

Crispy Pressed Chicken/Tofu with Garlic and Mint

Serves 4: 2 servings chicken, 2 servings tofu

Pressing the chicken thighs with something heavy not only speeds up the cooking time but also forces out the fat, resulting in supremely crispy skin, one of the great joys of eating chicken. Pressing the water out of the tofu results in a similar crispness. The chicken and tofu are covered by the weight throughout the cooking, so use your ears to keep tabs on their progress—you should hear a calm, friendly sizzle, not an intense hiss. Adjust the heat if things sound either too crazy or suspiciously quiet.

Note: To serve just one choice for 4 people, double the quantity of chicken or tofu.

Tip: To weight the chicken or tofu, I place a smaller pan on top (making sure it has a clean bottom), then weight it down with a full kettle, a heavy can of tomatoes, or a brick. The chicken and tofu can be cooked in two skillet simultaneously—monitor the heat under both pans to keep them cooking at the same rate.

GARLIC-MINT MARINADE

4 large garlic cloves, smashed

1 1/2 teaspoons sea salt or kosher salt

1/2 cup packed chopped fresh mint

Finely grated zest of 1 lemon

3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

1 teaspoon Aleppo pepper flakes or 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes, or to taste

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

4 chicken thighs, preferably salted in advance

Sea salt or kosher salt if necessary

12–14 ounces extra-firm tofu, sliced crosswise into four 5-inch-thick slabs and pressed

FOR THE MARINADE: Mash the garlic to a paste with the salt. In a bowl, whisk together the mint, lemon zest, lemon juice, garlic paste, and pepper flakes. Whisking constantly, drizzle in the olive oil. Divide the marinade between two bowls or resealable plastic bags.

MARINATE THE CHICKEN: If the chicken has been presalted, pat it thoroughly dry. Otherwise, season the chicken well with salt. Toss the chicken with half the marinade and let sit for 30 minutes at room temperature, or cover and refrigerate for up to 12 hours.

MARINATE THE TOFU: Toss the tofu with half the marinade and let sit for 30 minutes at room temperature, or cover and refrigerate for up to 4 hours.

TO COOK THE CHICKEN: Preheat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat for several minutes. Lift the chicken from the marinade, gently pat it dry with a paper towel, and lay skin side down in the pan. Reserve the marinade. Weight the chicken (see Tip) and cook for 5 minutes, then reduce the heat to medium and continue to cook until the chicken skin is well browned, about 5 more minutes. Flip the chicken, put the weight back on top, and cook until the chicken is browned on the second side and cooked through, 6 to 8 more minutes. Transfer the chicken to a serving platter. Pour the oil out of the pan, then add the reserved marinade to the pan. Stir and simmer for 1 to 2 minutes, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom of the pan, then pour over the chicken and serve.

TO COOK THE TOFU: Preheat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat for several minutes. Lift the tofu from the marinade, gently pat it dry with a paper towel, and lay in the pan. Reserve the marinade. Weight the tofu (see Tip) and cook for 5 minutes, then reduce the heat to medium and continue to cook until the tofu is golden brown on the bottom, about 5 more minutes. Flip the tofu, put the weight back on top, and cook until the tofu is browned on the second side, 6 to 8 more minutes.

Transfer the tofu to a serving plate. Pour the oil out of the pan, then add the reserved marinade to the pan. Stir and simmer for a few seconds, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom of the pan, then pour over the tofu and serve.