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Lemongrass Tempeh Crumbles

SERVES 4

TAKES 25 MINUTES

When my husband saw this on the counter, he mistook it for the caramelized porky crumbles on page 132 (*not included*). Yes, they look alike, but these crumbles are vegan, with a citrusy and spicy edge. Tempeh isn't a Viet ingredient, but I've used it in banh mi, pho, and here to mimic meat. When crumbled into small pieces in this recipe, tempeh absorbs the seasonings well and fries up nicely. Whether made from meat or tempeh, these sorts of crumbles are used the same way—to mix into and season rice, kind of like a condiment. Add a side of radish and carrot pickle for refreshing crunch and tang. The crumbles will keep, covered, in the refrigerator, for up to 3 days (though they never last long in my house) and are good scooped up with tortilla chips.

½ cup coarsely chopped lemongrass (from 2 large stalks)
1½ tablespoons coarsely chopped garlic
¼ cup coarsely chopped shallot
Rounded 1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon sriracha, plus more for serving
2 tablespoons [Bragg Liquid Aminos](#), [Maggi Seasoning sauce](#), or soy sauce
¼ cup water
Brimming 3 tablespoons canola or other neutral oil
8 ounces tempeh, broken into thumbnail-size chunks
1 teaspoon raw or toasted sesame seeds (optional)
2 green onions, green part only, cut into rings
Fine sea salt
1 small English or 2 Persian cucumbers, thinly sliced (optional)

In a small food processor, whirl the lemongrass to finely chop. Add the garlic and shallot and process until everything is minced, pausing to scrape down the sides as needed; set aside. (If you don't have a small food processor, grate the lemongrass stalks and mince the garlic and shallot.) In a small bowl, mix together the sugar, sriracha, [Bragg Liquid Aminos](#), and water. Set the seasoning liquid aside.

In a large skillet over medium heat, warm the canola oil. Add the lemongrass mixture and cook, stirring, for about 1 minute, until fragrant and no longer raw smelling. Add the tempeh and seasoning liquid, turn the heat to medium-high, and let the mixture bubble and fry for about 10 minutes. At first, press on the tempeh to break it into smaller pieces (ideally, separate into individual soybeans) to maximize flavor and crisping. When satisfied, leave the tempeh to sizzle, giving it an occasional stir and then spreading it out to cover the bottom of the pan so it cooks evenly.

Toward the end of the 10 minutes, when some of the tempeh is golden brown, add the sesame seeds (if using) and cook, stirring frequently, for about 2 minutes longer to brown the tempeh further. The mixture will feel



lighter under the weight of your spatula. When most of the tempeh is golden brown, remove from the heat, stir in the green onions, and let rest for 5 minutes to deepen in flavor. Taste and, if needed, add salt, a pinch at a time.

Serve the tempeh warm or at room temperature, with the cucumber, if desired. If diners want more heat, pass additional sriracha.

NOTE

For the best flavor, use old-school all-soybean tempeh, such as Westsoy and Lifelight brands, available at many health food markets; tempeh made with grains lack the umami depth of the traditional kind. When fresh lemongrass is unavailable, substitute 3 to 4 tablespoons lemongrass paste.

LEMONGRASS PREP TIPS AND SHORTCUTS

When dealing with lemongrass, remember this: You can't chew what you can't chop. To trim a stalk, chop off the green, woody top section and the tough base. Remove loose or dry outer layers. The usable section will be 4 to 8 inches long, depending on the stalk size.

To chop a trimmed stalk, cut it into 4-inch sections, halve each lengthwise, cut crosswise into half circles, then chop to the desired texture. If you like, whack the stalk with a meat mallet or heavy saucepan to break up the fibers before cutting.

Reduce knife work by grating the stalk with a rasp grater such as a Microplane; chop pieces that eventually splay open. Use 1½ tablespoons grated lemongrass for every 2 tablespoons chopped lemongrass. Feel free to apply this 3:4 ratio when subbing frozen minced lemongrass (see below) or store-bought lemongrass paste for freshly chopped lemongrass.

For advance prep, freeze trimmed stalks in a zipper-top bag for up to 3 months. Or, chop the stalks into ¼-inch pieces and then blitz in a processor, 1 cup at a time, to a fine mincelike texture. Add 1 tablespoon neutral oil and pulse to combine. Freeze in a storage container for up to 3 months.



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