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Cooks' Wares
....For a Finer Kitchen

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Braised Tofu and Peas in Curried Coconut Milk

Makes: 4 servings

Time: 40 minutes

This recipe features a classic Indian technique for making a deep-flavored “gravy.” Preparing the tofu in advance by frying, pressing, or freezing makes for a subtle improvement, but you can skip it because the tofu essentially “boils” in this broth anyway and becomes plump and firm.

I like peas in this recipe, because they’re easy, (for the most part, I rely on frozen peas), and I like the way their bright green color stands out. But—as you’ll see from the variations—you can use almost any vegetable.

Serve this over rice or with The Simplest or Flaky Indian-Style Flatbread.

3 large onions, quartered

One 28- or 35-ounce can tomatoes with their liquid

2 tablespoons neutral oil, like grapeseed or corn

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons garam masala or curry powder, or to taste

1-1/2 to 2 pounds firm to extra-firm tofu, prepared as noted above, or simply blotted dry, cut into 3/4-inch cubes

1-1/2 cups peas (frozen are fine; defrost in cold water and drain)

1-1/2 cups coconut milk, either made from scratch or canned (about 1 can plus a little water)

Chopped fresh cilantro leaves for garnish

(1) Combine the onions and tomatoes in a food processor and purée; depending on the size of your machine, you may have to do this in 2 batches. Put the oil in a deep skillet or broad saucepan over medium heat. When hot, add the onion-tomato mixture, along with some salt and pepper and the spice mixture, and cook, stirring occasionally, until it thins and becomes sauce-like, about 10 minutes.

(2) Add the tofu and peas, and cook for about 5 minutes, until the tofu swells slightly and the peas are tender; stir in the coconut milk and bring just about to a boil, stirring occasionally. Taste and adjust the seasoning, garnish with the cilantro, and serve as described above.

Faster Tofu and Peas in Coconut Milk. You can live without both the tomatoes and the onions if you’re in a hurry. Put the oil (or use butter) in a skillet and toast the spice mixture in it, stirring, for about 30 seconds. Add the tofu and continue to cook, stirring, for about a minute. Stir in the coconut milk and peas and cook, stirring, until the peas are cooked through. Garnish and serve.

Braised Tofu and Peas in Curried Coconut Milk, (continued)

Really Spicy Tofu and Peas in Coconut Milk. Add 5 or more cloves of peeled garlic and or more dried chiles, (1 will give you some heat, 2 will make it fairly hot, and 3 or more will really elevate the heat quotient), to the food processor with the onions and tomatoes. When you add the tofu to the mix, throw in another 10 or 20 dried chiles, which are primarily for appearance (you do not want to eat these). Add a tablespoon or more lime juice just before serving.

Creamy Tofu, Peas, and Rice in Coconut Milk. Think of an Indian risotto: Be sure to use a pan that can be covered. In Step 1, before you add the onion-tomato mixture, to the hot oil, stir in 1 cup of any short-grain white rice. Cook and stir until toasted and fragrant, then add the onion-tomato mixture, the tofu, and the coconut milk. Bring to a boil, cover the pot, and reduce the heat to low. Let cook for 15 minutes, instead of 10. In Step 2, put the peas into the pan on top of the rice mixture, return the lid, and remove from the heat. After 5 minutes, stir the peas into the rice along with the cilantro. Taste, adjust the seasoning, and serve.

4 More Ideas for Braised Tofu and Vegetables in Curried Coconut Milk

Using the main recipe or any of the variations, you can easily turn this into a one-pot stew that will feed a small crowd:

- (1) Add to the pan, along with the onion-tomato mixture, 2 cups diced (about 1/2-inch pieces) potatoes, carrots, parsnips, or turnips, alone or in combination. These will cook to tenderness in about 15 minutes.
- (2) Along with the tofu, add about 2 cups bite-sized broccoli or cauliflower florets that have been par-cooked by boiling for a minute or two.
- (3) Use fresh or frozen snow or snap peas instead of shell peas.
- (4) Along with the coconut milk, add about 3 cups shredded spinach, Napa cabbage, bok choy, or other greens (some, like kale, will take a little longer to cook).