

Plant-Based Nutrition Class #3: Life After Cheese!

There are some good commercial vegan cheeses like Daiya brand. But you can make your own delicious plant-based “cheeses” to use as dips and spreads, and to serve on pasta, grains or potatoes. Most homemade non-dairy cheeses use light-colored beans, nuts or seeds, or tofu as the main ingredient, along with such items as nutritional yeast, red bell pepper, sun-dried tomatoes, mustard, or turmeric for added flavor, nutrition, and the familiar yellow or orange color of cheese. The possibilities are endless; you can make up your own combinations or try variations on the recipes given below. Three somewhat unusual ingredients found in these recipes are nutritional yeast, tahini, and miso; see below for more information on these. A food processor is required for most of the recipes.

GEE WHIZ SPREAD (Jo Stepaniak)

1½ c cooked or canned white beans, drained
½ c pimiento or roasted red pepper pieces, drained
1/3 c nutritional yeast flakes*
3 T fresh lemon juice
3 T tahini**
½ t each onion powder, salt, and brown mustard

Place all ingredients in a food processor and process until the mixture is completely smooth. The finished product should be very thick, smooth, and creamy, with an orange color.

*Nutritional yeast is a powder/flake substance available in bulk at natural food stores; it may be available on the shelf in a jar or bag at Wegmans Nature’s Marketplace. It’s high in minerals and B vitamins and has a delicious cheesy flavor. Don’t confuse this with baker’s or brewer’s yeast.

**Tahini, or sesame seed butter, is found in the international (Middle Eastern—it’s an ingredient in hummus and baba ghanoush) and natural food stores or sections.

TUSCAN CHEESE SPREAD

(from Neal Barnard M.D.’s *Power Foods for the Brain*)

2 cups cooked or canned cannellini (white kidney) beans, drained
1 clove garlic, minced
½ t ground black pepper
Dash of salt
8 to 10 sundried tomatoes (not oil-packed), soaked in water and drained

Combine in food processor. Add fresh or dried herbs (opt.).

CREAM CHEESE (Robin Robertson)

1 cup raw cashews, soaked at least 4 hours and drained
2 tbsp fresh lemon juice
1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
1 tsp agave nectar
1 tsp light or white miso
1/2 tsp salt
6 oz firm silken tofu (comes in aseptic package)

Place all ingredients except tofu in food processor and blend. Add silken tofu and blend until smooth.

In recipes: t=teaspoon, T=tablespoon, c=cup

CASHEW CHEESE (Rae Sikora, plantpeacedaily.org)

1 c raw cashews
4 oz pimiento or roasted red peppers
½ c lemon juice
6 T nutritional yeast*
½ t each salt and garlic powder
1 t onion powder

Blend cashews in food processor until powdery. Add rest of ingredients and process until very smooth.

SWEET CASHEW CREAM CHEESE (Miyoko Schinner)

2 cups raw cashews, soaked in water for 3 -8 hrs and drained
½ cup water
2 tbsp plain nondairy yogurt, homemade or store-bought
Pinch of salt

Combine the ingredients in a blender and process until smooth and creamy, stopping occasionally to scrape down the sides of the blender jar as necessary. Transfer the mixture to a clean glass bowl or container, cover, and let rest at room temperature for 24 to 48 hours, depending on the temperature of the room and how sharp a flavor you want. Cover and store in the refrigerator. It will get firmer as it chills.

LOX AND CREAM CHEESE

In a food processor, combine 8 oz. of Sweet Cashew Cream Cheese with 1 finely torn sheet of nori, ½ roughly chopped roasted red bell pepper, ½ tsp of salt, and a few drops of liquid smoke. Process until combined. Enjoy on a bagel.

SUN-DRIED TOMATOES AND GARLIC CREAM CHEESE

In a food processor, combine 8 oz. of Sweet Cashew Cream Cheese, ½ cup reconstituted sun-dried tomatoes, 2 to 4 cloves of garlic, and salt to taste, and process until a desired consistency is achieved. Serve on crackers or bread.

ARTICHOKE AND WHITE BEAN ALFREDO (adapted from Robin Robertson, *Quick-Fix Vegan*)

3 cloves garlic
½ tsp salt and 1/4 tsp ground black pepper
1 jar marinated artichoke hearts, reserving juice
1 can white beans, undrained
1/3 cup nutritional yeast*
½ cup soy creamer or soy milk (optional)
2 tbsp minced fresh parsley
1 tbsp lemon juice
2 tsp Dijon or spicy brown mustard

Blend all ingredients in food processor. Add artichoke marinade as needed to achieve desired consistency. Makes enough sauce for 1 lb. of dry pasta, cooked.

