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morsels BY ROBBIE WILLIS

Garden of Veggie Delights

Longevity Buns and other treats at Lotus Garden.

Slowly, slowly, some really great Chinese restaurants are revealing themselves to me here in Eugene: I've found the perfect potstickers at Twin Dragons on River Road, a fine lunch buffet at Golden China Buffet on Franklin. And now there is Lotus Garden, located downtown. The restaurant is modest in size and easy to miss if you aren't looking for it — just the way all great secret spots are. The dining space consists of both tables and booths, and the restaurant is decorated with Chinese artwork, paintings of goddesses, and even an altar with fresh fruit offerings.

All the vegetarians out there will be raising the roof to hear that Lotus Garden serves vegetarian fare only. Appetizers include Golden Delights (fried veggie "shrimp," \$7.95) and my favorite for dish names, Longevity Buns (buns filled with red beans, \$3.95). Lotus Garden also offers a broad selection of soups, including Seaweed Tofu (\$5.50), Spinach Tofu (\$5.50) and Sizzling Rice (\$7.50).

I have stuck mainly to entrées, the lunch specials in particular. For those carnivores who lament that veggie fare is never interesting, or that there isn't much to choose from, note: Lotus Garden offers almost 40 different entrées, all vegetarian.

On my first visit I order Curry Tofu (fried tofu, broccoli, green peppers, water chestnuts, mushrooms and carrots, \$5.95 lunch price). The sauce is fantastic, classic curry flavor and almost a glossy consistency, though I would have liked it a little spicier. The tofu and mushrooms mesh nicely with the crispness of the water chest-

nuts and other veggies. A generous portion of the curry comes with a choice of steamed or fried rice. The lunch special comes with hot tea, which actually goes surprisingly well with the curry.

My most recent visit, I had the Lotus Delight (battered and deep-fried Hunan veggie "beef," with carrots and broccoli in a sweet spicy sauce, served with choice of steamed or fried rice, \$5.95 lunch price). I now say, forget beef broccoli, forget Kung Pao chicken (former favorites of mine) — my new favorite is the Lotus Delight. The "beef" medallions — a veggie, protein substitute — are deep-fried to a great toasty flavor, served with crisp veggies, all covered in the sweet spicy sauce that is something like hoisin in flavor. Lunching with friends, I refrained from too many facial expressions and abstract sounds of utter

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contentment. Try this dish — you will love it. And you may see me there, making my way through the other 38 selections...

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