

You'll love refried edamame

By Sara Moulton

The first time I ate fresh soybeans was, naturally enough, at a Japanese restaurant. Known as edamame, the dish is a staple of Japanese restaurant menus.

They were served as an appetizer, in their pods, steamed and sprinkled with salt. It took a little work to suck the cooked fresh soybeans out of their pods, but who cared? I was out to dinner and in no rush. Besides they were delicious, meaty and flavorful. They reminded me of lima beans minus the funkiness.

And, big surprise, not only are they good, they're good for you. Of course, all legumes wear a nutritional halo, but the one radiating from soybeans is especially blinding. They boast more protein than any other legume, and they're a great source of folate, vitamin K, calcium, iron and fiber.

But the idea of putting edamame on a home cook's menu for a

weeknight meal? It never entered my mind. Then, several years after my restaurant revelation, I noticed a recipe in Gourmet magazine that featured frozen shelled edamame, the beans freed from their pods, combined with butter and buttermilk. Who knew you could buy them already shelled? Suddenly a new world opened up.

Following the Gourmet recipe, I began boiling, steaming or mashing shelled edamame according to my mood. Here, I've taken them in a yet another direction, reworking my recipe for a lighter version of Mexican-styled refried beans by replacing the pinto beans with edamame. The finished product is wonderfully creamy - smoother than the creamiest mashed potatoes - because the beans are pureed instead of mashed. It was a real hit with my family.

One caveat: You want to be sure to cook the fresh soybeans until they're soft. This advice runs counter to the directions on the

back of the package, which recommends boiling the beans for a mere 5 minutes. For this recipe, that short a cooking time would leave them too firm.

By the way, when I refer to fresh soybeans, I mean the frozen shelled guys. At least sometimes, of course, you'll be able to find them fresh in the pod at the farmers' market, and I'm sure they're delicious. But then you'd have to shell them once you brought them home, which is pretty tedious. The great thing about frozen vegetables is that not only are they a snap to prepare, but they also taste surprisingly fresh. That's because they're harvested at the peak of ripeness, then briefly blanched, then quickly frozen. It might seem counter-intuitive - if it's frozen, how can it be fresh? - but it turns out to be a great way to lock in their goodness.

MEXICAN-STYLE EDAMAME 'REFRIED BEANS'

Ingredients

Serve these as a dip for tortilla chips, spooned into soft or hard tacos, or layered between quesadillas.

Start to finish: 40 minutes (25 minutes active)

Servings: 6

16-ounce bag frozen shelled edamame

3/4 cup low-sodium chicken or vegetable broth or stock

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1/2 cup finely chopped yellow onion

1 teaspoon minced garlic

1 teaspoon ground cumin

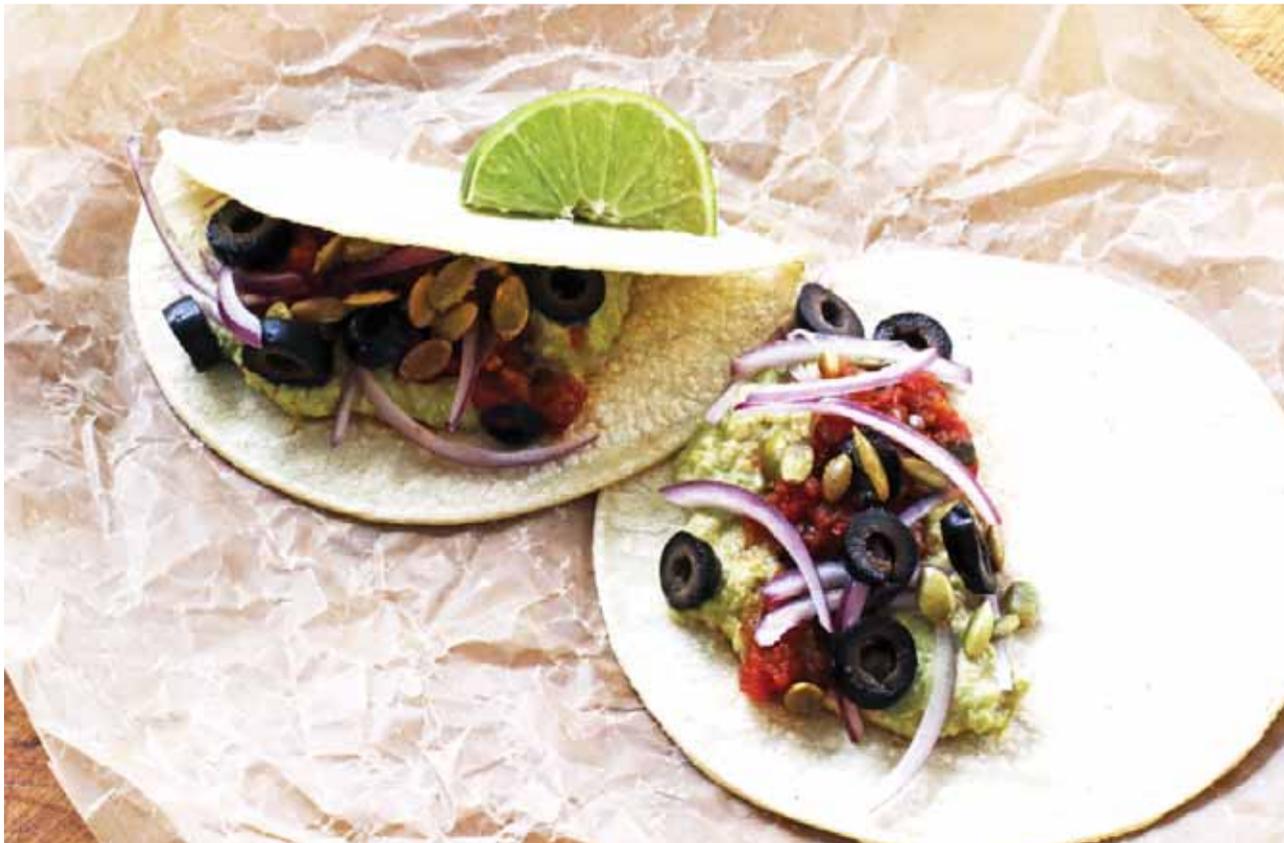
1/2 teaspoon chili powder, preferably chipotle

1 to 2 tablespoons lime juice

Salt and ground black pepper

1/4 cup sour cream

Pepitas (toasted pumpkin seeds) or toasted pine nuts, to garnish



Preparation

In a medium saucepan over medium-high, bring 2 quarts of well salted water to a simmer. Add the edamame, return to a simmer and cook until soft, about 20 minutes. Drain the edamame, reserving 1/2 cup of the cooking liquid, and transfer them along with the reserved liquid to a blender or food processor. Start to blend the edamame and when they are finely chopped add the chicken broth and continue blending, scraping down the sides as needed, until the beans are smooth.

While the edamame are cooking, in a large skillet over medium, heat the oil. Add the onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown. Add the garlic, cumin and chili powder and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the edamame puree and the lime juice. Season with salt and pepper, then cook, stirring, until the puree is hot. Remove from the heat and stir in the sour cream. Serve as desired, topped with pepitas.

Nutrition information per serving: 170 calories; 100 calories from fat (59 percent of total calories); 11 g fat (2 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 5 mg cholesterol; 180 mg sodium; 9 g carbohydrate; 4 g fiber; 3 g sugar; 9 g protein. — AP