



The No-Recipe Guide  
to Plant-Based Eating®

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# Chapter 6

## Finding the Food

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# Finding the Food

## Let's eat!

Eating is a natural experience. We all know how to do it, and very often, many of us do too much of it!

Whole-food, plant-based eaters, however, fill their plates differently than typical Western-style eaters. Instead of centering meals on meat, with highly processed breads and fried foods on the side, they center their meals on starchy, whole-foods, such as beans or potatoes, with vegetables and/or fruit on the side.

Plant-based eaters generally eat fewer calories than Western-style eaters, although that is not guaranteed.

There are no rules for a plant-based diet other than *reduce or eliminate meat and dairy*. After you change, however, it is likely you'll lose weight, or at least avoid indigestion.

This book was written to help you *easily* adopt a plant-based diet no matter where you are. What goes on your plate, however, is entirely up to you.



## Meal planning

Here are three considerations you can use to easily figure out how to access plant-based meals no matter where you are:

### *Select a starchy food as the meal's focus*

Starchy whole-foods include potatoes of any type, yams/squashes, whole-grains (as grains or in breads or noodles), beans, and brown-rice. Including beans is especially important, although foreign to many Western-style eaters.

### *Decide whether to lose or maintain your weight*

To lose weight, you need to keep your calorie intake low and get rid of non-essentials, such as fats, oils, and sugars. Plant-based foods are naturally low in calories, but they still do have calories.

As a rule, make starchy foods less than 50% of any meal to lose weight, and 50-to-75% if you want to maintain it, given, of course, that you also go on walks or take part regularly in other exercise. Consider this guidance whether preparing a large or small meal. If you really must eat some delicious

black corn chips as a snack, for example, pair it with fruit or a vegetable. The additional low-calorie veggie will reduce your emphasis on the higher calorie food.

## *Consider where your meals are made*

- **Home:** If you regularly eat at home, you can cook your starchy food daily, or better, make more than enough at one time so you can re-heat it later or carry it with you for lunch.
- **At Work:** If you eat on the job or while traveling, with no place to prepare food, seek restaurants or other food-service shops that serve starches and veggies. Many Chinese restaurants, for example, serve brown rice, plus an abundance of steamed veggies that you can order plain. Ethnic restaurants of all types usually serve starchy foods, such as rice or beans. Plus, baked and/or mashed potatoes are common at most Western-style restaurants. There, you'll find many options in a typical "Sides" menu section to complement fresh salads listed elsewhere.
- **While Traveling:** Carry instant oatmeal, which is easy to reconstitute, and combine it with veggies (tomatoes are great) or fruit that you can buy at *quick food marts*. Hummus (mashed beans) is popular and can be eaten with any veggie or fruit (I eat it with apples). Thick, whole-grain bread, such as made by [Dave's Killer Bread](#), is also a good choice when on the road. Pair it with veggies, hummus, nut butter, or fruit. Instead of two slices, save calories by using just one slice for an open-faced sandwich.

## Making, storing and carrying food

Consider making large quantities of starchy foods to produce leftovers that you can easily re-heat. Making fresh food daily is very time consuming and the lack of prep time can cause you to give up your diet, so use prep time wisely.

Starchy foods are easier to prepare than meat and dairy dishes and are less subject to bacteria. Most starchy foods can be steamed, boiled, or baked in an hour or less, store well, and can be re-warmed in minutes. Once re-warmed, add veggies, a sauce, and/or seasoning for an ever-changing cuisine.

I recommend storing food in clear containers. I use clear plastic, reusable deli-style containers. If you want to eliminate all waste, however, glass deli-type containers can be substituted. Search Amazon or other online suppliers on the phrase [glass prep containers](#) for reasonably priced items.

Most starches can be eaten at room temperature or cold, but if you prefer to pack hot food, search on the phrase [thermal lunch containers](#) for a good selection of insulated boxes, jars, and bottles if you don't already own one.

## Restaurants, pizza, and fast food

### *Mexican restaurants*

My *go to* fast food restaurant is Taco Bell, which gets good reviews from vegetarian and vegan websites. I regularly order bean burritos without cheese and season them with cayenne pepper that I carry with me. All Mexican restaurants serve good plant-based meals, although you might need to order your meal without cheese. If you have strict rules about consuming fat in any form, check before chowing down.

