

# DEEPLY REGIONAL JAPAN<sup>®</sup>

## JAPANESE-STYLE VEGETABLE AND TOFU ‘FRITTATA’

9 June 2020



Tofu and egg is a common ingredient combination in contemporary Japanese cooking. The comparative blandness of tofu tempers the richness of egg to a level that many older Japanese prefer, and the combination is also popular among the diet-conscious younger generation.

The following recipe is for a Japanese-style vegetable ‘frittata’ that makes good use of tofu. The crumbled firm tofu adds textural interest, while making the dish lighter. In this case, I used dandelion foraged from my garden while weeding, in combination with carrot and onion, however, you can use any vegetable of choice that you would normally put into a frittata or Spanish omelette. If you are not into foraging for edible weeds, English spinach, silverbeet, kale, cabbage, and mizuna all make good substitutes for dandelion leaves. The optional addition of a little katsuobushi (bonito flakes) results in depth of flavour, but can be left out if you prefer a seafood-free recipe.

**[IMPORTANT NOTE: NEVER consume weeds or wild plants unless you can identify them with 100% confidence. Do NOT collect edible plants from areas that may have been sprayed with chemicals, are polluted with heavy metals and other substances (e.g. near roads, painted surfaces and industrial activity), or contaminated by human or animal excrement. Many edible plants also require treatment or cooking to remove harmful substances such as toxins and anti-nutrients.]**

## INGREDIENTS (for 3 to 4 persons as an entrée or snack)

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|--|---|
| • Firm tofu  | 1 small to medium block (c. 300 g)                |
| • Dandelion leaf, coarsely chopped                             | A handful of leaves (equivalent to 1 large plant) |
| • Dandelion root, finely julienned                             | As available                                      |
| • Carrot   | 1 medium-sized                                    |
| • Onion  | 1 medium-sized                                    |
| • Whole egg, beaten  | 2 to 3 medium-sized                               |
| • Japanese soy sauce or tamari                                 | 1 level tablespoon or to taste                    |
| • Mirin (or sweet sherry, sweet white wine)                    | 1 level tablespoon                                |
| • Japanese sake (or vodka, medium sherry)                      | 1 level tablespoon                                |
| • Potato starch  | ¼ cup   |
| • Roasted sesame oil   | 1 level tablespoon                                |
| • OPTIONAL: Katsuobushi (smoked bonito flakes), finely crushed | 1 level tablespoon                                |

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Wrap the tofu block in paper towel. Place on a plate or in a bowl and gently squeeze the moisture out of tofu applying a downward pressure with your palms on top of the tofu block. Place a weight or apply a clamp (improvise as needed!), and leave the tofu to dewater for c. 1 hour, changing the paper towel if required.



2. Remove any dead or decayed material from the dandelion plants. Flowers and buds can be eaten if desired, but remove any flowerheads that have finished flowering (with a pointed shape), as they contain a hairy pith—the fluff that makes dandelion seeds float through the air.
3. Wash the dandelion plants to remove attached dirt. Be sure to wash the roots very well, taking particular care to remove dirt caught in the forks of the roots. Using a sharp knife on each plant, separate the tender part of the leaves from the tough leaf stalks, then the roots from the leaf stalks.





4. Remove the top of the root where leaf stalks were attached (as it is very tough and often have in-grained dirt attached), thin fibrous roots, and parts of the root where ingrained dirt still remains. Using a light scraping motion with a knife blade (or finger nails), remove as much as possible of the brown discoloured skin covering the roots.



5. Cut the dandelion roots into fine juliennes 3 to 5 mm wide and 4 to 5 cm long. Ideally, cut the juliennes diagonally across the root. Thick roots can be cut lengthwise first. Very thin roots can simply be cut lengthwise. Set aside.



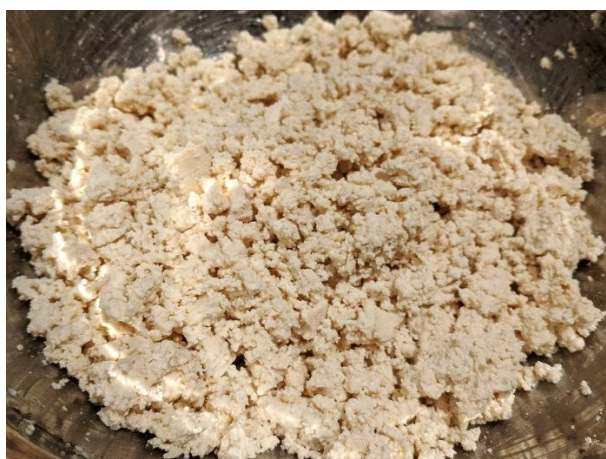


*Note: the photo also includes cut leaf stalks mentioned at Step 5*

6. Cut the leaf stalks into sections 2 to 4 cm long, and the leaves 3 to 5 cm wide.
7. In a bowl, combine the cut roots and leaf stalks, sprinkle with c. 1 teaspoon of salt, mix through well, and stand for 20 to 30 minutes. Then, cover with water and soak for c. 5 minutes. Discard the water (which will turn brownish with bitterness that has leached out), rinse briefly with running water, and drain well.



8. Crumble the tofu finely using a massaging action with your fingers, or using a mortar and pestle. Do not purée the tofu.





9. Prepare your other vegetable ingredients. Finely julienne the carrot. Thinly slice the onion lengthwise. Set aside. [The photo below also shows julienned dandelion roots in the foreground.]



10. Place the crumbled tofu from Step 8 in a large bowl. Add the potato starch incrementally, stirring continually for even mixing. Eliminate any lumps that form. Then, add the soy sauce/tamari, mirin (or substitute), sake (or substitute), beaten egg, and the optional katsuobushi. Mix thoroughly, then set aside.



11. Heat the sesame oil in a shallow pan over medium heat. [The pan should be large enough to hold the mixture when combined with the vegetables and formed into a 'pancake' c. 1.5 cm thick.] Add the prepared dandelion leaves and roots, carrot and onion and stir fry briefly until the dandelion leaves are starting to turn deep green.



12. Add the tofu–egg mixture from Step 10, mix thoroughly with the vegetables, and form into a flat ‘pancake’ c. 1.5 cm thick using a spatula or similar. Lower the heat to low or low–medium, cover with a lid and bake slowly.



13. Monitor progress regularly using a spatula to carefully lift the base of your frittata. [If the frittata is stuck to the pan, do NOT force it off. It should lift off easily once the base has hardened enough.] Once the base has browned lightly and hardened, turn the frittata over to bake the other side. The frittata can be very fragile at this stage and break easily, so be gentle when turning over—use an inverted plate or lid over the pan to assist (please take extreme care to prevent burning yourself with hot oil etc when doing this).
14. Once both sides have been baked, remove from the heat, cut into individual portions and serve. Although the frittata is flavoured, you can accompany it with a sauce of your choice if desired, e.g. tomato, tonkatsu, Worcestershire, sweet chilli.