CREAMY TOFU NOODLES

Adapted from Hetty Lui McKinnon at the New York Times Cooking site.

She says: "This noodle dish will win over any crowd, regardless of dietary dispositions. Here, tofu is blended with garlic, five-spice powder and water for a creamy yet weightless sauce that wraps around each noodle. The same technique can be used to create a lush dairy-free pasta sauce (just add nutritional yeast and fresh herbs) or a ranchlike dip (blitz silken tofu with garlic, onion powder and herbs)." Add water as needed: It can be thicker as a dip, thinner as a dressing for salads or grain bowls.

Ingredients:

For the noodles:

- 12 ounces Asian wheat noodles (like udon, somen, or yang chun) or other egg-free noodles

For the sauce:

- 1 (14-ounce) package firm tofu, regular or silken
- 2 garlic cloves, sliced
- 1/2 teaspoon granulated sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon five-spice powder
- 1/2 cup finely chopped cilantro leaves and tender stems, plus a few sprigs for serving
- 1 1/2 tbsp soy sauce or liquid aminos
- 1 1/2 tbsp rice vinegar
- Dash umeboshi vinegar (if you have it)
- 2 teaspoons sesame oilh

Topping:

- 1 scallion, finely chopped
- Toasted sesame seeds

Preparation:

Blend the sauce ingredients in a food processor. Cook the noodles *al dente* according to package directions. Toss with the sauce and add garnishes or offer them at the table.

Editor's Note: I left out some ingredients that are hard to find (black vinegar) or not to my taste (chili oil—I don't like heat), plus I simplified the technique a bit. The recipe calls for two sauces, the creamy sauce, then a thinner sauce with vinegar and heat that is added on top; I blended everything into one sauce, minus the ingredients I didn't use. I added umeboshi vinegar, which I have always been told "takes out the tofu taste."

The success of this dish comes from the five-spice powder. Amazing that 1/2 tsp of anything can flavor a whole dish!





