

Good reading for tofu lovers

They've done it again. Impossible as it sounds, Gary and Seraphina Landgrebe have produced another tofu cookbook that contains some of the greatest gastronomical delights to ever hit the dinner table.

"Tofu at Center Stage," the second of the Landgrebe efforts, is an assortment of 75 recipes that begins with an instant low calorie dip (tofu, yogurt and onion soup mix) and end with Tofabala, a cream cheese crust filled with a rich combination of tofu, nuts and dried fruit. In between are directions for dishes that will make an enthusiast of the first-time tofu cook and will convince the purest that tofu is the really the only food to eat.

Like its predecessor "Tofu Goes West," "Tofu at Center Stage" recipes are simple, clear and easy to follow. Recipes in the new book are arranged according to preparation time in each section. For example, a recipe for a quick and tasty egg salad opens the Frozen Tofu chapter, and is followed by dishes that become more involved, such as "Meaty

Meatless Turnovers" and an elaborate "Thanksgiving Pumpkin Bake" that uses a whole baked pumpkin stuffed with tofu, rice, water chestnuts, cheese, the pumpkin pulp, eggs and spices.

There are suggestions for all palates, including meat-eaters. This time, Landgrebe went beyond the occasional teaspoon of beef bouillon in Tofu Goes West, and incorporated a full chapter on fish and another section featuring beef recipes.

"It will go almost any place," said Landgrebe, "That's the beauty of it, tofu is so bland."

Landgrebe developed practically all of the recipes contained in the recently published volume, and through his efforts to write the second cookbook, he has evolved to the role of chef in the Landgrebe household.

"Seraphina hardly ever cooks anymore," he said. She illustrated both books, and works as a professional photographer and teacher.

Besides beautiful recipes, the titles are enough to entice doubters. Who could

resist trying "Mockamole" or "Gingered Nectar Pudding?"

"Most of the titles are simply off the top of my head, and the recipes are pure inspiration," he explained. "They just come."

Once inspiration struck Landgrebe, his toughest critics appeared — at the dinner table. With his wife, son Junauro and daughter Oradona would rate Landgrebe's creations, on a scale of one to ten.

"Oh, they have a lot of fun with that one," he said with a wide smile.

Next, recipes would be sent to the publisher, Fresh Press, where a group of tasters would prepare and sample Landgrebe's tofu dishes.

Most recipes were accepted, but some were returned with poor comments. Landgrebe said he would occasionally abandon the recipes, but there were several "that I just couldn't see why they wouldn't work. So I kept after them until they were what I wanted."

Unlike many would think, a cookbook on tofu does not

necessarily have to consist of stir-fry recipes. Landgrebe explained he and his family "are international—we move around a lot with our tastes in food." Besides American dishes, there are Mexican, Italian, Indian, African and Polynesian-type tofu recipes. There are even directions to make a "Chili-Jack Souffle" for those who want an Oriental food to use in a Mexican-flavored dish prepared in the French method.

With the exception of canned tomato sauce, just about all of Landgrebe's recipes feature fresh, whole foods. Many fruits and vegetables are grown locally, and dishes that feature seasonal foods often suggest substitutions when the produce is not available.

For some, the thought of tofu is still intimidating. True, eating tofu is the invogue thing to do, but a number of people get no further than purchasing the little plastic carton, taking it home, allowing it to sit in the refrigerator until past the expiration date, then throwing the unopened package out with a sigh of defeat. The small whitish



Gary Landgrebe, with his wife, is the author of another tofu cookbook.

cake of stuff floating in that tub of water remains a mystery.

Landgrebe said, "A lot of people say they hate it before they've tried it. With 'Tofu Goes West' I hear all the time about converts who started out that way."

For cooks who are reluctant to serve tofu-based meals because of family members, Landgrebe suggested the "lie by omission" approach.

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"You just don't tell them what it is," he recommended. "Then later ask them how they liked the tofu."

He didn't have much advice for the beginner as far as a recipe because, "people's tastes are so different, I find."

Bread recipes in both books make excellent starters, because the products are rich, moist and appealing to just about everyone. Landgrebe also said the recipe for "Stuffed Mushrooms" and the "Hot Potato Salad" might be good to start with, since he personally considers them "great."

"You could always begin with the meat recipes — that's one way to slip it in," he said.

Once people have adjusted to the funny packages and chunks of soy cheese in assorted sizes and textures, it will be a matter of incorporating tofu into regular meals, according to the author.

Tofu is a good enough incentive, without Landgrebe's wonderful methods of preparation. Tofu is very inexpensive, high in protein, low in calories, and provides a tremendous amount of food value for the amount of energy required to manufacture the product. As compared to beef, said Landgrebe, 18 pounds of soy beans are required to produce one pound of fat. With tofu, those 18 pounds of soy beans will make up to 80 pounds of the soy cheese, he said. For many dedicated tofu eaters, the comparison makes eating beef seem ridiculous.

As people become accustomed to using tofu, he said, many find a variety of ways to incorporate the soy cheese into most of their daily meals. Tofu can become a staple food for families without a determined effort to "become healthy" or to "eat cheap." A lot of tofu eaters begin with a few special tofu dishes they serve occasionally. In time, the versatile soy cheese appears more and more on the breakfast, lunch and dinner table. Landgrebe says use of tofu is evolutionary — it will increase at a steady, natural rate, without force from a cook bent on serving tofu at every meal.

Landgrebe says cooks will soon find their own preferences for the variety of tofu products offered. While some prefer to purchase their soy cheese at natural food stores, or even to make their own, Landgrebe usually shops for his at the local supermarket, and rarely pays more than

60-cents per package.

He suggests that cooks use the "soft" custard-like tofu for breads and desserts, and that consumers always purchase packages that have not passed the expiration date stamped on the package. Always rinse the tofu under cold running water before using, and store unused portion in fresh water.