

Spicy Lemongrass Tofu a la Mai Pham

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This is a dish I first had at Slanted Door, one of the finest restaurants in San Francisco. I saw Mai Pham on TV the other day plugging her excellent book, and she demonstrated her version. I've adjusted it a bit to accommodate my tastes and make it a bit more similar to the Slanted Door version. It's a great tofu dish.

12-14 ounce package firm or extra-firm tofu

4 tablespoons raw peanuts

2 lemongrass stalks

1 tablespoon dark soy sauce

1 tablespoon medium soy sauce

2 teaspoons chopped Thai bird chiles

1/2 teaspoon dried chile flakes

1 teaspoon ground turmeric

2 teaspoons sugar

1/2 teaspoon salt

4 tablespoons peanut or canola oil

1/2 yellow onion

2 shallots

4-5 cloves garlic

2/3 cup torn Thai basil leaves

Remove peels from peanuts, then roast at 350 degrees until browned and aromatic. Chop coarsely. Drain the tofu, cut into 3/4 inch cubes, place on a board, and drain well.

While the tofu drains, prepare a marinade: remove and discard the tough outer leaves and bottom from the lemongrass, then mince. Combine with the soy sauces, chiles, salt, sugar, and turmeric. Pat the tofu dry with a tea towel, then add to the marinade in a big bowl. Toss, being careful not to break up the tofu cubes. Let marinate for several hours.

Slice the onion into thin rings. Mince the shallots and garlic. Heat 2 tbs of oil on high heat, then sautee the onions, shallots, and garlic until soft and aromatic. Remove from heat and put aside.

Wipe the pan clean and heat the remaining oil over high heat. Add the tofu and a minimum amount of the marinade in a single layer. Saute until one side browns slightly, then turn and brown one other side. Add the rest of the marinade, cook for another minute, then add the onion/garlic mixture. Saute with

tossing for another 2 minutes or so, then remove from heat and stir in the Thai basil and half the peanuts. Place in serving bowls; garnish with remaining peanuts and a few basil leaves.

Notes: Do not substitute Italian basil for Thai basil- the flavor is very different. Mai Pham suggests pepper leaves or spearmint- I'd add some fennel or anise to the mint, if that's what you use.

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