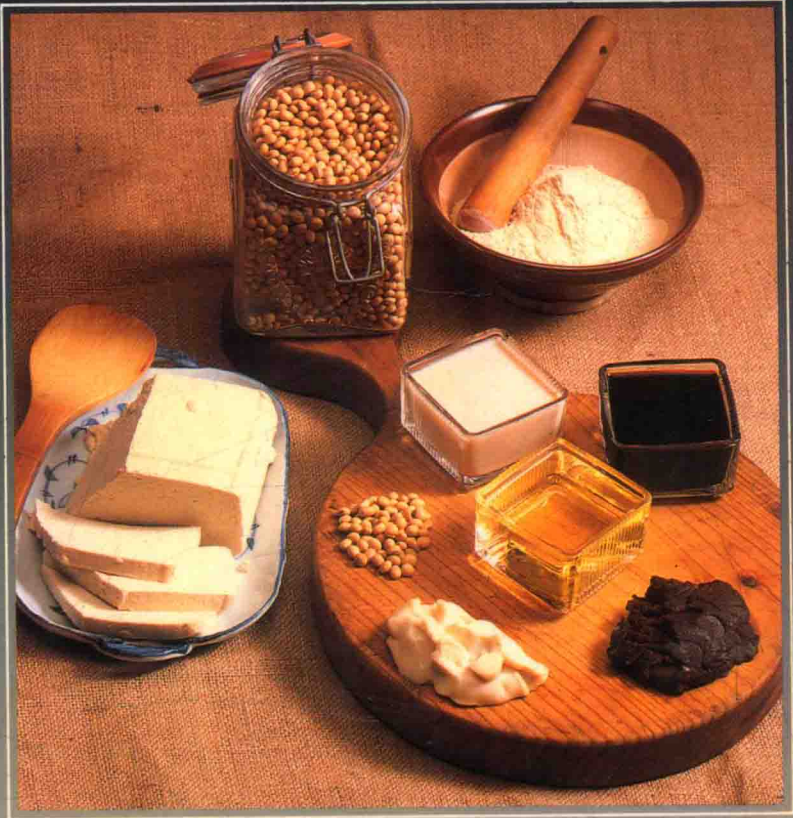


John Downes

# SOY SOURCE

*A practical guide to cooking with soy foods*



Nature  
& Health  
NATURE & HEALTH  
BOOKS

# SOY SOURCE

John Downes



First published in Australasia in 1987 by  
Nature & Health Books  
This edition co-published in Great Britain by  
Prism Press, 2 South Street, Bridport,  
Dorset DT6 3NQ, England  
and distributed in the United States of America by  
the Avery Publishing Group Inc.,  
350 Thorens Avenue, Garden City Park, New York, 11040

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ISBN 1 85327 00 1 6

616.5

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Series editor: Nevill Drury  
Design: Craig Peterson

Typeset by Setila Type Studio, Sydney  
Printed in Australia by The Book Printer

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This book is dedicated to Maar, Jesse, Sam and Nancy, with love.



*I would like to express my gratitude to Nevill at Nature and Health, David for arranging it all, Christobel (alias Garimo) for enduring support, Sandra for processing the words so well, Maar as the source of it, and family, friends and fellow workers for tolerating me! And thank you to those crazy gods for the soybean.*



# INTRODUCTION

The many foods which are naturally produced from the soybean are a wonderland for anybody interested in cooking. Even more so because soyfoods meld with our established Western cuisine, considerably expanding our options. It is no secret that the large amounts of animal foods, fat and white sugar, which in one way or another form the basis of modern Western cooking, are, among other factors, instrumental in our rising tide of degenerative disease. Soyfoods provide a medium through which to reduce or even eliminate this heavy reliance on potentially unhealthy ingredients. Soyfoods are generally high in easily assimilable protein, low in fat, with no cholesterol, and are extracted from an ecologically sound vegetable source.

Such dishes as tempeh pizza, tofu mousseline and soymilk custard are simple ways in which a conventional Western dish can be transformed. Soyfoods simply open a whole avenue of creative endeavour in cooking and, using the traditional Asian methods of preparing them, lend an exotic and enlivening edge to your daily eating. You can be sure the dishes you prepare are nutritionally sound, with delicious flavour and flair.

In the 1950s classrooms, where children were pondering the future, space exploration loomed large and so did future foods. The image I had was of dried, brown, biscuity chunks which weren't much to eat but were magically sustaining. Yes, they were made from soybeans. The reality of soyfoods, as a gift from the East, couldn't be more different.

From its origins in the mists of time, the soybean emerged as a food crop in China over 4000 years ago. Its cultivation rapidly spread to Japan and South-East Asia, and it has been a staple of diet in these areas ever since. It is the perfect dietary complement to a people whose basic staple is rice and other cereal grains.

