

# Sticky Fingers Cooking®

## Kung Pao Tofu

By Dylan Sabuco

**Prep Time** 15 / **Cook Time** 20 / **Serves** 4 - 6

## Fun-Da-Mentals Kitchen Skills

**chop:** to cut something into small, rough pieces using a blade.

**sauté:** to cook or brown food in a pan containing a small quantity of butter, oil, or other fat.

**simmer:** to cook a food gently, usually in a liquid, until softened.

**taste:** to put a bit of food or drink in your mouth to determine whether more of an ingredient is needed to improve the flavor.

**adjust:** to change seasonings or consistency to one's taste or to alter portion sizes.

**t.a.t.:** Taste, adjust, and taste again!

## Equipment

- Wok or large frying pan + lid
- Can opener
- Cutting board
- Kid-safe knife
- Wooden spoon
- Liquid measuring cup
- Measuring spoons

## Ingredients

Kung Pao Tofu

- 1 8-oz can water chestnuts

- 1 large carrot
- 1 large celery stalk
- 4 green onions
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 T vegetable oil \*\*
- 1 block extra firm tofu \*\*(for SOY ALLERGY sub 2 C mushrooms of your choice)\*\*
- 1/2 C water
- 1 tsp red pepper flakes
- 2 tsp cornstarch
- 1 T soy sauce \*\*(for GLUTEN/SOY ALLERGY sub 1 T coconut aminos)\*\*
- 1/2 tsp ground black pepper
- sugar, honey, or other sweetener to taste

## Food Allergen Substitutions

### Kung Pao Tofu

**Soy:** For 1 block extra firm tofu, substitute 2 C mushrooms of your choice. Substitute canola oil or other nut-free high-smoking point oil (can heat to a higher temperature without smoking) for vegetable oil.

**Gluten/Wheat/Soy:** For 1 T soy sauce, substitute 1 T coconut aminos.

## Instructions

### Kung Pao Tofu

#### intro

Kung Pao Chicken is a spicy Chinese stir-fry dish made with chicken, peanuts, and vegetables. It has a bold flavor from soy sauce and dried chili peppers. Kung pao is often served with rice and is popular in both Chinese and Western cuisines. The dish is named after Ding Baozhen, a Qing Dynasty governor of Sichuan Province. His title was "Gongbao" (also spelled "Kung Pao"), meaning "Palace Guardian," which inspired the name Kung Pao Chicken. This modern version replaces chicken with tofu while keeping all the other elements the same as the classic.

#### drain + rinse

Drain and rinse **1 can of water chestnuts**. Water chestnuts are not actually nuts, but aquatic tubers.

They are crunchy, low-calorie, and full of nutrients like fiber and potassium.

### chop + sauté

Roughly chop **1 large carrot, 1 large celery stalk, 4 green onions, 2 garlic cloves,** and **1 can of water chestnuts.** Heat **1 tablespoon of vegetable oil** in a wok or large frying pan over medium-high heat. Then, add all the chopped veggies. Sauté for 5 minutes, stirring often. Meanwhile, chop **1 block of extra firm tofu** into rough cubes.

### simmer + measure

Reduce the heat to low. Add the chopped tofu. Also, measure and add **1/2 cup water, 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes, 2 teaspoons cornstarch, 1 tablespoon soy sauce,** and **1/2 teaspoon black pepper.** Bring the mixture to a simmer for 10 minutes.

### stir + cover

Stir the Kung Pao Tofu every few minutes until the liquid is reduced by half. Cover with a lid to keep warm until you serve. Practice some Chinese counting while you stir: 1 yī (eee), 2 èr (arr), 3 sān (sahn), 4 sì (ssuh), 5 wǔ (woo), 6 liù (lee-oh), 7 qī (tchee), 8 bā (bah), 9 jiǔ (j-oh), 10 shí (shir).

### scrumptious science

Cornstarch will thicken sauces when heated. What happens when liquid heats? Its molecules start moving around rapidly. You can see this when water boils. Cornstarch granules bump into and disrupt each other, allowing them to absorb liquid from their surroundings. When the cornstarch absorbs the liquid, it changes the structure of the sauce, thickening it.