### *Chinese restaurants*

Many Chinese restaurants and carryout hubs serve brown rice and plain, steamed veggies. Ask and they will pack sauces separately. If you hate cooking at home, buy a large quantity of brown rice and steamed veggies, then simply rewarm portions over the next few days.

To re-warm brown rice, boil water, then spoon the cold rice into it. After a minute, drain the rice through a strainer, and eat. Reheating brown rice in this way leaves it tasting fresh. Note, however, that white sticky rice is a different food than brown rice and has different handling characteristics.

### *Full-service restaurants*

All full-service restaurants serve starchy foods. If there is no completely assembled meal on a menu that meets your needs, order your dinner from their *sides* offerings and pare it with a cold salad. Many popular dishes include cheese. If you do not want cheese, ask to have it left out.

### *Pizza:*

Most full-service pizzerias today serve veggie pizzas, but if not, specify your toppings. You can also specify a no- or reduced-cheese pizza. Baked veggies on a tomato-sauce coated crust taste great!

### *Fast food*

Mexican restaurants serve beans, rice, and veggies, as discussed above. McDonald's and Burger King serve oatmeal and salads 24/7! For more information, check menus on the Internet. My fallback food is the French Fry. I can't say it is healthy, but at least it is a potato if nothing else is available.



## More . . .

For ideas about where to eat, use the following phrases to search the web: [vegetarian fast food](#) and [vegan fast food](#). The difference between vegetarian and vegan is whether restaurant outlets serve meals with cheese and eggs, or not. Ethnic restaurants generally serve plant-based meals, but again, depending on your own dietary dictates, check whether those dishes include fats and dairy. Indian and Turkish food are great, but often include dairy, such as yogurt or milk. I eat it, but you might not.

## Canned and frozen foods

Canned and frozen foods, such as soup, broths, beans, fruit, and veggies, should become mainstays.

Yes, if you live on a farm, stay at home to clean and can veggies and fruit, have a pantry to keep it all, and live an idyllic life by eating nothing but “garden-to-mouth” foods, lavish yourself. If not, you’ll appreciate the canned and frozen foods sold in grocery stores across the nation.

I use canned food as an ingredient that I add to other things. I add, for example, my own onions, green peppers, and tomatoes to bottled spaghetti sauce, plus add canned diced tomatoes to just about everything else.

Keep in mind that any veggie or fruit can be added to anything else, hot or cold, without need for a recipe. While canned items might not be the perfect substitute for fresh foods, they can make meal preparation a breeze. Here are some examples:

- Add anything you’d like (fresh, canned, or frozen) to a can of soup, including a different can of soup, beans, mixed veggies, rice, noodles, etc.
- Add a can of soup to bottled spaghetti sauce for a new taste. Expand on that with even more veggies (fresh, frozen, or canned).
- Use soup and broth as gravy for rice, potatoes, yams, and even whole-grain bread.

To thicken the liquid, transfer a tablespoon of flour (of your choice) to a small strainer, then very *slowly* shake it over the liquid while rapidly stirring. As the liquid heats, the flour makes it thicker.

- Add canned veggies of your choice to canned soup to make a healthier mix.
- To thicken broth, add mashed veggies to it.
- Add canned beans to soup to give it a higher protein content, plus starchy calories. Pour the mixture you just made over noodles, rice, potatoes, etc., as an interesting sauce or gravy.
- For those of you who are reducing your salt intake, but need the convenience of canned soup, double or more the volume of non-salted broth or other liquid (water used for cooking rice, for example) to the original product. The ratio of salt per cup will be greatly reduced.
- If you are in a hurry but only have frozen veggies, run them under hot water before adding them to your cooking pot.
- Heat, then add fruit that was frozen to breakfast grains, such as oatmeal.

## Fresh cut and packaged foods

While I love the chef's kitchens designed for happy homeowners on HGTV, I live in a 750-square-foot co-op apartment with a kitchen area about the size of a large closet.

