

Miso eggplant & haloumi burgers

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Peter Kuruvita shares his yummy, vegetarian-friendly take on the humble burger.

Fermented bok choy

- 5 bunches bok choy, washed thoroughly and cut into thin wedges
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tbsp prepared horseradish
- 1 tbsp thyme leaves
- 1 tbsp coarse sea salt
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 celery stalks, chopped
- Fresh or dried habaneros, to taste

Pickled fennel

- 1-2 fennel bulbs, stalks removed
- 250 ml (1 cup) white wine vinegar
- 125 ml (½ cup) water
- 55 g (¼ cup) sugar
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed

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- 1 tsp chilli flakes
- 1 tsp yellow mustard seeds
- 2 tbsp lemonade fruit or lemon zest

Coriander macadamia chilli pesto

- 1 ½ cups coriander leaves
- 55 g (⅓ cup) unsalted roasted macadamia nuts
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 long fresh red chilli, chopped
- 80 ml (⅓ cup) rice bran oil
- 2 tsp lime juice
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Miso eggplant

- 2 large eggplants
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 spring onions, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp toasted white and black sesame seeds
- Sea salt, to taste

Miso dressing

- 3 tbsp white or red miso
- 1 tbsp sugar
- 2 tbsp mirin
- 1 tbsp sake
- 2 tbsp water

To assemble

- 6 brioche burger buns, split
- 6 slices haloumi cheese
- 3 vine-ripened or heirloom tomatoes, sliced
- 1 cup loosely packed rocket

Method

To make the fermented bok choy, combine all the ingredients in a large container or food-grade bucket or container, making sure the salt is well distributed. Press the mixture down with your fist, then let it stand for 1 hour or until the salt has drawn out enough moisture to submerge the vegetables in the brine. If not enough moisture is drawn out, add enough water to almost cover the vegetables. Cover the mixture with a plate or non-metallic lid, then cover the container with a clean piece of fabric and tie a string around that.

Press the mixture down once a day for 4 to 6 days or until the mixture tastes sour enough for you. Transfer the mixture to sterilised glass jars, seal and refrigerate for up to 2 months. To make the pickled fennel, slice the bulbs into very thin slivers. Rinse well and set aside. Place all the remaining ingredients in a small saucepan and bring to the boil. Remove from the heat and stand for 1 to 2 minutes or until slightly cooled. Tightly pack the fennel into a sterilised glass jar, then pour the brine into the jar, making sure the fennel is completely covered. Stand until cooled to room temperature, then seal the jar with a tight-fitting lid. When kept covered and chilled, the pickles will keep well for 1 to 2 weeks.

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To make the coriander pesto, place the coriander, peanuts, garlic and chilli in a food processor and blitz until almost smooth, scraping down the sides occasionally. With the motor running, add the oil in a slow, steady stream and process until just combined. Transfer to a bowl, stir in the lime juice and season to taste.

To make the miso eggplant, preheat a chargrill pan or barbecue over medium-high heat. Cut the eggplant into 3 cm-thick discs. Brush both sides liberally with oil. Combine all the miso dressing ingredients in a small bowl, then brush over both sides of the eggplant. Grill until golden and tender on both sides, then place in a bowl with the spring onion and sesame seeds.

Season to taste, then gently toss.

Just before serving, grill the haloumi until just golden on both sides.

To assemble the burgers, toast the buns until golden, then brush both cut sides with the pesto. Place haloumi on the base of each burger bun, then top with the tomato, eggplant, fermented bok choy and pickled fennel. Place some rocket on top, then place the lids on top and secure the buns with a toothpick.

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