Even well-cooked whole soybeans contain an anti-nutritive substance called the *trypsin inhibitor*. This effectively stops us from secreting the necessary factors to digest the protein. It is fascinating that in those countries where soybeans are traditional fare, the only time the locals eat them whole is before harvest, as delicious green beans. Otherwise they are naturally processed in a variety of ways to maximise their protein availability and to render them digestible. We call these products *soyfoods*.

Because soybeans are of Asian origin, soyfoods have varying names, depending on the country in which they are used. Each country also has its own varieties and method of making soy products, so we have items as varied as rich, dark *miso paste*, and beans covered in a soft, white Camembert-like mould – *tempeh*.

The soyfoods which I have chosen to use in this book are :

<i>Tofu or Beancurd</i>	A soft white curd which when pressed resembles fresh cheese.
<i>Miso</i>	A paste of fermented soybeans, cereal grain and sea salt.
<i>Soy sauce</i>	(1) Shoyu: A dark sauce made by fermenting soybeans and wheat in water. (2) Tamari: Similar to shoyu, but contains no wheat.
<i>Soy milk</i>	A nutty milk extracted from soybeans with water. This is curdled to make tofu.
<i>Tempeh</i>	Fermented soybeans in a block, bound together by a white mould or mycelium – much like soft ripened cheese (e.g. Camembert).
<i>Yuba</i>	Soybean skin (or sheets) – skimmed from soymilk like scalded cream.

These foods all have non-English names, of course, and some just do not translate! The rich aroma of good miso, its invigorating quality, variety of colours and tastes, its honoured place in Japanese culture, are not at all translated by the term 'fermented soybean paste' or 'soybean purée'. In the same way, we prefer to call curdled, fermented, aged cow's milk 'cheese'.

We are just beginning to discover what Asian cultures have understood for aeons. Many authorities today are urging us all to eat less dairy products and red meat, and soyfoods have many answers . . . low fat, no cholesterol, fibre, adequate protein (which is increased considerably if eaten with whole cereal grains, the most recommended food group), and last but not least, interesting and enjoyable food. To top this off, we have a wealth of cooking tradition with soyfoods from which to glean inspiration.

## Tofu

When soaked soybeans are ground with water, cooked and strained, a 'milk' known as soymilk is formed. If this milk is curdled and the resultant whey separated from the curds, we have in its most basic form, soybean curds or, in

Japanese, tofu. These curds are pressed under weights between cloths in settling boxes and the resultant product can then be cut into gleaming, creamy-white cakes which may be familiar to you from Chinese food stores, or more recently, from natural food shops.

The Chinese call it *dofu* or *dow-fu*; the Indonesians *tahu*, the Burmese *tohu* or *pepya*, and generally in Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, it follows the Chinese pronunciation. I will call it tofu throughout this book as it is becoming widely known by this name, especially as a natural food. Those introduced to it by the Chinese will know it as bean curd.

Tofu originated in China over 2000 years ago and it is a familiar ingredient in Chinese cooking today, indeed forming the protein mainstay of the Chinese diet. It rapidly spread to South-East Asia and Japan, where it also figures significantly in the cooking of these nations. Tofu has become localised in these countries and each has numerous methods of preparing it, much to the delight of anyone interested in cooking or eating.

From a culinary standpoint, tofu is very exciting. Not only does it open up an avenue of exploration into the exotic cooking of South and East Asia, the cooking you will enjoy will not be laden with fats and sugar. In short, forget about being 'health conscious' – you *know* you will be eating high-quality, life-sustaining food. Tofu is relatively bland tasting, making it a good counterpoise to delicious sauces. Its texture is soft and creamy, a delight to contrast with crisp and hard textures, or to use to full advantage in dips or generally as a replacement for many dairy items.

There are a number of varieties of tofu. Those generally available are:

1. hard,
2. medium soft, and
3. soft.

*Hard tofu* is made by pressing the curds more than for regular tofu. This gives a compact texture which will not disintegrate when being stir-fried, for example. Hard tofu is generally available in Chinese stores, and is quite distinguishable, being thinner (from greater compression) and obviously more solid than their regular tofu.

*Medium-soft tofu* is a catchall which describes the Chinese product and some of the newer natural tofu. The Chinese one is generally softer than the natural food store product – sometimes startling so. Chinese tofu can be quite jelly-like, although still firm. The burgeoning soyfoods market in the USA demanded tofu with a texture which is suitable for incorporation into Western-style cooking, as well as for Asian styles. The new 'natural tofu' makers in Australia have generally taken their lead from the American adventure, hence this 'new style' tofu.

