

# A light entrée for the new year

Properly prepared tofu is a great sponge for flavor

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My mom started traveling abroad when I was in high school. And after each of her trips, we cooked a meal from the country she'd just visited.

It was after her trip to Italy that I became a huge fan of veal. Veal, of course, is notoriously bland, so what's the appeal? I love it because it functions mostly as a firm landing strip for the delicious sauce of your choice, and

I'm a nut for sauces. Recently, I figured out that tofu plays the same role for vegetarians as veal does for carnivores.

Made from soybeans, water and a coagulant, tofu is notably healthy — low in calories, devoid of saturated fat, and a great source of protein, calcium and iron. But there's the little matter of tofu's flabby texture and its flavor (or lack thereof), which is why I've always shied away from the stuff.

It turns out, though, that properly prepared tofu is a great sponge for flavor, a natural fact exploited to good



The secret to great tofu is all in the pressing.

effect in this light entrée for the new year.

The first step is to lose the excess water in tofu, which will — Duh! — water down your dish. So you force out the excess water by putting a weighted plate on top of the tofu and let it press and drain for about 30 minutes. The tofu becomes firmer and less watery the longer you press it. This also ensures that when you cook it, the tofu will have a springy texture and a crispy exterior.

The crispy slices of tofu are a wonderful foil for this recipe's intense chili-orange sauce. The sauce is complemented with broccoli and red pepper. Serve it on brown rice and you're looking at a one-dish meal, light but filling. My husband, a die-hard carnivore, had no idea that this was a healthy vegetarian dish. He just scarfed it down and said thank you.

**Editor's Note:** Sara Moulton was executive chef at *Gourmet* magazine for nearly 25 years and spent a decade hosting several Food Network shows. She currently stars in public television's "Sara's Week-night Meals" and has written three cookbooks, including "Sara Moulton's Everyday Family Dinners."



Sauteed tofu with broccoli and red peppers in chili-orange sauce makes a great healthy entrée.



This dish also features ginger, garlic, broccoli and red pepper.

## Sauteed Tofu with Broccoli and Red Peppers in Chili-Orange Sauce

Start to finish: 1 hour 15 minutes

Servings: 4

14-ounce package extra-firm water-packed tofu  
1/4 cup fresh orange juice  
1/4 cup water  
2 tablespoons hoisin  
2 tablespoons soy sauce  
2 tablespoons chili-garlic sauce  
1 tablespoon cornstarch  
1/2 teaspoon sesame oil  
4 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided  
1 red bell pepper, cored and cut into thin strips  
6 cups medium broccoli florets, blanched until crisp-tender, then drained  
2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger  
2 teaspoons minced garlic  
Brown rice, cooked, to serve  
Toasted cashews, to garnish

### Directions:

1. Cut the block of tofu in half horizontally to create 2 thick slabs. Wrap each slab in a clean kitchen towel and place on a plate. Place a second plate on top of the tofu, then weigh it down with several heavy cans. Press in this manner for 30 minutes to drain water from the tofu and firm it up. Unwrap the tofu and cut each slab into 1/2-inch pieces. Set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk together the orange

juice, water, hoisin, soy sauce, chili-garlic sauce, cornstarch and sesame oil. Set aside.



You sautee the tofu first for this dish, then add it back in later.

3. In a large nonstick or stick-resistant skillet over medium-high, heat 1 1/2 tablespoons of the vegetable oil. Add half of the tofu pieces, sprinkle with salt, then cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown on all sides, 8 to 10 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the tofu to a medium bowl. Repeat with another 1 1/2 tablespoons of oil and the remaining tofu.

4. Return the skillet to the heat and add the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil. Add the red pepper and cook, stirring, until it is almost tender, about 3 minutes. Add the broccoli and cook for 2 minutes. Add the ginger and garlic and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Whisk the sauce in the bowl to make certain the cornstarch is dissolved, then add to the skillet, whisking. Bring to a boil to thicken, then add the tofu and cook just until heated through.

5. Arrange a mound of rice on each of 4 serving plates, then top with the tofu mixture and cashews.

*Nutrition information per serving: 490 calories; 230 calories from fat (47 percent of total calories); 26 g fat (3 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 49 g carbohydrate; 8 g fiber; 8 g sugar; 18 g protein; 580 mg sodium.*