

Chew blues

When it comes to squid and cow tongue, texture is everything.

by [Victoria Davis](#)



When it comes to food, strange and uncomfortable textures have always been a bit of a deal-breaker for me. No matter how great the actual flavor might be, I've always had a sensitive gag reflex and, for years, allowed that to dictate what food I would or would not try. Applesauce, sweet potatoes, clams and fatty ribs were just a few of the foods constantly put on the backburner in fear I might become red-faced and/or make rather unholy

noises at the table. Still, I know this fear of textures has kept me from trying foods that I could potentially enjoy. Here's three foods my instincts told me to reject.

Cow tongue: In Mexico, France and Japan, beef tongue is a classic dish, but knowing full well the texture of my own tongue, the idea of biting into a cow's is utterly disgusting (no pun intended). Thankfully, at a little Kearny Mesa joint called **Tsuruhashi Japanese BBQ** (3904 Convoy St.), I was able to cook fresh bovine tongue myself on a small grill in the middle of the table. The raw, thin slices turned from a bright pink to a greyish color. This process did help it to look more appetizing but, after finally getting to bite into it, I found that it actually tasted like bacon or Taylor ham. It was tough and definitely chewy. Since the tongue is entirely muscle and fat, I had to forcibly rip pieces off with my teeth. With the lemon sauce, it tasted even better. My downfall was I became too brave, shoved a whole tongue in my mouth and ended up gagging it up into a napkin. So yeah, small bites... always small bites.

Roasted squash: Even the name sounds mushy. I had only ever known squash to be a big yellow pile of stringy mash that would cause my eyes to water as I tried to force it down. Little did I know, there's other ways to prepare and serve squash that don't result in a mushy mess. At **CUCINA urbana** (505 Laurel Street, Bankers Hill), an Italian restaurant with some California flair, the roasted squash is served in cubes, maintaining the outer layer of the vegetable. Biting into it, the center is still soft and squashy like applesauce but the crunchy exterior evens out the texture so it's easier to consume. The browned Gold Bar, Eight Ball and Patty Pan variety of squashes are locally grown and marinated with a sweet and sour apricot sauce. This dressing adds a spicy aftertaste, helping to ease the gooey substance down the gullet with a pleasant, tingling sensation. Mashed and

steamed squash will remain on my list of food enemies, but I would undeniably try CUCINA's take on it again.



Squid: Slimy tentacles with suction cups bumping against the lips as one slurps in a squid arm... that is what I pictured when I sat down at the sushi bar of Japanese restaurant, **Nobu** (207 5th Ave., Downtown). I watched whole plates of sea urchins and octopus arms being served in baskets and came very close to chickening out. Luckily, biting into the squid sushi roll was like sinking my teeth into butter. The sushi was made, not with the tentacles, but with the squid's mantle (the largest part of the body). The arms are removed from the Yariqa squid, the body is cleaned out, cooked for one minute and then put on ice. The chef in front of me sliced up little pieces of the mantle and filled it with white rice. It was slimy, certainly, but it was easy to chew. In fact, the more I gnawed, the creamier the squid got. It felt like I was eating a wet, overcooked noodle. The problem was the squid never actually broke up, so it essentially had to be swallowed whole. My sushi never resurfaced, so I count that as a success.