



The No-Recipe Guide
to Plant-Based Eating®

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Chapter 2

Grocery Shopping

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Grocery Shopping

Become an enthusiastic grocery store explorer

According to the 2017 book, *Grocery: The Buying and Selling of Food in America*, by Michael Ruhlman, an American supermarket stocks 40- to 50-thousand individual items, compared to the early 1900s of about 200.

Worried about what to eat if you reduced or eliminated your reliance on meat or dairy products? Well, there are enough remaining products, even in the oldest grocery stores, to provide sustenance. You will not go hungry on a whole-food, plant-based diet.



Selecting plant-based foods

The dirty little secret of a plant-based diet is that any plant-based food you buy can be combined with any other to make a tasty meal, hot, warm, or cold.

Cold salads can be mixed with anything and become especially tasty under some type of dressing, from lemon juice or vinegar to dressings mixed with spices and herbs. Recipes are not required to throw foods together, although recipes are useful when you want to explore new tastes.

Hot or warm plant-based foods are also the result of mixing any edible plant with any other edible plant. Do mashed potatoes mixed with raspberries sound tasty? Well, they are. How about chopped apples in soup? The only combination limits are those you cannot dream up.

Bakery and meat preparation rely on rules that create chemical reactions, such as needed to raise dough, or heat timed to kill bacteria and tenderize flesh. Plant-based meal preparation does not. Don't avoid cookbooks, but free your mind from thinking that you are required to consult them.

So, where do you find plant-based food? Many are found in the produce departments of your local stores, with international trade, transportation, and refrigeration being responsible for increasing the range of products available. Then there are refrigerated, frozen, dried, and canned (or *boxed*) foods displayed throughout a store. The only areas you'll actively avoid are the meat and dairy cases.

What might not be familiar to people who primarily dine on the Western diet are beans and grains, many of which are staples outside of the USA. Grains are *plant seeds*, all of which require some boiling to soften, which I discuss later in this book. For now, increase your knowledge of grains and beans through the following organizations:

Whole Grains Council (www.WholeGrainsCouncil.org): Refer to their list of “whole grains from A to Z.” You will also find detailed information about rice.

US Dried Bean Council (www.usDryBeans.com): Click on “Industry,” then “Bean Varieties” for a complete list.

Using starches, veggies, and fruit

When meals evolve around meat (including eggs) and dairy, meal planning usually involves around picking meat first, and then figuring out what to serve with it. In a plant-based diet, meal planning might start by selecting a starchy food, like white or sweet potatoes, grains (such as rice, bulgur, oatmeal, whole-grain products, etc.), squashes, or beans, then thinking about what would go with it.

Keeping in mind that anything in the plant-world can go with anything else, your next consideration for enhancing your starches might include sauces (or items from which sauces can be made), veggies that can be eaten raw or cooked, fruit, and/or nuts (often used as a garnish). For a more concrete example, think of Chinese carryout meals that consist of a sauce and veggies on top of rice.

Popular sauces can be as simple as lemon juice and Balsamic vinegar, or as complex as soup, which I regard as a type of interesting sauce that can be ladled over starches of any type (or the starches can be put into the soup itself).

Dr. McDougall's book, *The Starch Solution*, recommends that meals consist of 70% starchy foods, and 30% of everything else, with each entire meal consisting of plant-based items. Yes, plant-based meals often consist of fresh, leafy salads. It is common to accompany a salad, however, with a starch of some type, such as a thick, whole-grain bread. Starches contain three-times as many carbohydrates as non-starchy vegetables and provide enough calories overall to sustain daily activities.

Shopping

Even if you live in a very small community, finding food is easy, although you may have tight budget issues. The list that follows suggest outlets that provide items for plant-based meals, whether local or in a big city, tips on how specialty outlets and mega-stores can best serve you, and what to seek if you are on a tight budget:

Farmer's Markets: Farmer's markets are often festive, with produce, flowers, bakery, and crafts for sale. If you like a vendor (*farmer*), get its contact information. Many have websites that lists the products it sells, its outlets, and partners. If you are concerned about the source of its produce, ask whether they are GMO or non-GMO, its growing practices (*organic* or *non-organic*), and the types of pesticides and fertilizer it uses. **Budget Tip:** Limit your buying to only what you'll eat, no matter how attractive the produce looks. Avoid generating waste at home just because your eyes are bigger than your consuming needs.

Huge and Mega Grocery Stores: Mega shops are stores with 40- to 50-thousand products. Stores in this size-range often sell "store prepared" products, such as cleaned and sliced vegetables, meals, salads, and bakery, as well as many products that were once the exclusive domain of "natural" and "health food" stores. **Budget Tip:** I am especially fond of packaged and cleaned veggies sold in mega-shops as sanitary procedures are far better than those in my own small kitchen. Pre-cleaned items save time, money, and reduce household waste.

