

The graphic features a stylized, light green leaf shape in the background. The text "TO VEGETABLES" is written in a small, uppercase, sans-serif font at the top. Below it, the words "with love" are written in a large, bold, lowercase, serif font.

TO VEGETABLES with love

Lo han jai (Buddha's Delight)

© Hetty Lui McKinnon for To Vegetables, With Love

Lo han jai or Buddha's delight is a feast for vegans. It is full of wonderful Chinese ingredients, and incredibly comforting. My mum makes this dish during most of our Chinese celebrations including Chinese New Year, Ching Ming (Tomb Sweeping Day), Mid-Autumn Festival, and birthdays. Unlike many Cantonese dishes, which are big on flavour, this is a delicate dish, without the use of any alliums (in accordance with Buddhist belief that plants from onion family excite the senses).

There is no single recipe for Buddha's Delight. Rather, like many traditional recipes, it is a work in progress, and is dependent upon both family customs and your pantry ingredients. The key is bringing together ingredients with lots of different textures. While many of the ingredients may not look familiar, they are actually easily found at most Asian grocery stores. My mum's essential ingredients were shiitake mushrooms, dried lily flowers, bean curd sticks, tofu, lotus root, water chestnut, mung bean vermicelli and fresh greens. She also added an ingredient which my kids call 'hair' - it is actually black moss called *fat choy*.

Serves 4, with rice

1 tablespoon neutral oil
1 inch piece of ginger, peeled and sliced
about 45g / 1.5 ounce (5-6 lumps) of red fermented bean curd (nam yu)
4 green onions (scallions), white and green parts separated and cut into 2.5cm / 1-inch pieces
6 dried Chinese shiitake mushrooms, soaked in hot water for 30 minutes
8 black fungus, soaked in hot water for 30 minutes
20g dried lily flowers (optional), soaked in hot water for 30 minutes
½ teaspoon white sugar
50g beancurd sticks, soaked in warm water for 30 minutes
60g fried tofu puffs
450g / 1 pound (¼ small) napa/chinese cabbage (wombok), cut into 5cm / 2-inch pieces
6-8 slices of fresh (or frozen) lotus root
2 tbsp soy sauce
1 cup mushroom soaking water or vegetable stock
1 tablespoon sesame oil
white pepper
75g mung bean vermicelli noodles, soaked in warm water for 10 minutes
60g / 2 ounces snow peas or baby bok choy, trimmed
100g / 3.5 ounce canned baby corn

3 teaspoons sesame oil
handful toasted sesame seeds
cooked white or brown rice, to serve

Squeeze out the liquid from the mushrooms, cut off the stems (the stems are super chewy and I love them, so I add the stems to the dish but others discard) and slice; keep the mushroom soaking water for later. Drain the black fungus, trimming off any hard stems, and tear any large pieces in half. Drain the beancurd sticks and cut into 5cm (2 inch) pieces.

Heat a large Dutch oven or wide pot over medium-high heat. Add the oil and when hot, throw in the ginger and white part of the scallions and stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Reduce heat to medium, and add the red fermented beancurd, using a spoon or chopsticks to break it up. Add the mushrooms, black fungus, and lily buds, sugar, and stir for 1-2 minutes. Next, add the cabbage, beancurd sticks, tofu puff, and lotus root and toss well for 1 minute. Add the soy sauce, mushroom soaking water or vegetable stock, and combine well. Cover and cook for 6-7 minutes until the cabbage has wilted.

Drain the mung bean vermicelli and add to the pot, along with the baby corn, snow peas, and green parts of the green onions and stir to combine. Cover and cook for 2-3 minutes, until the snow peas are bright green and crisp-tender and the vermicelli has expanded and soaked up some of the liquid. Drizzle over sesame oil, and taste, seasoning with salt, if required, and white pepper. Remove from heat immediately and scatter with a few sesame seeds. Serve hot, with rice.