

Tofu is beloved by many around the world for its versatility and texture. The soy dish can be made at home using soybeans, a few special items, and a little time.

What You'll Need

Tofu is made up of three ingredients: soybeans, water, and a coagulant—usually nigari (magnesium chloride) or gypsum (calcium sulfate). Soy milk, prepared with soybeans and water, is the precursor to tofu the way milk is the precursor to cheese. A coagulant is added to soy milk to create curds and whey, similar to the way cheese is made.

The only ingredient that will really affect the flavor is the coagulant. Nigari, which has a slightly bitter taste that many people happen to like, is often used to make this recipe. If this is not to your liking, gypsum results in a less bitter taste and creates the same firm, smooth tofu as nigari (and it adds a lot of calcium to your block, too).

Gather these ingredients:

- 3 cups dried soybeans
- 1 tablespoon coagulant (gypsum or nigari)
- 1/2 cup water

And this special equipments

- Blender
- Large pot with lid
- Cheesecloth
- Fine-mesh strainer
- Tofu mold (either an actual mold or a homemade rig), lined with several layers of cheesecloth
- About 2 1/2 pounds of weights

Step 1: Make the Soy Milk

Before making tofu, you need to make soy milk. Since this part of the recipe calls for soaking overnight, start the day before making tofu.

01 Place 3 cups of dried soybeans in a medium mixing bowl. Cover with water by about 2 inches. Let soak overnight.

02 Drain the beans and place in a blender with 8 cups of water. Blend until very creamy and frothy.

03 Pour the liquid into a large pot and place over medium heat. Cook, stirring often and skimming and discarding any froth or foam that forms, until steam begins to rise from the surface but the liquid does not boil.

04 Once the soy milk starts to get very foamy and rise up the sides of the pot, move it off of the heat immediately. Set a fine-mesh strainer over a mixing bowl. Line the strainer with cheesecloth.

05 Pour the cooked soymilk into the cheesecloth-lined strainer. Allow to strain and cool for an hour or two or until cool enough to handle.

06 Gather up the sides of the cheesecloth in your hands, forming a sack. Press out the remaining soy milk from the solids. You should have about 8 cups of soy milk. Transfer the soy milk back into the pot and discard or save the solids, called okara, to use in cooking.

07 Cook the soy milk a second time over medium heat. Stir often to prevent scorching. When steam forms on the surface of the soy milk, turn down the heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes.

Take care not to burn your milk, constantly scraping the bottom of the pot with a wooden spoon—if your soymilk burns on the bottom, your tofu will have an unpleasant flavor.

Step 2: Add the Coagulant

Stir the soy milk several times and remove any skin that has formed. Turn off the heat. Combine the coagulant with 1/2 cup water, mixing to dissolve. Stir the soy milk vigorously for 10 seconds, then add 1/4 of the coagulant mixture, stirring several times and then gently lifting the spoon out of the pot.

Sprinkle another 1/4 of the coagulant over the top of the soy milk, then cover the pot and allow it to sit for 3 minutes. Stir just the surface of the soy milk for a few seconds, then sprinkle the next 1/4 of the coagulant over the surface of the soy milk. Cover the pot again for 3 to 5 minutes. Gently stir the soy milk, then add the final 1/4 of coagulant. Cover and let sit for another 3 minutes.

By now, your soy milk should no longer look like soy milk; you should have a pot of pale yellow whey and whitish curds.

Step 3: Drain and Form the Tofu

With your cheesecloth-lined tofu mold or homemade rig and a mixing bowl nearby, begin separating the whey from the curds. Press the small fine-mesh strainer into the mixture, pressing down the solid curds and allowing the whey to fill the cup. Use a ladle or measuring cup to scoop up the whey and transfer it to the mixing bowl. Continue to do this until the curds feel firm against the back of the strainer and there is no longer enough whey for you to scoop out of the pot.

Transfer the curds into the prepared mold and cover with a layer or two of cheesecloth. Put the top of your mold on top and place your weights on top of this to press it down. Allow your tofu to sit for 15 to 25 minutes for a firm to extra-firm tofu.

What to Do With Tofu

Chill your tofu in the fridge until firm enough to cut, then cut it into cubes and bake it, fry it, grill it, or steam it. If you want to wait a few days, place it in fresh, cold water for up to three days. Or you can serve it right away—it will be a little crumbly this way but still full of fresh flavor.