

# Pumpkin Seed-Crusted Tofu with Baked Pumpkin and Cranberry Relish

SERVES 3-4

**Every year** we buy a couple of pumpkins to cook with the best of intentions but they end up as decoration until they meet their demise. Well, not this year! This recipe utilizes the whole pumpkin—the pulp and the seeds. It's fun to pull together and it's got that homespun feel since you toast the seeds yourself. It's also really crunchy and flavorful, especially topped off with the cranberry relish. I hope this becomes an autumn tradition for you as it has for me.

- 3 to 3½ pound sugar pumpkin
- 8 teaspoons canola oil plus extra for deep-frying
- ½ cup cornstarch
- ¼ cup fresh oregano, chopped
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 pound extra-firm tofu, drained and pressed, sliced lengthwise into eighths
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup water

Preheat oven to 300°F.

Carve out the top of the pumpkin with a paring knife and slice the pumpkin in half with a chef's knife. Remove the seeds and clean them in a strainer under running water (the holes should be big enough for the stringy bits to escape). Set the pumpkin aside to prepare as described below. Dry the seeds thoroughly by laying on a paper towel or kitchen towel; pat the tops with another towel to remove any moisture. Measure ¾ cup of seeds and transfer them to a rimmed baking sheet. Sprinkle with 2 teaspoons of oil, toss to coat. Bake for 20 minutes, flipping occasionally. They should be toasted a golden brown to a deep golden brown. Transfer to a bowl to cool. Meanwhile, prepare the pumpkin.

Adjust the oven temperature to 350°F. Cut the pumpkin into slices that are about 2 inches wide at the widest point. Lightly oil the slices with canola oil. Place on a rimmed baking sheet and bake for about 45 minutes, until tender and lightly browned.

When the seeds have cooled, transfer them to a food processor and pulse until crumbly; the texture should range from ground to coarse and chunky. In a shallow bowl mix the seeds with the cornstarch, oregano, and salt. Place the flour in another bowl, the water in another, and line up your three bowls: flour, water, and the seed mixture.

Heat  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of oil over moderate heat in a heavy-bottomed skillet, preferably cast iron. The heat should be between 320 and 350°F; if you don't have a thermometer test the oil by dropping a pinch of the seed mixture in; if bubbles form rapidly around the seeds, the oil is ready.

Dip the tofu on both sides into the flour, then into the water, then into the seed mixture on both sides until the tofu is well coated with seeds. Repeat until all eight pieces are ready. Using tongs, lower the pieces into the oil (you may have to do it in two batches). Fry for 3 minutes on one side and about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  minutes on the second side. Remove from the oil and transfer to flattened paper bags or paper towels to drain the excess oil. Serve with roasted pumpkin.

## PUNK POINTS

When frying, the temperature of the oil is really important. Too hot and the food will burn; too cool and it won't cook properly. A frying thermometer is a pretty important accessory to have for this kinda stuff. If you don't have one, there are several methods to test if the oil is ready. One is to drop in some crumbs and see if bubbles form around it quickly; if the bubbles are out of control and smoky, it's too hot. If they are slow to form, the oil may need more heat or just a little more time. You can also use a wooden spoon: dunk in the handle and if bubbles quickly surround it, the oil is ready.

## Cranberry Relish

- 2 cups fresh cranberries, coarsely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup pure maple syrup
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup fresh orange juice
- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest

Mix together all ingredients in a small saucepan. Cover and bring to a boil. Once boiling, uncover and let simmer for 15 minutes. Bring to room temperature and serve.