4-INGREDIENT CHEESE (Maribeth Abrams)

1 can white beans, drained
2 tbsp cashew butter
1/3 cup nutritional yeast
1/2 cup salsa

Mix ingredients in food processor or blender. Nacho style!

CASHEW RICOTTA (Adapted from Moskowitz and Romero, *Veganomicon*. Really good, even eaten with a spoon!)

1/2 c raw cashews
2 t lemon juice
2 T olive oil
2 cloves garlic
1 pound firm tofu
1 1/2 t basil
1 t salt

Blend the cashews through garlic in a food processor until creamy. It's okay if it has small nut particles. Add the rest and process. Use instead of dairy ricotta in lasagna & other recipes.

TOFU FILLING (Maribeth Abrams, Tofu 1-2-3)

1 lb firm tofu
2 T miso, preferably light miso***
2 T fresh lemon juice
1 t dried dill, oregano, basil, or a mix
1 T nutritional yeast (optional)
1/4 t ground nutmeg (optional)
1 pkg frozen chopped spinach, thawed (optional)

Combine all ingredients in food processor and mix until smooth. Use instead of dairy ricotta in lasagna or anywhere else you want a mild creamy cheese. This and the previous recipe can be used to make a spreadable cheese; feel free to add diced sun-dried tomatoes, roasted red peppers, Kalamata olives, or artichoke hearts.

***Fermented soybean paste, quite salty and with considerable health benefits. Available in tubs in refrigerator case of natural food store or section.

EXPERIMENT with making creamy pasta sauces:

No meal is easier than pasta with sauce from a jar. There are many vegan varieties, such as Newman's Own Marinara, and Wegmans Tomato Basil, Mushroom, or Arrabiata (spicy!) (always check labels, though, as ingredients have a way of changing). Sprinkle on vegan Parmesan, either commercial or homemade (see recipe sheet #1). But you can also make a "cheesier" spaghetti sauce with the following combinations:

-Combine tofu in food processor with roasted red peppers, sun-dried tomatoes (roughly chopped), or bottled spaghetti sauce, or some of all three. If the sun-dried tomatoes are not oil-packed, add hot water to soften them before chopping. This is a good place to use silken tofu (the shelf-stable kind in aseptic package) because it is smooth and creamy.

-Combine canned white beans with the same three ingredients, any or all. Make sure sun-dried tomatoes are soft enough to chop and blend properly.

-With both of these combinations, add more water as necessary to get the desired consistency for pasta sauce; some of the liquid can be wine or vermouth. Add chopped Kalamata olives and artichoke hearts if you like, and if you use marinated artichoke hearts, add the marinade. Gently heat the sauce before adding to cooked pasta. Don't forget salad and lots of veggies either added to the sauce or on the side!

PESTO SAUCE (with no-oil option)

2 c packed fresh basil leaves or 1 bag triple-washed spinach or a mix (the spinach keeps the pesto green)
2 T extra-virgin olive oil (optional)
1 c walnuts or pine nuts or a mix
2 cloves garlic
1/3 cup light miso*** (optional)
3/4 t salt (can be omitted if using miso)
Water as necessary (about 2/3 cup)

Combine all ingredients in a food processor and blend until smooth. Serve with 1 lb. pasta any type, cooked al dente according to package directions.

SESAME NOODLES

1/2 c tahini or natural peanut butter or combination
1/2 c water or more as needed
2 T rice vinegar or cider vinegar
2 T soy sauce or Bragg's Liquid Aminos
1/2 t garlic powder
1 t toasted sesame oil (optional)

In a large serving bowl, gradually whisk the tahini or peanut butter with the water until it takes on a creamy color and fluffy consistency. Add the remaining ingredients. Makes sauce for 1 lb. dried pasta cooked according to package directions. Add more liquid if needed; can include lime juice or apple juice. Add veggies like sliced scallions or red bell pepper, grated carrot or red cabbage, or thawed green peas for more color, flavor, and nutrition.

CHICKPEA UNTUNA (Allison Rivers Samson, Allison's Gourmet)

2 cans garbanzo beans (chick peas), drained
1/4 red onion, finely chopped
1/2 c celery, finely chopped
1 small clove garlic, minced (optional)
1/4 c dill pickle, finely chopped
2 T nori seaweed flakes or dulse flakes****
1/2 to 1 c vegan mayonnaise
3/4 t salt and 1/2 t black pepper

Makes enough "untuna" for six sandwiches.

****If the seaweed flakes are unavailable, this recipe is still delicious without them; but they add a "fishy" flavor dimension from its true source. Hint: fish eat seaweed.