Whole Foods Market and "Health Food" Specialty Stores: Standard grocery stores, Whole Foods Market, and Health Food Specialty Shops are becoming increasingly similar and competitive. I like Whole Foods Market and specialty stores because they often introduce unique products. Whole Foods Markets sell prepared foods in their deli departments that are plant-based in nature. Study their

selections to learn how these food-mixtures look, taste, and are made. **Budget Tip:** Even if you cannot afford to buy pre-made food, these items provide ideas as to what you can make at home. As an educational bonus, Whole Foods Market posts ingredient lists in front of their offerings.

Trader Joe's: This is a nation-wide chain that primarily sells its own branded products, which proprot to be organic and non-GMO. Pay attention to its freezer sections where you can buy many vegetarian dinners and prepared that may meet your new eating requirements. If you are first starting your plant-based diet, this is the place to go for ideas. **Budget Tip:** This company is known for its low prices, but its interesting variety of food might entice you to buy more than you need and it does not sell bulk items that are commonly found in mega-grocery stores such as Walmart's.

Walmart: Surprisingly, Walmart aggressively competes with every type of grocery vendor known and should not be ignored. Its frozen and canned goods departments are just short of awesome. **Budget Tip:** This is also the store where you are most likely to find 25 to 50 pounds of rice or beans, both products of which are easy on food budgets.

Sam's Club, BJ's, and Costco: Amazingly, warehouse clubs sell a wide-range of whole-grain, plant-based products in addition to their standard sweet and salty snacks. As these clubs also serve restaurants, bodegas, and other small shops, buying in bulk can save you tremendous amounts of cash. I am particularly fond of Sam's Club's fresh and frozen food departments for their low price-points, quality, and receipts which let you track spending. **Note:** As of early 2018, media outlets report that these types of stores are becoming less popular with people under 40 and some are turning into warehouses for online-shopping fulfillment, and others are simply closing.

Spending on a tight budget

Plant-based dining is surprisingly inexpensive no matter where you shop! Buying plant-based items keeps your budget and health in check because you no longer need to buy expensive meat, dairy products, and salty snacks. The following staples hold costs down:

- **Potatoes (white or yellow):** These can be prepared in hundreds of ways, combined with fruit and veggies, prepared spicy, sweet, or salty, and be consumed at any temperature.
- **Rice:** Brown rice is preferred in a plant-based diet. That said, rice is often sold very affordably in 10-, 25-, and 50-pound sacks.
- **Beans:** Both canned and dried are the world's biggest bargain, especially dried beans that are often sold in large sacks.
- **Oatmeal:** This grain, which can be sold in bulk, mixes well with vegetables and fruit, and can be served hot, warm, or cold.
- **Bulk Onions:** Any veggie or fruit with a long shelf-life that comes packaged in a large sack is a good deal.
- **Dressings, Condiments, Vinegars, Herbs, and Spices:** While prepared condiments and dressings might seem expensive, only small amounts are needed to enhance the blandness of starches, such as potatoes, rice, beans, etc. Pepper (such as *cayenne*) and mustard, for example, enhance the flavor of many dishes, with small amounts going a long way. Tomato-based products, which dominate canned- and bottled-good displays, also extend meal-preparation possibilities.

Reading labels

Some plant-based eaters are very particular about what they eat and ritualistically avoid certain items. Others are more liberal in their interpretation of “*reducing* or *eliminating*.” I, for example, fall into the *reducing* category as I use eggs to make and decorate sugar cookies.

Under all circumstances, carefully read prepared-or-canned food labels before you buy a product to make sure it meets your needs.

When you start your new dietary lifestyle, loosen your self-imposed rules until you are used to substituting plant-based items for, say, hamburgers dripping with cheese. It took me quite a while, in fact, to realize that I could order a flat pizza without cheese, but loaded with veggies; a delicious baked combination.



Considering frozen food

While fresh salads are appealing, frozen food provides the same or better nutrients and does so often at a lower price. Frozen foods are especially handy to toss into soup or use as the basis of a sauce. Although I prefer fresh broccoli, cauliflower, corn and blueberries, I always have some in the freezer to round out cooked meals. Many people prefer frozen fruit for use in hot oatmeal or smoothies as their package life is longer and more reliable than fresh.

Under all circumstances, avoid buying “frosty” frozen food. If possible, carry frozen foods in an insulated bag from your grocery store. If you find your food becoming frosty, repackage it, then quickly stick it back in the freezer to maintain its quality and appearance. If, of course, you plan on using it for soup, appearance does not matter that much, but the quality of your food will be much better if you initially prohibit frost from forming.

Buying sauces, dressings, condiments, and spices

Plant-based meals are enlivened by sauces, dressings, juices, vinegars, and condiments. You’ll be surprised at how much lemon juice as well as balsamic vinegar adds taste to grains. Commercial dressings do the same thing, even over potatoes! Just remember, dressings are not soup. A little goes a long way and a tablespoon of something should not be mistaken for a cup.

Tomato sauce as well as canned or diced tomatoes create a healthy sauce to use over grains, whole-grain noodles, potatoes and even mashed beans. They can even be used to extend soup and punch up the flavor of broth-based dishes.

