

Foxy Fried Tōfu (Abura Agé) 油揚げ
Soy-Simmered Sheets to Stuff with Sushi and/or to Top Noodles



Japanese culinary culture is filled with references to foxes and their fondness for *abura agé* (fried tōfu). Names of dishes made with fried tōfu will often allude to this fox connection. The Japanese word for fox is *kitsuné*. The color of fried tōfu is referred to as *kitsuné iro* or "fox-colored." *Kitsuné udon* or *soba* are soup-noodles garnished with sheets of fried tōfu that have been simmered in a (slightly) sweet soy broth.

Another word associated with fried tōfu cookery is *inari*. This reference is to Inari Jinja (shrines). Inari shrines are dedicated to rice cultivation; fox-figures guard the entrance to these shrines. *Inari-zushi* are sweetly soy-simmered pouches of fried tōfu stuffed with tart (sushi) rice.

Foxy Fried Tōfu (Golden-Colored Soy-Simmered Abura Agé)
きつね色油揚げ煮付け

Both the pouches that are stuffed with sushi rice and the sheets that top noodle dishes are pre-cooked by simmering in a slightly sweet stock.

Makes 12 pieces (pouches to stuff OR half-sheets to top noodles).

6 sheets *abura agé* (fried tōfu)

1/3 cup Kelp Alone Stock (recipe follows main recipe)

2 teaspoons *saké* + 1 tablespoon sugar + 1 & 1/2 tablespoons soy sauce



blanch *abura agé* (fried tōfu)...



chopstick roll method...



slap method to press out air

Bring a pot of water to a rolling boil; quickly blanch the fried tōfu to remove excess oil. Drain. When cool enough to handle comfortably, wrap in paper toweling and squeeze gently to press out and blot up as much oily moisture as possible. Cut each slice of fried tōfu in half across the center to make 2 pieces per sheet. Repeat to make 12 pieces in all.

IF YOU WILL BE STUFFING the pouches later with sushi rice, its best to pry open the pouches before simmering them, inside-out, in sweetened soy broth.

In most Japanese households, where round chopsticks are standard kitchen equipment, a single chopstick is used, rolling pin-style, to press out air (and greasy water) trapped inside the pouches. If you don't have a round chopstick, use the slap-method instead. Lay a slice of fried tōfu on the open palm of one hand and slap down on it with the other to press out trapped air from the cut edge. Best to do this over the sink since greasy water is also forced out. Gently pry the pouch open with your fingertips and invert. Repeat the roll-pry-invert, or slap-pry-invert, procedure for the remaining pouches.



pry open...



invert...



turn inside out...

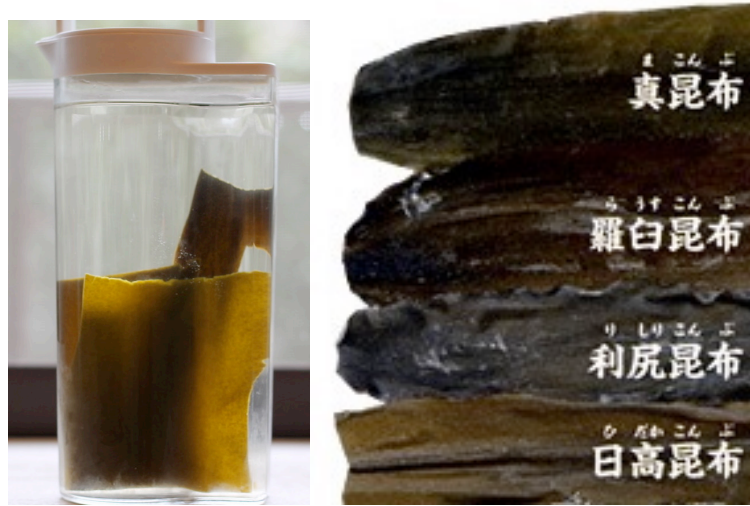
IF YOU WILL BE USING THE POUCHES TO TOP noodles later, cook the pouches in sweetened soy broth without turning them inside out.

Arrange the (inside-out OR right-side-to) pouches in a single layer in a wide pot. Pour in the *kombu* stock, cover with an *otoshi-buta* (dropped wooden lid) and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Adjust to maintain a simmer over low heat and cook for 2 minutes.

Season with the combination of *saké*, sugar and soy sauce. Cook for 2 minutes, or until nearly all the liquid has been absorbed. The pouches absorb cooking liquid quickly so watch out for scorching. Allow the fried tōfu to cool in the pan with the dropped lid in place (it is in this cooling off stage that the flavors are absorbed and intensified). The simmered slices will keep, refrigerated, for 3 or 4 days.



KELP ALONE STOCK *Kombu Dashi* 昆布だし



A simple stock can be made with just *kombu* (kelp) and tap or bottled water.

The four types of *kombu* most commonly found in Asian markets are from top to bottom: ***ma kombu***, ***Rausu kombu***, ***Rishiri kombu***, ***Hidaka kombu***. Any (or combinations of several) will make a flavorful broth by soaking in tap or bottled water for a minimum of 20 minutes (and up to 12 hours). Use a glass (or other non-reactive material) jar or beaker to soak the *kombu*. If you will be soaking for more than a few hours, or its a warm day, cover and refrigerate.

For deeper, rounder flavor, place the *kombu* and water in a pot over low heat. Gradually apply heat until you see a few bubbles appear to travel from the bottom of the pot to the surface. That is about 70 degrees Celsius/ 160 Fahrenheit, the ideal temperature for extracting *umami seibun* (flavor-enhancing glutamates) but not activating bitter tannins. Let the warm *kombu* broth cool naturally before refrigerating for longer storage (up to 3 days). Use this *kombu dashi* broth in any recipe that calls for stock.