*Soft tofu* is called *kinugoshi* or 'silken' in Japan, and *tahu fah* throughout South-East Asia. This is not pressed in the production, the curds being allowed to mingle and set in the whey. Whey is then carefully scooped off. This tofu has a delicate texture which really is silken and glistening. In Japan, the texture is prized as the basis of beautiful arrangements. I have used it as a garnish, particularly atop dishes which have dark and bright colours – on a whole baked fish glazed with black bean sauce it was very effective.

In South-East Asia, silken tofu can be bought still warm from many a street vendor, who serves it with all manner of side foods such as ginger tea, tapioca, agar, puffed barley, deep-fried gluten puffs, lotus seeds and natural black or palm sugar. One tahu-fah pedlar we frequented in Penang scooped the delicate curds out of his scrubbed wooden vat with a beautiful sea shell. These scoops were then laid on top of each other, black sugar syrup added, and it was slurped down with quiet satisfaction. We found tahu-fah to be a great boon when travelling with children, as it was widely available, fresh and nutritious. It was also very cooling in the tropical heat and, being such a light food, harmonised perfectly with the surroundings.

In Australia, tahu-fah is available in a few Chinese restaurants and from some Chinese bean-curd makers, if you visit the plant. Occasionally I have seen it in a plastic tub in the refrigerator of a Chinese food store. It can also be purchased in a long-life tetrapak under the brand name Morinaga Silken Tofu. This is a good product, but I use it only occasionally because I don't like the curdling agent used, which is GDL (Glucono-Delta-Lactone). Silken tofu can be made at home relatively easily (see p.37).

As I have mentioned, tofu is made by curdling soymilk. The agents used to curdle soymilk can vary and hence the quality of your tofu varies. *Nigari* is the traditional Japanese coagulant. It is the grey liquid which drips from a hessian bag of raw sea salt, and is mineral rich. Making good tofu with nigari is quite an art, as there are many subtle variables. However, it produces very good-tasting tofu.

The other coagulant generally used is *calcium sulphate*. Some purists think this is an artificial chemical. This is not true, and, in fact, calcium sulphate was the original and is probably the most natural curdling agent. That is, of course, if you get it from the right source. Calcium sulphate occurs naturally as gypsum and is abundant in Australia. It increases the percentage of calcium in the tofu and is easier to make softer tofu with. Some Chinese manufacturers use poor-quality calcium sulphate, which is an industrial by-product. Consequently, their tofu is less wholesome. I always buy tofu made from organic soybeans, and I make a point of buying it on the day it is delivered.

I'm waiting for the day when one of our natural tofu makers use good-quality



gypsum. It produces more nutritious tofu, with a very good texture, and it requires less skill. Nigari tofu is, to my mind, the best, but only in the hands of an experienced soy crafter.

There are a number of ways to buy tofu. Some Chinese will cut whatever size you please from large slabs laid out on stainless steel. In oriental food stores, it is packed in rectangular plastic containers and displayed in the refrigerator. Natural food stores and 'health' food stores carry the Chinese bean curd in the same containers and the natural products either vacuum packed or water packed in a sealed plastic container.

One of the problems some of our soy crafters experience is of maintaining deliveries of fresh tofu. A financially viable run of tofu-making can be done if a portion is vacuum packed. This vacuum-packed tofu is given a very long shelf life, and is sometimes quite sour. Soy crafters need to take great care with hygiene and cleanliness. The difference between fresh tofu and 6-week old, vacuum-packed tofu is dramatic – so support those who sell you the freshest tofu, and complain to the makers if yours is sour.

After buying tofu, unless you intend to use it immediately, store in the refrigerator. If you have firm tofu, cover it with water in a sealed container and refrigerate. Change the water every two days and it will keep well for a week. If you have no refrigerator, store in the coolest place in salted water (brine).

### Agé-Tofu

*Agé, dow-foo bok, fried bean curd* is made by deep frying strips or small cubes of tofu. After frying, these have a tremendous texture and great possibilities. When bean curd is fried, a thick skin is formed and the interior becomes hollow or honeycombed. This can be sliced and added to stir fries, salads, cold dishes, noodles, etc., or prised open and stuffed with innumerable fillings. To remove most of the frying oil, agé is soaked in hot water briefly before use.

Agé is easy to make at home and can be refrigerated or frozen. It is well liked for its 'meaty' texture. The protein is concentrated by frying, hence agé is, by weight, very high in protein. Agé is always available in Japanese food stores where it comes in large and medium rectangles. The large pieces are excellent for stuffing, as they are big enough to form a neat, firm envelope, the top of which can be sealed and dropped in a simmering stock. The Chinese also make much smaller cubes or triangles of fried bean curd. These are either sliced and used in other dishes, or stuffed and served hot or cold.

### Soymilk

The soybean earns its reputation as 'the vegetable cow'. Apart from producing cheese-like tofu, the most simple method of rendering the soybean into food is