Condiments are also good over veggies. Some are very salty, so if that is a concern, use sparingly. For interesting products, check ethnic aisles in grocery stores for items made by Mexican, South American, Indian, Pakistani, Korean, Japanese, Greek, Turkish, Chinese, Italians and African cuisines. Sampling these condiments educate you on what herbs and spices you like and provide inspiration to combine “do it yourself” ingredients in recipe-free dishes.

Consuming crackers, crunches, and snacks

Luckily, today whole wheat crackers, blue corn chips, and other whole-grain products are becoming common and good to eat with hummus. Equally common and possibly healthier are clean, sliced and diced veggies which are sold in the fresh food sections of many grocery stores, some pre-sliced and cleaned, and can also be dipped into hummus.

Salt-free nuts are also useful. For sweetness, I often mix raisins, nuts, and chocolate chips for a good carry-with-me snack or topping for oatmeal.

Air-popped popcorn is also an excellent, high-fiber, low-calorie treat. To season, mist the popcorn with water so the seasoning sticks, then shake salt or spice like cayenne pepper to the bowl.

Investing in beans, beans, and more beans

Beans are a popular staple for many cultures, but can be a novelty for Westerners. Luckily, now that hummus is common, people are increasingly likely to add beans in their diets in many forms – beans in soups, mashed beans, bean spreads, and even cold-bean salads are very acceptable.

If you find beans a bit bland, combine them with sauces, herbs, and spices, with hot sauce being very popular.

Canned beans are inexpensive, but for more flavor and even less cost, re-constitute dry beans. Most can be cooked within an hour (overnight soaking is not necessary). Once cooked, they can be mashed, turned into soup, lightly fried into patties, or simply combined with other things into what are commonly known as “bean and rice dishes.”

My favorite beans are physically small and cook quickly. These include pinto, black, and white beans, plus lentils.

Sprinkling herbs and spices

If you are familiar with world-wide cuisines and the herbs and spices that make them unique, buy those herbs and spices, then toss them into your veggie dishes. If you are not familiar with those things, buy pre-packaged condiments and sauces that represent the type of ethnic cooking you are beginning to like. Read the ingredient lists on packages, then extract from those lists the things you think would perk up your own veggie dishes. Most grocery stores sell a wide range of herbs and spices. If not, buy from online vendors, or visit ethnic enclaves for authentic flavorings.

Buying unfamiliar veggies

Some grocery stores sell veggies not found everywhere in our nation, especially in states that are home to a wide variety of ethnicities. The following example lists veggies sold in Northwestern New Jersey to serve our Latino, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Turkish communities:

Plantains, Yucca, Guava, Cactus Leaves, Calabaza, Malanga Kaboche Squash, Chayote, Yautia Lila, White Yautia, Batata, Tomatillos, Saifun (bean threads), Daikon, Nagaimo, Myoga, Gobo, Kongnamul, Putbaechu, Celeriac, Bok Choy, Bamboo Shoots, and Bitter Melon

To broaden your appreciation of unfamiliar veggies, select a single item, then ask a shop clerk how to prepare it, or search the web for advice. YouTube videos are especially helpful in this regard.

Reducing spoilage

Farm-fresh vegetables and fruit are so attractive that it is not uncommon for people to buy more than they can easily clean or eat. If you find your fresh products spoiling before consumption, learn portion control, even if you yearn to buy bushels of produce.

While I love supporting farmers, if you have limited preparation and storage space, consider buying pre-washed and packaged veggies from your local grocery store. Buying what you need is better than tossing what you thought you needed when getting swept up by the romance of a farm stand.

Also consider buying bottled, canned, and frozen products. Use these as your “back-up” when you run low on fresh produce, or your budget needs trimming.

Always label the food you buy and store with the date of purchase. Office supply stores sell nice little self-stick labels, with enough labels on sheets to keep you supplied for years.

If you simply do not touch your frozen, canned, or bottled foods for 6 months, that is a warning that you are not interested in eating it. Assuming the food is still good, donate it to someone or an organization that can use it and do not buy those products again.

Always eat the oldest food first and make a practice of not generating waste by knowing exactly what is in your refrigerator. I recommend storing food in clear containers, glass or clear deli-containers, so you can always see inside. Labels, of course, tell you how long these foods have been stored. Make a practice of ruthlessly tossing the pre-opened things you saved for too long, even though you do not want to generate waste. Hanging on simply incubates mold.



What's Next?

Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the whole-food, plant-based eating style.

Chapter 2 re-introduces you to grocery shopping for whole-food, plant-based eaters.

Chapter 3 recommends kitchen tools most suitable for preparing whole-food, plant-based meals.

Chapter 4 shows you how to prepare foods for your whole-food, plant-based diet.

Chapter 5 discusses eating at home or *on the go* by yourself or with family and friends.

Chapter 6 examines diet and easy exercise considerations

Chapter 7 provides cookbook, website, and other recommendations



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