZINE.CO.UK/TOFU](https://www.sainsburysmagazine.co.uk/tofu)

Chocolate and amaretto mousse

Silken tofu has a softer texture than firm, making it the perfect substitute for eggs in this fluffy mousse, which can be whipped up in minutes. Dark chocolate and amaretto are a grown-up match made in heaven.

SERVES 4 **V** **Vn** **DF** **HANDS-ON TIME** 10 MINS
TOTAL TIME 10 MINS, PLUS CHILLING

100g **dark chocolate** (70% cocoa solids)*
1 x 349g pack **silken tofu**, at room temperature (we used Mori-Nu)
2 tbs **maple syrup**
2 tbs **amaretto liqueur**
1 tbs **flaked almonds**
finely grated zest of ¼ **orange**

- 1 Set aside one square of the chocolate for garnish. Break the rest into pieces and melt it in a heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water, ensuring the bowl does not touch the water. Stir occasionally.
- 2 In the meantime, blitz the silken tofu and maple syrup in a high-power blender or food processor until smooth.
- 3 Carefully pour the melted chocolate into the tofu mixture, using a spatula to scrape the edges of the bowl. Add the amaretto, then blitz again until combined and silky smooth. Spoon into ramekins or dessert glasses, then chill for at least 1 hour.
- 4 Just before serving, lightly toast the flaked almonds in a dry pan for 2-3 minutes over a medium heat until golden. Scatter them over the mousse, along with the orange zest, and finely grate over the reserved dark chocolate.

*Use dairy-free chocolate, if required

■ 307cals; 15g fat (5g sat fat); 13g protein; 2g fibre; 25g carbs; 24g total sugars; 0.1g salt ➤

» GET AHEAD

Make up to 2 days ahead and chill until ready to serve.



'Silken tofu is *delicate* and *custardy* in texture - ideal for making *vegan-friendly* desserts'



Tofu katsu curry

This fragrant Japanese-style curry is the perfect way to enjoy tofu – crispy on the outside and deliciously tender in the centre.

SERVES 4 **V** **Vn** **DF** **✳** **HANDS-ON TIME** 50 MINS
TOTAL TIME 50 MINS, PLUS 1 HR PRESSING

1 x 280g block of **extra-firm tofu** (we used The Tofoo Co.)
1 tbsp **cornflour**
4 tbsp **panko breadcrumbs**
1 tsp **curry powder**
200ml **sunflower oil**, to fry

For the curry:

1 tbsp **sunflower oil**
1 **onion**, roughly diced
1 **carrot**, roughly chopped into rounds
2cm piece **root ginger**, grated
2 **garlic cloves**, sliced
1 tbsp **mild curry powder**
1 x 400g tin **coconut milk**
1 tsp **cornflour**
1 tsp **maple syrup**
2 tsp **light soy sauce**

To serve:

2 x 250g packs cooked **basmati rice**
2 **spring onions**, finely sliced
small handful of **coriander**, torn
1 **lime**, quartered into wedges

1 Remove as much moisture from the tofu as possible, using a tofu press if you have one. Alternatively, wrap it in a couple of layers of kitchen paper, place it on a baking tray with another solid baking tray on top and weigh it down with a couple of books or a heavy pan. Press for at least 1 hour. Slice the tofu block horizontally into 4 slices around 1cm thick, then set aside on kitchen paper.

2 For the curry sauce, heat 1 tablespoon of sunflower oil in a wok or high-sided frying pan over a high heat, then stir-fry the onion, carrot and ginger for 2-3 minutes until beginning to soften. Add the garlic and curry powder and cook for a further minute. Reduce the heat slightly and pour in the coconut milk and cornflour. Stir to combine and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in the maple syrup and soy sauce, then remove from the heat. Transfer to a blender or food processor, and blitz on high until completely smooth. Keep warm or reheat when ready to serve.

3 In a wide bowl, whisk the cornflour with 4 tablespoons of hot water, then allow to stand for a few minutes until gelatinous. Mix the breadcrumbs with the curry powder and a pinch of salt, then place on a plate.

4 Dip each slice of tofu fully into the cornflour mixture, then into the panko breadcrumbs, ensuring all surfaces are coated. Press the breadcrumbs firmly onto the tofu.

5 Heat 200ml sunflower oil in a frying pan until hot. Using tongs, shallow-fry the tofu for 3-4 minutes on each side until crisp and golden. Remove from the pan and keep warm between sheets of kitchen paper. Sprinkle with a little extra sea salt.

6 Heat the rice and divide between 4 serving bowls. Pour over the curry sauce and top with the tofu, sliced into strips. Scatter with the spring onions and coriander, and serve with wedges of lime.

■ 727cals; 40g fat (18g sat fat); 18g protein; 7g fibre; 71g carbs; 9g total sugars; 0.9g salt

Cajun tofu scramble

You'll be amazed at how similar to scrambled eggs this is! If you're new to cooking tofu, this is perfect, because there's no pressing or prep required. Take the pan to the table so everyone can help themselves.

SERVES 4 **V** **Vn** **DF** **HANDS-ON TIME** 30 MINS
TOTAL TIME 30 MINS

1 x 280g block of **extra firm tofu** (we used The Tofoo Co.)
1 tbsp **sunflower oil**
1 **red onion**, finely sliced
1 **red or yellow pepper**, deseeded and diced
4 tbsp **frozen sweetcorn**
1 tsp **Cajun seasoning**
1 tsp **ground turmeric**
1 x 400g tin **kidney beans**, rinsed and drained

2 **spring onions**, finely chopped
a handful of **coriander**, leaves picked
1 **small red chilli**, deseeded and finely sliced
1 **avocado**, finely sliced
flaky sea salt, preferably smoked
4 thick slices of **sourdough bread**
dairy-free spread (optional)

1 Lay the tofu on a piece of kitchen paper or a clean tea towel, and leave to drain for 10 minutes. Crumble the tofu into a bowl, and use a fork to separate the larger pieces, until it resembles the texture of scrambled eggs.

2 Heat the oil in a large frying pan, then cook the red onion, pepper and sweetcorn over a medium heat for 3-4 minutes until the onion begins to soften.

3 Stir in the Cajun seasoning and turmeric, along with 50ml cold water. Gently mix in the crumbled tofu until it is fully coated in the spice mixture.

4 Add the kidney beans and cook for 8-10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

5 Remove the pan from the heat and scatter over the spring onions, coriander and red chilli. Top with the avocado slices, then season with flaky sea salt and black pepper.

6 Toast the sourdough until golden, butter with dairy-free spread, if using, then serve with the scramble.

■ 413cals; 16g fat (3g sat fat); 20g protein; 12g fibre; 40g carbs; 7g total sugars; 0.8g salt ■



» GET AHEAD

Prep to the end of step 3 ahead of time – even the night before.

» GET AHEAD

The curry sauce can be frozen – great for a speedy midweek meal.