

Sweet Chili Lime Tofu

I've been thinking recently about the five flavors that many Thai dishes revolve around: hot, sweet, salty, sour, and bitter. I wasn't necessarily looking to create a Thai dish, but a dish that balances those five flavors without being overly complicated. I'm really pleased with the result: tofu so easy to prepare you won't mind whipping it up after work. And this recipe has no added fat! It certainly has a good deal of sugar and salt, but hey, old habits die hard.

If you've read my blog for any length of time, you'll probably realize that this recipe falls within the basic equation for my favorite meals: flavorful tofu + dark leafy green + grain/rice/pasta base. I love this combination because it's easy and super customizable, depending on what you have on hand. I use collard greens and quinoa in this recipe, but feel free to use spinach, kale, mustard greens, chard, arugula, Chinese broccoli, cabbage, or whatever for the greens, and wheat pasta, rice, millet, rice noodles, barley, orzo, and so on instead of the quinoa. Just keep in mind that if you use brown rice, you'll need to adjust the amount of water to 1 cup.



Sweet Chili Lime Tofu

Makes 2 to 3 servings

step 1 Combine the quinoa, lime zest, cardamom, cinnamon, salt, and water in a pot with a tight-fitting lid. Bring to a boil, then cover and reduce heat to low. Cook for 20 minutes, then turn off heat. Do not open the lid. Let it steam for 10 minutes before serving.

step 2 Prepare the sweet chili lime sauce by whisking together the sugar, tamari, lime juice, lime zest, red chili flakes, garlic, salt, and mint until the sugar and salt is dissolved. Set aside.



step 3 Drain the tofu and cut it into small triangles. I slice the block into 8 rectangles, then each rectangle in half to make 2 squares per rectangle. I cut each square diagonally to make 4 triangles per square. Tofu geometry is my favorite kind of math! You can cut the tofu however you please, but a thinner, smaller shape will work best for this method.

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup quinoa, rubbed/rinsed in cool water and drained

Zest from 1 lime, separated into two equal parts

2 bruised cardamom pods (optional)

1 tiny stick of cinnamon (a broken piece of a larger stick) (optional)

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

$1\frac{1}{3}$ cups water

Sweet Chili Lime Sauce (see recipe below)

1 14-ounce block of extra-firm tofu

1 bunch collard greens, washed with middle veins removed

2 to 3 tablespoons water

1 teaspoon lime juice

1 pinch salt

Lime slices, for garnish (optional)

Mint leaves, for garnish (optional)

Sweet Chili Lime Sauce

3 tablespoons sugar

3 tablespoons reduced-sodium tamari or soy sauce

$1\frac{3}{4}$ tablespoons fresh lime juice

$\frac{1}{2}$ zest of the lime

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon red chili flakes (or 1 to 2 fresh hot chilies, minced)

1 clove garlic, pressed (optional)

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt

4 mint leaves, chiffonade (stack the leaves, roll them up, and slice thinly)

step 4 Heat a well-seasoned cast-iron or nonstick skillet over medium heat. A 10-inch skillet will fit all the tofu, so if you're using a smaller skillet, you'll need to do this in batches. In order to properly "dry fry" the tofu, you'll need a pan the tofu won't stick to even without any oil.

step 5 Spread the tofu out in one layer in the pan. Using a spatula, press the tofu. The liquid will squeeze out and boil away, and the tofu will begin to turn golden. The more water that evaporates, the sturdier the tofu will be, so be gentle at first to prevent the tofu from breaking up. After several minutes, flip the tofu over and press the other side. After about 10 minutes of dry frying, you can turn off the heat and set the tofu aside for finishing later or proceed by adding the sauce. (You might want to set the tofu aside before finishing in order to prepare the collards, below.)

step 6 To finish the tofu, bring the pan back up to temperature if it's not already very hot. You want to heat the pan and the tofu over high heat, making sure the tofu is hot all the way through. Add the chili lime sauce and stir to coat the tofu. Turn off the heat. The sauce will bubble up, reduce, and form a glaze. If it isn't bubbling up and forming a glaze, turn the heat back on high and cook until the glaze is, well, "glazey."



step 7 Stack the collard leaves on top of each other, 3 to 4 at a time, and roll up.

step 8 Slice the roll in 1-inch segments.

step 9 Run your knife through the chopped collards to make smaller pieces, then add them to a wok with the water, lime juice, and salt.

step 10 Cover with any lid that will contain the collards and cook them over high heat for 3 to 4 minutes until the collards are steamed and tender.

step 11 For plating, arrange the collards on top of a bed of quinoa. Place the tofu over the top, drizzling any leftover sauce over the dish. Garnish with lime slices and mint leaves. Serve.

