Sweet & sour tempeh

About
The tempeh in this recipe is made from soybeans, which are one of the only complete, vegetarian sources of protein.

Tempeh is an Indonesian food. It is rich in protein and vitamin B12 and low in calories, salt, and cholesterol. It is rather bland by itself, but it takes on other flavors from sauces easily.

The way tempeh is made sounds pretty disgusting. Soybeans are cooked, then pressed into a small block. A mold grows over the cake of soybeans, eventually coating it in a white film. Tempeh is usually deep fried before being added to other recipes.

Ingredients
4 to 5 dried red chiles, seeds removed and soaked in 1/4-cup hot water for 30 minutes
3/4 cup coarsely chopped shallots
1 (1 in.) piece of fresh ginger, grated to a pulp
3 garlic cloves, peeled and coarsely chopped
Peanut oil for deep-frying
1/2 cup raw skinned peanuts
8 ounces tempeh, cut into 1 1/2 in. x 1/4 in. x 1/4 in. matchsticks
10 fresh curry leaves, if available, or 8 fresh basil leaves, torn in rough pieces
4 tsp thick tamarind paste
1 tsp salt
2 tsp light brown sugar

Directions
In a blender, combine the chiles and their soaking liquid, the shallots, ginger, and garlic and blend until a paste forms. Heat enough oil to have about 1 1/2 in. in a deep frying pan or about 3 in. in the center of a wok over medium heat. When hot, add the peanuts and fry until they start to color; remove them with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Put half of the tempeh in the oil. Stir and fry for about 6 min., or until the matchsticks are reddish-gold and crisp. Remove and drain on paper towels. Fry the remaining tempeh in the same way, draining on paper towels.

Remove all but 4 tablespoons of oil from the frying pan or work. Put in the spice paste from the blender as well as the curry leaves. Stir and fry on medium heat for 7 to 8 minutes, or until the paste loses its watery look. Stir in the tamarind paste, salt, and sugar then add the tempeh and peanuts. Stir gently to mix. Serves 4

Reference
Recipe adapted from Madhur Jaffrey’s World Vegetarian, by the Madhur Jaffrey, 1999. Published by Clarkson Potter, New York.