My kitchen is small like many on America's North-East coast, while yours may be bigger. Huge, truly comfortable kitchens, however, are probably rare and pantries next to non-existent. I mention this because cleaning, cutting, preparing, and storing veggies takes up a lot of space. Short of moving to a new home or apartment, pre-cut and packaged foods available at many grocery stores help solve problems related to organization, prep, and storage.

If you have not yet spent time in your local grocery store's fresh food area, do so now and contemplate how it can help support your whole-food, plant-based dining needs.



Obviously, farmers' stands provide additional shopping options and delicious fresh veggies. If, however, your home is short of space, relying on prepared fresh food saves time and reduces waste.

## Finger foods and snacks

We are all used to ravenous mid-afternoon hunger. It's the time we seek candy, chips, and donuts, especially when that is the only food available.

Eating fresh fruit and veggies might not be a satisfying snack when what we really need are calories. Low-calorie nibbles, no matter how healthy they are, do not completely satisfy hunger.

I recommend snacking on the densest whole-grain bread available, combined with fruit or vegetables as well as hummus, nut butter and/or fruit jam. One standard slice of bread comes in at around 150 calories and combined with other whole foods is more satisfying than veggies or fruit alone.

**Note:** Use hummus or a nut-butter to stick things, like fruits or vegetables, to a slice of bread.

Other snacks include air-popped and microwaved plain popcorn. I recommend the [Presto PowerPop for the Microwave](#) as delivering the most consistently fresh taste without subjecting you to unexpected burns. Love salt or other flavorings? Mist your popped corn with water, then shake on the seasoning of your choice. It'll stick! My favorite seasoning is cayenne pepper.

Lemon juice and vinaigrettes also make good popcorn flavors. Invest in a food-grade mister, such as [Cookisy](#) and use it to spray dressings of your own creation.



## Breads and tortillas

Consider using thick, whole-grain breads combined with veggies or fruit for robust small meals that will stop your hunger immediately.

By eating a single hunk of whole grain bread, you fill up on your calorie requirements without spending much meal preparation time. That slice can easily be used in place of the candy-bar or donut you used to eat when you needed a snack.

Whole-grain bread can be eaten plain, covered with hummus, sprayed with balsamic vinegar, coated with a nut-butter, spread with jam, or paired with a juicy veggie like tomatoes or cucumbers. Even flat whole-grain breads covered with tomato sauce and roasted veggies make excellent snacks, hot as well as cold.

If multi-grain bread is not available in your area, consider buying a bread machine and making it yourself. [Hamilton Beach](#) makes excellent bread machines that sell for under \$50.

Pre-packaged whole-grain breads might be easier to find, with [Dave's Killer Bread](#) being a good choice. A Google search on the phrase "[whole grain pre-packaged bread](#)" as well as "[whole grain flatbread](#)" turns up more suggestions.

### Tortillas:

Few people in the West make their own tortillas and pre-packaged tortillas, unfortunately, require extra work to make them soft. When used to rap around food, I like them thin, flexible, and moist.

The best filling for tortillas are beans, rice, salsa, and hot peppers, but almost anything can be folded in or placed on top of a tortilla.

For those of you who need to bring a dry tortilla back to life, consider these varied suggestions:

- Bring water in a flat pan to a boil. Using tongs, place the tortilla in the water for about 30-to-60 seconds, then remove. Cover with a damp paper or cloth towel to keep the tortilla warm and flexible.
- Wrap the tortilla in a wet paper towel, then quickly heat it in a microwave. Consider doing this with more efficiency in a microwave steaming dish.
- Dampen a dry tortilla using a clean, water-filled spray-bottle, cover with a damp paper towel, and quickly heat it in a microwave dish.
- Steam a dry tortilla using any of the cookware seen in the picture. Put the tortilla on a grate, in a steamer basket, or some type of a strainer, then heat for a 30 to 60 seconds over boiling water.
- To heat a frozen burrito (like those found in a grocer's freezer case), first defrost, then lightly steam it in a microwave or steaming device. Frozen tortillas tend to develop tough edges when heated, so keep heating time to a minimum.



