

Tofu 101

The Chinese having been making Tofu for over 2000 years. The process for making tofu is very similar to making cheese where soy milk is coagulated with vinegar, calcium sulfate or lemon juice making curds. These curds are then put into forms and pressed to create a large block of tofu. The large block is then cut into smaller blocks and packaged in filtered water.

There are three main varieties of soybeans; immature soybeans are green and typically sold precooked as Edamame, mature soybeans are white, and dried soybeans. Soy is considered a complete vegetable protein because it has all 8 of the essential amino acids that cannot be created from other compounds in the human body. Soybeans can produce over 33 percent more protein from an acre of land than any other known crop. Tofu is also very high in protein and low in calories. Most Tofu and other soy products sold to humans are non-GMO. They feed all the GMO soybeans to animals, particularly now with the GMO bans in Europe which makes it harder for companies to feed GMO to humans.

There are three types of tofu generally available in the United States: silken tofu, firm tofu, and extra firm tofu. Each of these types of tofu are generally made the same way except the firmer the tofu the longer it is pressed.

Silken tofu is just how it sounds, silky. It is great for making sauces and creams because of its smooth and pudding-like texture. You can find silken tofu in the refrigerated section of the store or in a Tetra Pack on the shelf in an aisle. **Mori-Nu** is the most common shelf-stable brand. Some may consider the shelf-stable version a little silkier or smoother, so it is the best for making vegan Pumpkin Pie or vegan chocolate pie. The Tetra Pak version is great for taking on trips since it is shelf stable and doesn't need to be refrigerated until opened. You can use Mori-Nu to make vegan mayo, vegan Alfredo sauce and a cream sauce replacement for cream soups in recipes. It can also be used as an egg replacement in recipes.

Firm and Extra-Firm tofu work best where the tofu needs to hold together, such as in stir-fries, when making Baked Tofu or crumbled as in Tofu Scramble for breakfast. Note that if the recipe calls for cubing the tofu into small pieces, the firmer the better.

Sprouted tofu is the same as regular tofu, except it is made from sprouted soy beans. While there is no difference in how you would cook with sprouted tofu (it is still labeled as firm, extra-firm, etc) there is a difference nutritionally. Sprouted tofu has more calories, fat and protein than regular tofu.

Freezing tofu-Freezing makes tofu a little more chewier which may encourage others who do not like the softer texture of tofu. The color also changes when frozen, but will go back to its off-white shade once thawed. Open your refrigerated tofu, drain the water, put the tofu block into a zip lock bag and freeze for 24 hours or longer until needed. You can defrost in the refrigerator but even this way you may still have to use the defrost option on your microwave. Press to drain all water. Be careful because once frozen the tofu once defrosted will be more brittle than unfrozen tofu. You will note it appears more textured. Once drained of water it will be very absorbent of the sauce you want to flavor it with, much more so than pressed unfrozen tofu.