### taste + adjust + taste

Time to tat (or taste-adjust-taste)! First, taste the sauce, then adjust the flavors with more soy sauce, salt, or sweetener, then taste once more to make sure the flavors are to your liking. It's important to tat before you serve every meal!

### serve + devour

Scoop heaping portions into bowls. Time to devour! Enjoy! Or in Chinese, "Chī hǎo hē hǎo" (Chuh how huh how)!

## Featured Ingredient: Tofu!

Hi! I'm Tofu!

"I'm also called "bean curd" because "tofu" (TOH-foo) is made from soybeans. I'm a great substitute for meat and eggs in many recipes, while my spongy texture absorbs the flavors of a dish's marinade, sauce, or seasoning!"

## History & Etymology

Sources disagree on when the making of tofu began. Some say it was discovered about 2,000 years ago in China during the Han dynasty, and some say it was closer to 1,000 years ago. Legend says that Prince Liu An found the process for making tofu during the Han dynasty. Whether he did or the invention was just attributed to him, the Han dynasty tofu may not have resembled what we have now.

Another theory for tofu's discovery is ascribed to the addition of impure sea salt to a boiled soybean mixture that caused the concoction to curdle. Some also believe the credit goes to borrowed milk-curdling techniques from the Mongolians or East Indians.

Zen Buddhist monks introduced "Chinese tofu" to Japan in the late 8th century, where it was used as a replacement for meat and fish. Chinese immigrants brought tofu to Southeast Asia sometime between the 10th and 11th centuries.

In the United States, tofu was first mentioned by Benjamin Franklin in letters written to two different people. He had tried it in London and referred to it as Chinese "cheese" made from soybeans.

The first tofu factory in the United States was established in 1878. The oldest currently running tofu company is Ota Tofu in Portland, Oregon, founded in 1911.

The word "tofu" comes from the Japanese "tōfu," from the Chinese "dòufu," from "dòu" ("beans") and fǔ ("rot").

## How to Select & Eat

The types of tofu you can buy are silken or soft, medium (regular or medium-firm), firm, and extra firm.

Silken or soft tofu has not been pressed and has a higher moisture content than firmer tofu. It is similar to yogurt or pudding or a soft, early cheese. You can use it to make smoothies or as a replacement for eggs. Medium tofu is a popular type, referred to as just "tofu" on some labels. It has a porous texture that is good for mopping up sauces.

Firm tofu has been drained and pressed but still has a high moisture content. Its outside texture is similar to raw meat, and when you press it, it will bounce back. The inside is similar to a firm custard. Firm tofu is versatile to cook and can be pan-fried, deep-fried, or stir-fried.

Extra-firm tofu has had a larger amount of liquid pressed out, and its texture is closer to fully-cooked meat. Therefore, it is a suitable replacement for meat and can be pan-fried, deep-fried, or stir-fried. You can also serve it cold or add it to soup. Extra-firm tofu does not absorb liquid as well as firm tofu, so if you use a marinade, choose medium or firm tofu.

Tofu benefits from being frozen before cooking. Freezing tofu removes more of the liquid and gives it a stronger, firmer, and more meat-like texture. When you cook with frozen tofu, it will not fall apart as easily. Freezing also helps tofu to last longer, and it works with most forms but may be more difficult with the silken type.

To freeze tofu, drain the liquid from the package, then remove the block and gently squeeze out any remaining liquid with a paper or kitchen towel (you do not need to press it). Cut it into the size needed for your recipe. If you will be using a portion of a tofu block, separate what you are using, then put the pieces,

not touching, on a tray covered with plastic wrap. After the tofu freezes, in about five hours or overnight, you can transfer it to a freezer-safe airtight container or bag. Frozen tofu may not need to be thawed before cooking, depending on your recipe. If you want to thaw it first, let it sit in the refrigerator for a few hours or overnight, or if needed more quickly, run warm water over it.

## Nutrition

Tofu is high in protein, which makes it a great meat substitute. Firm tofu has more protein than silken or soft tofu. It also has a higher fat content.

Tofu is considered a complete protein, containing all nine essential amino acids.

Tofu has a good amount of calcium, iron, potassium, and manganese. It can help strengthen bones, lower cholesterol, and prevent coronary heart disease.

People allergic to soy should not consume tofu, which is made from soybeans.