

Make Your Own Tofu

Getting Started

We're assuming that you already have basic tools lying around (such as cutting boards, bowls, a large 15- to 20-quart pot, and measuring cups), so here are the special ingredients and equipment that you'll need. We found soybeans at our local Whole Foods; try any health food store with a good bulk section.



- 1 pound dried soybeans (about 3 cups)
- 1 (1/2 gallon) empty paper milk or juice carton
- Resealable plastic bags
- Masking or electrical tape
- Cheesecloth (at least 1 square yard)
- 1 pound of small weights (dried beans or pie weights work well)
- Thermometer
- 2 teaspoons powdered nigari
- Cooling rack

Make the Soy Milk



1. Pour the dried beans onto a rimmed baking sheet and pick through them, removing and discarding any broken beans or stones. Place the beans in a large nonreactive bowl and cover them with at least 2 inches of cold water. Allow to soak for 12 to 24 hours.



2. Meanwhile, prepare the mold. Take the milk carton and cut off one of the long sides (try to keep the piece you cut off in a rectangle shape so it can be used later).



3. Place the cut piece in a resealable plastic bag and set it aside. Using a hole punch, a skewer, or scissors, poke 1/2-inch holes all over the milk carton so that the tofu can drain easily.

Make the Soy Milk cont.



4. Reinforce the sides of the mold by running tape around the perimeter of the carton. Line the mold with doubled-over cheesecloth and trim the cheesecloth so there are just a few inches overhanging on each side. Fill a resealable plastic bag with about 1 pound of pie weights or dried beans. Set everything aside until the beans are done soaking.



5. Once the beans have soaked, drain them and discard the water. Place half of the beans (about 3 cups) in a food processor and pour in enough water to just cover the mixture (about 1 to 1 1/2 cups).



6. Process the mixture until it is pulverized and smooth, about 30 seconds. Then repeat with the remaining beans.



7. Place all the pulverized beans in a large (15- to 20-quart) stockpot and add 10 cups water. Bring the mixture to a simmer over medium heat. Set 2 cups of water nearby to pour over the mixture later on.



8. Stir the mixture occasionally and let it simmer. The mixture is ready when foam rises to the top of the pot, about 25 to 30 minutes.



9. Remove from heat, immediately pour in the reserved 2 cups water, and stir until the foam subsides—it will not completely disappear.



10. Place a large fine mesh strainer in a bowl and strain the mixture. Push on the pulverized bean solids so that most of the liquid drains out. Discard the solids (known as okara) or use in a recipe that calls for them. The liquid is soy milk. It will last up to three days refrigerated.

Make the Soy Milk into Tofu



1. To make tofu, let the soy milk cool to 165 degrees Fahrenheit, about 8 to 10 minutes. Meanwhile, dissolve the nigari in 1/2 cup water and set aside. Once the mixture has cooled, gently stir in the nigari—almost immediately the mixture should start to separate into water and tofu curds.



2. Cover the bowl and let it sit undisturbed until the yellowish water and the curds are well separated, about 15 minutes. Meanwhile, dampen the cheesecloth and put the milk carton on a rack set in the sink so the liquid can drain off. The cut side of the carton should be facing upward.



3. Once the liquid and curds have separated, use a fine mesh strainer to gently press down on the curds, and ladle off any liquid that collects in the strainer. (You won't get all the liquid, but try to remove as much as possible.)



4. Using either a skimmer or a slotted spoon, scoop out the curds and transfer them to the mold.



5. Fold the cheesecloth over the tofu and place the reserved cardboard piece in the plastic bag inside the mold. Set the bag of weights on top and press down firmly until the liquid draining from the bottom has slowed to a few drops, about 2 minutes.



6. Let the tofu set up to your desired firmness. For soft tofu, it should take 5 minutes. For firm, about 15 to 20 minutes. Once the tofu has firmed up as desired, pull it out of the mold using the cheesecloth, then remove and discard the cheesecloth.

Tip: Better Not Bitter

Depending on the amount and type of coagulant you use, your tofu may have a slightly bitter taste. It's still good. To get rid of the bitterness, place the tofu in a bowl and cover it with water. Gently let water run over the bowl of tofu for about 10 minutes. The tofu is ready to eat once the bitter flavor is gone.

Tip: Storage

Homemade tofu is more perishable than most store-bought tofu, because it's missing all the preservatives and additives. Use your homemade tofu within four days.

To store, place the tofu in a resealable container and cover with water. Place the container in the refrigerator. Change the water every day, and use the tofu as you would any other soft or firm tofu.