

The Spice Is Right

Kim O'Donnel was facing a dilemma. The longtime food writer and trained chef had never been a huge fan of tofu. Yet there she was, writing *The Meat Lover's Meatless Cookbook*, thinking: "This is crazy. How am I going to have a meatless book without any nod to tofu?"

"It just didn't feel right."

And so, with a zeal that came to typify her quest for successful vegetarian recipes, she began experimenting—and eventually developed two dishes that met her "standard of deliciousness": pepita-crusted tofu and tofu barbecue.

The latter took off after a friend suggested freezing tofu—thus making it more porous, like a "flavor sponge"—and both now stand among the more than 50 recipes in her cookbook, which was designed in part to help readers institute their own Meatless Monday program throughout the year.

"I want people to cook," O'Donnel says. "And I think that the more we commit to cooking regularly, the more aware we become

of where our food's coming from and how it's raised and grown."

For the *USA Today* food columnist, the inspiration for a new culinary journey came in 2008, when she learned about the environmental impacts of animal agribusiness. Having since cut her meat consumption in half, she's reveled in the challenge of re-creating the "savoriness" of meat in meat-free dishes and making vegetables irresistible. "I've converted many a broccoli hater after I served them my roasted broccoli pickup sticks," she says. Some of her favorites from the book include the chickpea "crab" cakes, roasted eggplant-lentil "caviar," and tempeh hoagie-letta.

Another, the West Indian-style channa wrap—"one of my go-to dishes at home"—replicates the flavorful sandwiches she'd buy in gas stations while visiting friends in the Caribbean.

"That theme of delicious first, meatless second has really sort of [been] the driving force behind my book," O'Donnel says. "So I wanted to re-create something from that time, when I would just swoon over these sandwiches."
— **Michael Sharp**

West Indian–Style Channa Wrap — Serves 8 or more

- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- 2 cups onions**, diced
- 5 cloves garlic**, minced
- ½ chili pepper of choice**, seeded and diced
- 1 (2-by-1 inch) hunk fresh ginger**, peeled and minced
- 1 ½ to 3 tablespoons curry powder*** (preferably Madras-style)
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin**
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne**
- ¼ teaspoon ground turmeric**
- 1 teaspoon salt**
- 2 (15-ounce) cans chickpeas**, drained and rinsed thoroughly
- 1 (17.5-ounce) package 8- or 10-inch whole wheat tortillas**

Optional add-ons: Your favorite hot sauce; ½ red onion, sliced thinly; ½ cucumber, diced

1. In a deep skillet, heat oil over medium heat. Add onions and cook until slightly softened, about 8 minutes.
2. Add garlic, chili pepper, and ginger, and cook for about 2 minutes.
3. Add spices and salt, and stir well. You'll end up with a paste.
4. Add chickpeas, plus enough water to barely cover them (at least 3 cups). Bring to a lively simmer, then lower the heat and cook at a gentle simmer, stirring occasionally, until most of the liquid evaporates (50 to 60 minutes). You're looking for very soft chickpeas with a thick gravy, not soup.
5. Taste for salt and season accordingly.



6. Place a few tablespoons of channa inside a warmed tortilla with any or all of the optional add-ons. (The channa is also great served over rice.)

*On a spicy scale, the original recipe calling for 3 tablespoons of curry is 4 stars out of 5. Especially if you use Madras-style curry, HSUS testers recommend following O'Donnel's suggestion for toning down the heat by using only 1 ½ tablespoons of curry powder; she also suggests eliminating the cayenne if desired.

From *The Meat Lover's Meatless Cookbook* by Kim O'Donnel. Excerpted by arrangement with Da Capo Lifelong, a member of the Perseus Books Group. © 2010.

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