# Beans

People used to the Western diet are not well informed about the versatility of beans and lentils. If that is your case, spend time on the Internet searching on these subjects: “[bean dishes](#),” “[bean dishes vegan](#),” and “[bean dishes vegetarian](#).”

## Mashed

Mashed pinto beans are called *frijoles refritos* in Spanish, and *refried beans* in English. After cooking, however, any type of bean can be mashed, not just pinto beans.

While it is possible to mash beans in a blender, liquid and/or fat must be mixed to reduce their viscosity (*thickness*). Unless you are cooking for a crowd, mash beans by hand using a masher that has a flat, circular mashing plate. Add liquid as needed.

## Deskin beans

All beans are encased in an edible skin. Many popular bean dishes, in fact, are prepared after the bean skin is removed, which leaves an ultra-smooth substance, like peeled, mashed potatoes.

If you like your home-made mashed bean dishes ultra-smooth, and do not want to remove the skins bean-by-bean, search the Internet on the subject “[How to deskin beans](#),” then watch demonstration videos.

## Online references

[Epicurious.com](#) produced an excellent guide on how to cook beans. Read it here at [Epicurious's Myth-Busting Guide to Cooking Beans](#)

The following links also provide helpful guides on bean preparation:

- [How to Cook Beans – a guide by Melissa Clark](#): This article covers how beans are cooked, plus information on individual beans and how to use seasonings. [NYTimes.com](#)
- [How to Cook Beans on the Stove by Emma Christensen](#): This article shows you how to prepare beans on the stove and includes a video and slide-show. Instructions could not be easier! [theKitchen.com](#)
- [Authentic Mexican Refried Beans](#) by Isabel Eats. [IsabelEats.com](#)
- For the advice I love to give, read [No Recipe Required](#) by [The Bean Institute](#)



## Other tips

- Canned beans are inexpensive and are great timesavers because it is not necessary to hydrate them from scratch.
- Prepared beans from cans or those you hydrate yourself can be added to a salad, soup, or grain, and be eaten hot or cold.
- Eat mashed beans like mashed potatoes, although probably not in the same quantity. Once mashed, beans can be shaped into a patty and fried or grilled.
- To make hummus without buying all the traditional ingredients, simply mash chickpeas (or whatever type of beans you have on hand) and stir them into pre-made hummus to preserve the hummus taste. Note that unless you deskin your beans, the resulting mixture will be slightly lumpy.
- To change the taste of store-bought hummus, add finely chopped ingredients to it. If the hummus is too thick, thin with fresh lemon juice or a touch of olive oil.
- Stuff mashed beans, plus salsa and/or an avocado into soft tortillas.
- To keep tortillas flexible, serve them in a covered tortilla warmer, lined with a paper towel. Tortillas can be stacked in a warmer but layer a piece of parchment paper between every three or four to keep them from sticking together. If you don't have a tortilla warmer, simply wrap warm tortillas with a kitchen towel.
- Warm a refrigerated or room temperature burrito in a microwave by first wrapping it in a wet paper towel. Consider using a dedicated microwave steamer for this purpose.

## Oatmeal and grains

Like with beans, Western-style diners are usually unaware of how easy it is to work with grains, and instead only know about oatmeal as a breakfast food. If you want to reduce the time hunting for plant-based food, start relying on eating oatmeal at any time of the day. Whatever you can do with oatmeal, you can also do with other grains. See Chapter 7, *Summary and Links*, for more resources.

- Instant and regular oatmeal are based on the same whole grain. Instant oatmeal, however, is simply diced into smaller pieces that can absorb water faster.
- You do not need an exact measurement of water to make non-instant cooked oatmeal. Like with rice, bring a pot of water to boil. Spoon in oatmeal. Let boil, then drain the excess water away (or use the water for something else).
- To date, oatmeal is served at McDonalds. If your friends stop there, but you don't want a burger, order oatmeal instead.
- Carry packets of instant oatmeal with you wherever you go. Hot tap water is all you need to constitute the grain and when moist, oatmeal can be combined with any type of fruit or veggie and it makes the base of a tasty plant-based meal.
- Cold oatmeal can be spooned into a fresh veggie salad.

- Use oatmeal to thicken soup, broth, and sauces.

