

Combine edamame and walnuts for savory vegan taco "meat" - Edamame and Walnut Lettuce Wraps -

By: *Melissa d'Arabian* *March 30, 2015*

For my daughter's 10th birthday, I took 15 giggling girls to dinner at a Japanese steakhouse.

Let that sink in for a moment. Because I probably could stop right here and let this column just explore the wisdom of that parenting decision. And in case you were wondering what the right number of fourth graders is to take out for a teppanyaki dinner, the answer is not 15.

If you've been to a teppanyaki restaurant, you know that the chefs put on a spectacle for the diners, cooking the meal tableside on giant griddles - spinning knives, tossing utensils, drumming out rhythmic beats with oversized salt and pepper shakers, and dazzling the crowd with their stacks of onions lit into volcanos.

But the exciting theatrics were not the highlight of the evening. Turns out it was the bowls of edamame that thrilled the girls most. Steamed soybeans beat out flaming poofs of oil-fueled fire. Who knew?

Whether the girls felt trendy squeezing the little beans out of the pods and into their mouths or actually just loved the mild flavor and firm texture, I'm not sure. But everyone seemed to love edamame.

The good news is edamame don't just appeal to young girls. They are delicious and nothing at all like tofu (the better known soy food). And frozen edamame are available at nearly every grocery store these days, which means this nutritious bean can easily join your home cooking repertoire. And a half cup of shelled edamame has about 10 grams of protein and 4 grams of fiber with just 100 calories.

To showcase edamame's versatility, I've created this recipe for edamame and walnut lettuce wraps. Though Japanese in spirit, it skews Mexican in flavor. I pair tasty, firm edamame with crunchy walnuts and some spices to make a cold vegetarian "meat" for lettuce wraps or tacos. Vegans will love this recipe, but so will meat-lovers.

I mix up a batch of the filling, then eat it for lunch or snacks for several days, reminding me that edamame are so much more than just a teppanyaki prelude.



EDAMAME AND WALNUT LETTUCE WRAPS

Start to finish: 15 minutes

Servings: 4

For the cucumber-avocado salsa:

1 small English cucumber, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1 small avocado, peeled, pitted and cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint
1 scallion, chopped
Juice of 1/2 lime (about 1 tablespoon)

For the filling:

1 cup shelled edamame
1 cup walnut pieces
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon chili powder
1/3 cup jarred tomato salsa (or 1 chopped small tomato)
Juice of 1 lime (about 2 tablespoons)
Kosher salt and ground black pepper

To serve:

8 large butter lettuce leaves
1/2 cup low-fat plain Greek yogurt
Sliced radishes
Lime wedges

To prepare the cucumber-avocado salsa, in a medium bowl toss together all ingredients. Set aside.

To prepare the filling, in a food processor combine the edamame, walnuts, cumin and chili powder. Pulse until finely chopped but still a little chunky. Add the jarred salsa and lime juice and pulse another 5 to 10 times to bind the mixture. If the mixture is too dry, add water 1 teaspoon at a time until the consistency is to your liking.

To assemble, place 2 lettuce leaves on each serving plate. Add about 1/4 cup the edamame mixture to the center of each leaf. Top with 1 tablespoon of the cucumber-avocado salsa, 1 tablespoon of the yogurt, radish slices and a squeeze of lime.

Nutrition information per serving: 350 calories; 260 calories from fat (74 percent of total calories); 29 g fat (3.5 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 0 mg cholesterol; 19 g carbohydrate; 9 g fiber; 6 g sugar; 13 g protein; 310 mg sodium.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the "Supermarket Healthy" cookbook. <http://www.melissadarabian.net>