

Vegetable Tempura (Yasai Tempura)

Description

Vegetable Tempura, known as Yasai Tempura in Japanese, is a beloved dish featuring an assortment of fresh vegetables coated in a light, crispy batter and deep-fried to golden perfection. The secret to authentic tempura lies in its delicate, airy coating that doesn't absorb oil, creating a satisfying crunch with every bite. Traditionally served with tentsuyu (tempura dipping sauce), grated daikon radish, and fresh ginger, this dish is a staple of Japanese cuisine.

Cuisine: Japanese

Time Required

- **Prep Time:** 25 minutes
 - **Marination Time:** None
 - **Cook Time:** 45 minutes
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Ingredients

For the Vegetables:

1. 1 Japanese Sweet Potato (or regular sweet potato), sliced into 1/4-inch rounds
2. Kabocha Squash (Japanese pumpkin), sliced into 1/4-inch pieces
3. 1 Japanese or Chinese Eggplant
4. 4-5 Shiitake Mushrooms or King Oyster Mushrooms
5. 1 medium Carrot, diagonally sliced
6. 1 medium Onion, cut into rings
7. 5-6 Green Beans, ends trimmed
8. 4-5 Asparagus Spears, woody ends removed
9. 1 medium Bell Pepper (any color), cut into thick strips
10. 4 Shiso Leaves (optional, for authentic flavor)

For the Tempura Batter:

11. 1 cup All-Purpose Flour, chilled
12. 2 tbsp Cornstarch
13. 1 large Egg, chilled
14. 200 ml Iced Water (3/4 cup + 4 tsp)
15. 1/2 tsp Salt
16. 2-3 Ice Cubes (to keep batter cold)

For Deep-Frying:

- 17. 4-6 cups Neutral Oil (vegetable or canola oil)
- 18. Optional: 1-2 tbsp Sesame Oil (for enhanced flavor)

For the Dipping Sauce (Tentsuyu):

- 19. $\frac{3}{4}$ cup Dashi (Japanese soup stock)
- 20. 3 tbsp Soy Sauce
- 21. 2 tbsp Mirin
- 22. 2 tsp Sugar

For Serving:

- 23. 2-inch piece Daikon Radish, freshly grated
 - 24. 1 tsp Fresh Ginger, grated
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Instructions

Preparing the Dipping Sauce (Tentsuyu):

Step 1: In a small saucepan, combine dashi, soy sauce, mirin, and sugar. Bring to a boil over medium heat.

Step 2: Lower the heat and simmer until the sugar completely dissolves (about 2-3 minutes). Remove from heat and set aside to cool slightly.

Preparing the Vegetables:

Step 3: Slice the sweet potato into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch rounds and soak in cold water for 15-30 minutes to remove excess starch. Pat completely dry with paper towels.

Step 4: Cut the kabocha squash into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slices (leave the skin on for authentic presentation).

Step 5: For the eggplant, cut off the stem and slice in half lengthwise. Leave the top 1 inch intact, then cut the rest lengthwise into thin strips ($\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thick). Gently press down to fan out the slices.

Step 6: Slice mushrooms lengthwise into thin pieces. Keep smaller mushrooms whole.

Step 7: Prepare all other vegetables (carrot, onion, green beans, asparagus, bell pepper) as indicated in the ingredients list. Ensure all vegetables are completely dry—moisture is the enemy of crispy tempura.

Preparing the Tempura Batter:

Step 8: Sift the chilled all-purpose flour and cornstarch together into a large mixing bowl.

Step 9: In a separate bowl or measuring cup, whisk together the chilled egg and iced water vigorously. Discard any foam that forms on the surface.

Step 10: Slowly pour the egg-water mixture into the flour mixture. Using chopsticks or a fork, mix in a figure-8 pattern for only 15-20 seconds. DO NOT OVERMIX—it's perfectly fine to have lumps in the batter.

Step 11: Add 2-3 ice cubes to the batter to keep it cold throughout the frying process. Optionally, place the batter bowl in a larger bowl filled with ice water.

Heating the Oil:

Step 12: Pour oil into a deep pot or wok to a depth of 1½-2 inches. Heat the oil to 320°F (160°C) for vegetables. Use an instant-read thermometer for accuracy.

Step 13: To test the oil without a thermometer, drop a small amount of batter into the oil. If it sinks halfway and immediately rises back up, the oil is ready.

Frying the Tempura:

Step 14: Lightly dust vegetables with a small amount of flour (this helps the batter adhere better). Shake off any excess.

Step 15: Dip vegetables one at a time into the cold batter, coating completely. Let excess batter drip off for 1-2 seconds.

Step 16: Gently slide the battered vegetable into the hot oil. Do not overcrowd the pot—only fill half of the oil surface at a time.

Step 17: Fry delicate vegetables (shiso leaves, mushrooms) for 1 minute, medium vegetables (eggplant, green beans, asparagus, bell pepper, onion) for 1-2 minutes, and denser vegetables (sweet potato, kabocha, carrot) for 2-3 minutes.

Step 18: Turn the tempura occasionally to ensure even cooking and golden-brown color on all sides.

Step 19: Remove tempura with a slotted spoon or spider strainer and place on a wire rack or paper towel-lined plate to drain excess oil.

Step 20: Between batches, use a fine-mesh skimmer to remove any batter crumbs (tenkasu) floating in the oil to keep it clean.

Serving:

Step 21: Arrange the vegetable tempura on a serving plate. Garnish with freshly grated daikon radish and ginger.

Step 22: Serve immediately while hot and crispy, with warm tentsuyu dipping sauce on the side. Add grated daikon and ginger to the dipping sauce according to taste.

Tips

- The key to crispy tempura is keeping the batter ICE COLD at all times. Add ice cubes to the batter and work quickly
- Do not overmix the batter—lumps are your friend! Overmixing develops gluten, which makes the coating heavy and chewy instead of light and crispy
- Maintain steady oil temperature throughout frying. If the temperature drops too low, the tempura will absorb excess oil and become greasy
- Dry all vegetables thoroughly before battering—excess moisture will make the coating soggy
- Dust vegetables lightly with flour before dipping in batter for better adhesion
- Only fry a few pieces at a time to maintain oil temperature and ensure even cooking
- For extra crunch, drizzle a spoonful of batter over the tempura while it's frying in the oil
- Tempura is best enjoyed immediately after frying. If you must store leftovers, reheat in a 400°F (200°C) oven for 5 minutes to restore crispiness

Enjoy your authentic homemade Vegetable Tempura!