



Chicken-Tofu Tsukune

By Rie McClenny

For these chicken tsukune (meatballs), I use tofu to bind the ingredients instead of soaked bread or bread crumbs. In Japan it's common to mix in tofu with other ingredients as it's more affordable than meat and considered healthier. Since tofu is mild in flavor, it doesn't affect the taste of a dish. It also gives the meatballs a lovely soft texture and adds moisture to the chicken. I like to eat the meatballs dipped in raw egg yolk, but if you're worried about eating raw egg, you can try a poached egg. Serve the meatballs with a bowl of rice and Cucumber and Fennel Sunomono (recipe follows).

Serves 4

SWEET SOY SAUCE:

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons sake
- 2 tablespoons mirin
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon sugar

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MEATBALLS:

- 8 ounces firm tofu
- 1 pound ground chicken
- 2 scallions, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons potato starch or cornstarch
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons neutral oil, such as canola or grapeseed
- Toasted white sesame seeds, for garnish

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1. **MAKE THE SWEET SOY SAUCE:**
In a small bowl, combine the soy sauce, sake, mirin, and sugar. Whisk until the sugar is completely dissolved. Set aside.
 2. **MAKE THE MEATBALLS:** Place the tofu on a plate lined with paper towels. Set aside for 10 minutes and gently press to remove excess water.
 3. Transfer the tofu to a medium bowl. Using your hands, a whisk, or a potato masher, break apart the tofu and mash until finely broken down. The texture should be similar to ground meat.
 4. Add the ground chicken to the tofu and mix until fully combined and sticky. The mixture should hold together. Add the scallions, potato starch, salt, and pepper. Mix well until fully combined.
 5. Shape the meatball mixture into large balls (about 3 tablespoons per

meatball). If the mixture sticks to your hands, lightly wet your hands with water. Slightly flatten the meatballs to a 1-inch thickness. You should have 14 to 16 meatballs.

6. In a large cast-iron pan or nonstick skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Working in batches, cook the meatballs until golden brown, about 2 minutes per side. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook until the meatballs are cooked through, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer the meatballs to a plate.
7. Wipe the skillet clean with a paper towel. Add the sweet soy sauce and bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Cook until the sauce is thick and syrupy, about 2 minutes. Return the meatballs to the skillet and coat with the sauce. Sprinkle with sesame seeds, if desired, and serve immediately

Cucumber and Fennel Sunomono

By Rie McClenny

This vinegary vegetable side dish is very refreshing and easy to make. It reminds me of a palate cleanser and is the perfect small side to balance a richer meal. There are many ways to make sunomono, the simplest version being with cucumber. I've added fennel for a hint of anise. The dressing has no oil and is made with just vinegar, salt, and sugar. The sugar is an important ingredient, as it counters the sharpness of the vinegar. I recommend starting with 1 teaspoon of sugar, tasting the dressing, and adding more to your liking.

Serves 4

- 1 English cucumber, very thinly sliced (about 3 cups)
- Kosher salt
- 1/2 fennel bulb, very thinly sliced (about 1 cup)
- 1/4 cup rice vinegar
- 1 teaspoon sugar, plus more to taste
- 2 tablespoons toasted white sesame seeds, whole or coarsely ground

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1. Place the cucumber in a medium bowl and sprinkle it with 1 teaspoon salt. Toss to combine. Set aside for 10 minutes. Drain the cucumber, using your hands to squeeze out more liquid.
 2. Add the fennel to the bowl with the cucumber. Stir to combine.
 3. In a small bowl, combine the rice vinegar, sugar, and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Stir well to completely dissolve the sugar and salt. Taste and add more sugar if desired. Stir in the ground sesame seeds.
 4. Drizzle the vinegar mixture over the cucumber and fennel. Stir to evenly coat the vegetables. Serve immediately. The cucumber and fennel salad will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 2 days.

TIP | I highly recommend using a mandoline to slice the cucumber and fennel. It's the easiest and quickest way to get thin, uniform slices. Be careful with it! If you don't have a mandoline, use a sharp knife and make sure the slices are about 1/16-inch thick.