

A Spicy Tofu Eggplant Stir-Fry: A Meat-Eater Meets his Match

You know, I should really make a holiday to celebrate my dear friend, Jessie. Upon reflection, I realized that without Jessie, I may not have met some really important and incredible people in my life. One of these incredible people, besides my husband, is Stef, the guest author of this post.

Stef is one of those people who is the full package – outrageously funny, kind, smart, and beautiful. I remember asking her years ago how she met her husband (at the time, they were just dating) and I remember loving this love story.

I'm sure you will too. Shabbat shalom, Whit xoxox

P.S. Follow Stef and Matt's journey as new Israelis here.

When I asked my husband which food he thought most represented our love, he answered without hesitation: tofu.



On Our Wedding Day in Jerusalem

Like Whitney, I met my husband, Matt, in the holy city of Jerusalem, but it took us a bit longer to realize we were meant to be. On my first day at the Pardes Institute in 2006, where I planned to study for 3 years, my closest friend turned to me and asked me who I thought was cute. I immediately picked out my future husband, despite the fact that he was wearing cut-off hospital pants, a “wife-beater” tank-top, and mismatched red and blue converse high tops. It took us a few weeks to actually have a conversation (although my husband doesn’t remember it) and a couple months until we became friends. Since he was in a relationship with someone else at

the time and I had just gotten out of a long-term relationship myself, we continued to be just friends for the remainder of the year. In the first days of our friendship, Matt came over to my apartment for dinner. That year also happened to be the year I reintroduced meat into my diet after many year of vegetarianism. While I had begun eating some meat, I still preferred to (and generally still do) cook vegetarian. When Matt came over for dinner that night early on in our friendship, I told him I was making tofu. A look of uncertainty and fear washed over his face. He admitted to not having a lot of "experience" eating tofu and to not liking it so much, but agreed to try it nonetheless. I don't think I could truthfully say that fell in love with tofu that night, but he did eat it and that's a good first step.



At our LA Wedding Reception

Fast-forward to today: we have been married for four years and tofu is a still a staple part of our diet. How did that happen? The simple answer (to both the questions of marriage and tofu) is love.

After our year of friendship, Matt moved back to the US and I began my second year of school in Jerusalem. Now, with both of us available and thousands of miles between us, we decided it was the right time to start dating. This was confirmed the week I came back to the States for a friend's wedding. We knew

we wanted to see each other before committing to a long-distance relationship, so I planned a detour on my trip to meet him for a weekend. Unfortunately, the only time such a visit could be arranged was over the holiday of Yom Kippur, a 25-hour fast day where we are meant to focus on repentance and atonement. It would have to do. Even though we spent much of the visit davening (praying) in shul (synagogue) on separate sides of the mehitzah, it was enough for us to know that we were ready to do this. We survived the distance and the following year Matt got a job in Israel so we could spend my 3rd year of school together.

Finally in the same place, we began to share many more meals together and I began to learn about all the foods Matt did or did not like. On the list of "not-likes" was, you guessed it, tofu. To add insult to injury, he also claimed to not like spicy food, something that characterized almost everything I ate. Here's where love comes into play. Despite his specific dislikes (those previously mentioned, among others), Matt always tried every single dish I cooked. And to both our surprise, he liked more things than he thought he did. If you ask him, Matt will still claim that anything I make with tofu would taste better with chicken, but he eats it and, dare I say, he enjoys it. At the end of my final year of school, we got married in Jerusalem (at a vegetarian restaurant) on Tu B'Av, the Jewish day of love, and the rest is history.



Falling in Love in Jerusalem

Over the course of our marriage, my husband has grown to like other previously disliked foods as well, including spicy food. I still prefer to cook vegetarian during the week (we save the meat for Shabbat) and this Spicy Tofu Eggplant Stir-fry is one of our go-to meals. If you don't like spicy food, heads up, this is a real mouth burner.

Spicy Tofu Eggplant Stir-fry (adapted from a "learn to cook vegetarian" book I had in college)

What

2 Tbsp Cooking Oil (you can choose: canola, olive, coconut, etc.)

2-3 cloves Garlic, minced

1 Tbsp (or more) Fresh Ginger, minced

1-2 Tbsp Chinese Chili Garlic Sauce (the hero of this dish)

1 block of Tofu, cut into 1 inch cubes, drained

1 small or 1/2 large Eggplant, cut into 1 inch cubes, pre-steamed if you like softer eggplant

Any other vegetable of your choice: red pepper cut into strips, mushrooms, zucchini, spinach, water chestnuts, etc.

2 Tbsp Soy Sauce

1 Tbsp Sesame Oil

1 Tbsp Brown Sugar

2 Tsp Corn Starch

1/2 cup water

2-3 Green Onions, diced

How

Heat the oil in a large frying pan or wok, add garlic and ginger and cook for 1 minute. Add Chinese chili sauce (adjust for taste) and simmer for another minute. Add the drained tofu

cubes and cook for a few minutes until the tofu absorbs the garlic mixture. Add the eggplant and stir-fry until cooked through.



Working with Tofu

Mix together soy sauce, sesame oil, brown sugar, corn starch and water in a separate bowl. At this point add any additional vegetables and then the sauce mixture to the pan. Cook until vegetables reach desired tenderness. In the last minute, add green onion.



Serve over brown rice and enjoy!



Spicy Love