



# Tempeh 101: What It Is, How to Make It, and Ways to Use It

By Courtney Davison  
October 28 2020

Tempeh is a soybean-based food that originated centuries ago in Indonesia. It's popular among plant-based eaters, as its texture makes it a good [substitute for meat](#) in many dishes.

## Tempeh vs. Tofu

Tofu and tempeh are both made with soybeans, using different processes. [Tofu](#) is made of coagulated soy milk, with a curdling process similar to that used for producing cheese. Tofu is virtually tasteless—a culinary chameleon that takes on the flavors of whatever it's cooked with. Tempeh is made of cooked and fermented soybeans and has a slightly nutty taste. ([More on that process below.](#)) Tempeh is less processed than tofu and contains more of the whole soybean, which makes it higher in fiber than tofu. It is also denser and chewier than tofu. Both tofu and tempeh are relatively high in fat compared with whole beans, so we recommend enjoying them in moderation, especially if you're looking to lose weight.

## Where to Buy Tempeh

You can find tempeh near tofu in the refrigerated section of grocery stores. It's sold in vacuum-sealed packs.

## Tempeh Shortage of 2020

If you've had trouble finding tempeh lately, you're not alone. Lightlife, one of the leading manufacturers of tempeh in the U.S., said in October 2020 that "unprecedented demand" in the preceding months had led to low stock but that consumers should expect to start seeing it on shelves again this month. If you still can't find tempeh, read on for how to make your own.

## How to Make Tempeh

Making tempeh is a relatively easy but lengthy process. You can make it on the stovetop or using an Instant Pot. While soybeans are traditionally wrapped in banana leaves for the fermentation process, perforated Ziploc bags will work, too.

## Stovetop Method

For this method, you'll need a stove and a warm place where the tempeh can incubate.

## Ingredients

1 pound dried dehulled soybeans  
2 tablespoons vinegar  
1 teaspoon tempeh starter

## Instructions

1. Soak dried soybeans in ample water for at least eight hours or overnight.
2. Use a wooden skewer to punch a few holes into two quart-size zip-top freezer bags. Set aside.
3. Drain and rinse the soaked beans. Place in a large pot. Fill with enough water to submerge the beans, plus about an inch more.
4. Cover and cook over medium, monitoring the pot to be sure that water doesn't boil over. If it does begin to boil over, tilt the lid at an angle to vent some of the heat; once the excess bubbling and steam has died down, recover. Continue to cook, adding more water if necessary, until beans are nearly fully cooked, about 45 minutes. Stir in vinegar and continue to cook until beans are tender but not mushy.
5. Drain most of the water from the pot. Return to heat and cook until remaining liquid has evaporated.
6. Allow beans to cool to about 90 degrees. (This is important! You want the beans to be warm, but if they're too hot, it will kill off the bacteria necessary for the fermentation process.)
7. Spread beans on a clean kitchen towel and pat dry to absorb any excess moisture. Transfer to large bowl. Stir in tempeh starter. Mix well.
8. Transfer beans to prepared zip-top bags. Shape the contents of each bag into a rectangular loaf that's no more than an inch thick. (If there is extra space in the bags, fold excess material under so that the loaves stay compact.)
9. Place in a warm place between 85°F and 95°F, such as a food dehydrator or oven with the light on. If using oven, keep oven door cracked open to allow air to circulate.
10. Check beans after about 12 hours. They should be generating their own heat due to the fermentation

(continued)

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process.

**11.** After another 24 hours, there should be a layer of edible mold all around the beans, holding them together as a single compact mass.

**12.** Let tempeh loaves cool on countertop. Transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate until ready to use, up to 1 week.

## Instant Pot Method

If you have a pressure cooker such as the Instant Pot, then you can make tempeh using the machine's "Yogurt" setting to incubate.

### Ingredients

1 pound dried dehulled soybeans  
2 tablespoons vinegar  
1 teaspoon tempeh starter

### Instructions

1. Use a wooden skewer to punch a few holes into two quart-size zip-top freezer bags. Set aside.
2. Cook soybeans according to manufacturer directions. Spread cooked beans on a large kitchen towel to allow them to dry for about 15 minutes. Pat with kitchen towel to absorb excess moisture.
3. Transfer beans to a large bowl. Stir in vinegar. Mix well. Stir in tempeh starter. Mix again.
4. Transfer beans to prepared zip-top bags. Shape the contents of each bag into a rectangular loaf that's no more than an inch thick. (If there is extra space in the bags, fold excess material under so that the loaves stay compact.)
5. Add about 1 cup water to Instant Pot and insert steamer rack. Place zip-top bags of beans onto steamer rack, making sure that they're not touching the water. (If they are, pour out a little water.) Set Instant Pot to "Yogurt" setting. Let cook for 16 hours.
6. Turn off heat and allow loaves to sit in Instant Pot for another 24 hours. Check on loaves: They are ready once an edible mold has completely covered the beans, encasing them into solid loaves. If they are not ready yet, replace Instant Pot lid and allow them to incubate further, checking every two hours.
7. Let tempeh loaves cool on countertop. Transfer to an airtight container and refrigerate until ready to use, up to 1 week.

## Soy-Free Tempeh

Though soybeans are the traditional choice for tempeh, you can follow the steps outlined above using another bean of your choice, such as chickpeas.

## Ways to Use It

- Crumble tempeh into tomato sauce for vegan bolognese.
- Marinade it in equal parts vinegar, low-sodium soy sauce, and your favorite seasonings. Refrigerate at least two hours to infuse with flavor before cooking.
- Brush tempeh slices with [barbecue sauce](#). Roast in an oven at 350°F for 20 minutes.
- Saute in a nonstick pan with a small amount of water until well-browned; chop into 1-inch pieces and toss into a salad with [vegan ranch](#) and your favorite greens and veggies.

## Spicy Tempeh Mango Spring Rolls



Try this [super delicious spring roll recipe](#) from plant-based chef Ashley Madden.