

The Thai-Ital Dish: Broccoli, Tofu, and Basil Spaghetti

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I was introduced to this dish by Susan Kegley (organo-metallic chemist, athlete, environmentalist, and all-around impressive person) in the late 1980s. I think the recipe may have drifted/evolved over the years, but here's how I made it this evening. It's an odd dish, but if you enjoy strong flavours give it a go. As with any recipe, it is a good idea to read and think through the whole thing before you start cooking.

For two as main dish.

Main Ingredients

Block of medium-firm tofu cut into bite-sized dice

Small baby's head of broccoli, cut into medium florettes

3-4 cloves garlic minced

¼ cup chopped onion or scallion chopped

At least 2 loose cups basil (Thai if you can get it), coarsely chopped after measuring. A lot. Hard to have too much.

Hot red Thai chilli peppers, minced, to taste.

½ cup medium-finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

3 tbs oil (peanut if you have it, or whatever)

About a third of a pound of spaghetti (a bit smaller than the grip of a baseball bat)

Salt

Sauce Ingredients

- 3 TBLS fresh-squeezed lime juice
- 3 TBLS fish sauce (+/- depending on intensity of sauce)
- 1 generous TBLS corn starch
- ¼ cup or so water



Method

1. Heat a good-sized sauce pan of water and add tofu cubes and simmer for about 3 minutes, then drain and set aside.
2. Place broccoli florettes in bowl and cover with cold water for a while, then drain and shake out water.
3. Begin to heat a big pot of water for pasta.
4. Prep the other dry ingredients and place them conveniently.
5. Check the tofu – if the pieces have glommed together gently separate them. If there is a lot of water on them, get rid of it.
6. Mix the sauce ingredients in a bowl.
7. Relax until the water begins to boil, and then add a tablespoon or so of salt. [Salt increases the boiling temperature (although for reasons I don't understand it also tends to make the water boil faster when you first add it). Waiting until the water is near boiling to add salt will reduce wear on your pot.]
8. When the salted water is at a good boil add the spaghetti and stir to get it all submerged and separated, keeping the heat high. If your stove is wimpy then put a lid on the pot, a bit ajar, to keep it at a steady boil and stir the pasta every now and then while you do the following briskly.
9. Add oil to wok or large pan, turn on heat to pretty damned high, add broccoli and stir fry by itself for a minute or two.
10. Add tofu and stir fry for a minute or so.
11. Add garlic, chilli, and onion and stir fry for a minute or so. If the pan seems to dry, add some more oil.
12. Stir the sauce again and pour it in and stir things about then reduce heat to low.
13. Add basil and stir.
14. You've been periodically stirring the spaghetti, right? When it is done, drain but reserve some of the hot starchy water if you easily can.
15. Add the spaghetti to the wok or pan (or if the pan is not big enough, dump them together into a bowl) and turn gently to mix without breaking up the tofu. If it seems too dry add some of that reserved pasta water. Then add most of the parm and mix a bit more, then serve a bowl for each person and sprinkle parm on top.