Main dishes / Japan

Ebi Tempura

Tail-on prawns stretched straight, dipped in an ice-cold, just-barely-mixed flour-and-water batter, and dropped into 175°C oil until the coating puffs into a ghostly, crackle-crisp shell.

Time 40 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 parts Tiger prawns or large shrimp, shell-on (16/20 count)
- ☐ 30 parts Cake flour or low-protein (pastry) flour, sifted
- ☐ 5 parts Potato starch or cornstarch
- ☐ 35 parts Ice-cold sparkling water (or ice-cold flat water)
- ☐ 4 parts Egg yolk (1 large), ice-cold
- ☐ 200 parts Neutral oil for deep frying (rice bran or sunflower)
- ☐ 20 parts Dashi (for tentsuyu dipping sauce)
- ☐ 5 parts Soy sauce (for tentsuyu)
- ☐ 5 parts Mirin (for tentsuyu)
- ☐ 10 parts Freshly grated daikon, to serve

Let's make it.

01 Peel the shrimp, leaving the final tail segment and tail fan intact — the tail is the handle for dipping and eating. Devein by making a shallow cut along the back with a paring knife and lifting out the dark intestine with the tip. To straighten the shrimp so they fry evenly and do not curl: flip them belly-up and make 4–5 shallow diagonal cuts across the belly 2 mm deep, spacing them evenly. Then press each shrimp flat against the cutting board with your thumb, gently stretching it until you hear and feel a tiny snap — the connective tissue breaking. The shrimp should now lie flat and remain straight when fried.

02 Combine the dashi, soy sauce, and mirin in a small saucepan. Bring to a brief simmer over medium heat, about 2 minutes, to cook off the alcohol from the mirin. Taste — it should be savory and round with a faint sweetness and no sharp edge. Pour into small dipping bowls and place a small mound of grated daikon alongside for guests to stir in. Make this before the batter so you are not distracted once frying starts.

03 Heat the oil to exactly 175°C / 347°F in a deep, heavy pot. While the oil heats, chill your mixing bowl in the freezer for 5 minutes. Make the batter at the last possible moment: combine the sifted flour and starch in the frozen bowl. In a separate bowl, whisk the egg yolk into the ice-cold water with a single stir. Pour the egg water into the flour in one addition. Mix with chopsticks in 4–5 deliberate strokes, turning rather than stirring — the batter must remain lumpy, streaky, and barely combined, with visible dry flour patches. Overmixing develops gluten and produces a dense, cakey crust instead of the ethereal tempura shell. Batter should be used within 10 minutes. Hold each shrimp by the tail, dip in batter, let excess drip for one second, and immediately lower it gently into the oil headfirst. Fry 2–3 minutes, turning once, until the batter is pale gold and the shrimp curled only slightly. Fry in small batches to maintain oil temperature.

04 Drain each piece upright against the edge of a wire rack for 10 seconds — holding it tail-up so excess oil runs down and off the crust. Arrange on a folded napkin or washi paper on a plate or bamboo tray, tails fanned upward. Serve with the tentsuyu in small bowls alongside grated daikon. The shrimp must be eaten immediately — tempura degrades within 2 minutes as steam from the interior migrates out and softens the shell.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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