

# VEGETABLE TEMPURA

Use any combination of vegetables for tempura, including lotus root, broccoli, kabocha squash, pumpkin, eggplant, sweet potato, shiitake and any other mushrooms, carrot, zucchini, okra, broccoli, peppers, and asparagus—the list is as long as the vegetables available at your market. You can also use tender leaves like shiso, a delicacy in Japan. With leaves, batter only one side and fry quickly for about 30 seconds.

## SERVES 4

1 recipe tempura batter (page 109)

1 pound vegetables, sliced on an angle into bite-size pieces

½ cup cake flour

2 quarts vegetable oil

¼ cup toasted sesame oil

Tempura dipping sauce (page 111)

Prepare the wet and dry parts of the batter, following the master recipe (page 109).

To prepare a tempura cooking station, beside your burner, arrange the vegetables, a plate with the cake flour, and the wet and dry parts of the batter. Also, ready a tray lined with paper towels or newspaper to absorb the excess oil from the cooked vegetables, and the tools you'll need: chopsticks, a metal strainer, and a candy thermometer, if you have one.

Place a cooking vessel on the burner; use one with a uniform size to heat oil evenly, like a large cast-iron skillet or Dutch oven (don't use a wok). Add the vegetable oil and sesame oil.

Heat the oil to 360°F over high heat. Use a candy thermometer or follow the old-school method to judge the temperature (see page 115).

While the oil is heating, prepare the tempura batter, following the master method (page 110).

When the oil has reached 360°F, prepare to cook the vegetables in batches. See “How to Cook Tempura” (page 114)

for step-by-step instructions and photographs. Be careful not to overfill the skillet, which will lower the cooking temperature; use, at most, half of the surface area of the oil to cook. While the tempura is cooking, check the oil temperature with a candy thermometer. Regulate the heat to maintain a constant 360°F oil temperature. If the oil is too hot, the tempura will burn; if too low, the tempura will come out soggy and greasy.

Lightly dredge the vegetables in the flour, then dip into the batter. Immediately lay the vegetables in the hot oil. Working in batches, deep-fry the harder vegetables like sweet potato, carrot, or lotus root first, for about 3 minutes, until the vegetables turn golden brown. Transfer the vegetables to the prepared tray to drain excess oil. Repeat with the other vegetables. Cook softer vegetables like asparagus, broccoli, and pumpkin for about 2 minutes. For shiso leaves, dredge only one side of the leaf with flour, and cook for about 1 minute.

Serve the vegetable tempura with the dipping sauce on the side.