Other grains include such things as rice, barley, wheat, and quinoa. All can be boiled, combined with anything, eaten hot or cold, sweet or sour, and made into the base of a good meal. Whole grains can also be mixed into bread, a form that makes it easy for them to be eaten when away from a kitchen.

For more information about grains, visit the Whole Grain Council's website. ([WholeGrainsCouncil.org](http://WholeGrainsCouncil.org)).

## Potatoes and squash

Like beans, after being cooked, potatoes and squash can be eaten hot, warm or cold. All can be added to soup or broth as a thickening agent, or just the opposite, soup and broth can be poured over them like a gravy.

### *Making mashed potatoes*

Boil until the potatoes can be crushed by lightly pressing a fork into them. Mash with a potato masher until lumps are gone. Note that with or without the skin on, small chunks of potatoes boil (or bake) faster than whole potatoes. Check during the cooking process so you do not over-boil and turn them mushy.

On a Western-diet, you might add butter and hot milk to the mashed potatoes to bring them to the consistency you like. Without butter and hot milk, you can moisten those freshly mashed potatoes to taste with lemon juice, broth, soup of any type, water from boiled beans or rice, or any type of moisture you can think of, including tomato juice.

### *Making squash*

**Squash cooked in its skin:** Remove seeds, then bake or steam pieces of squash still in their skin. When soft, scrape the pulp from the skin to eat. Drizzle dressing of any type, lemon juice, or Balsamic vinegar over it to taste.

**Squash cooked after skin is removed:** Remove seeds prior to cooking. Squash is stringy and needs to be whipped a bit while crushing the pulp. When soft from steaming or boiling, mash and whip the pulp with a fork. Spoon small amounts of dressing, lemon juice, or Balsamic vinegar over the mashed squash to taste.

**Baked cubed squash without skin:** Remove and discard seeds. Bake chunks at 350- to 400-degrees until fork-soft. While baking, lightly coat squash chunks with olive oil, or simply spray them with water from a food-grade spray bottle. Season to taste. Note that food-grade spray bottles are glass and can be sanitized.

You can mix any veggie or fruit into these starchy foods. I'm fond of mixing them with corn, for example, but peas and onions are good, too. Mashed squash and potatoes can even be mixed together!

The skins on all types of potatoes are easy to remove and potatoes are easy to chop or dice. Best, with or without skin, all potatoes can be eaten whole without any other preparation after they reach the right temperature through boiling or baking.

Squash skins, however, are hard to cut, time consuming to remove, and make it difficult to remove their seeds and pulp. While you don't need a recipe to prepare squash (just boil or bake the pulp), getting to that pulp is hard. If you haven't attempted it before, watch a video, such as [All About Butternut Squash: How to Peel, Seed, & Prepare](#) by Tori Avey, to help you understand carving techniques and avoid injuries.

## Nuts and seeds

Mix a few non-salted nuts and seeds, especially walnuts and almonds, into your food. A few nuts or seeds add protein, fiber, and a satisfying crunch to a meal. They are high in calories, however, so don't treat them like a snack-food as they are *real food*, not candy. Yes, nuts are used in candy, but not as a nutritional benefit.

The most economical way to buy nuts is to purchase non-salted nuts in large bags, then mix a few handfuls of various types in a small container to keep on a counter for easy access. Store the remainder in the frig because nut oil goes rancid when left in a warm environment for too long.

The same is true for seeds. Even though seeds are highly nutritious, eat sparingly. While excessively high calories per seed are good for birds, it will quickly put pounds on you.

If you can't buy reasonably-priced nuts and seeds in your area, search the web. There are several online vendors that specialize, such as [Nuts.com](#) and [NutsStop.com](#). Use the search phrase [wholesale bulk nuts](#) to find additional vendors.

## Sauces, dressings, and condiments

Most of us think of salad dressing as a sauce that goes over a cold veggie salad. Given, however, that a whole-food, plant-based meal is largely a veggie salad, dressings can be spooned over almost everything you eat, cold or hot.

The components of sauces, dressings, and condiments must measure up to your own needs, of course, but there are enough products around for you to find something even if you are very selective about ingredients. If you want to create your own from scratch, start with a tasty vinegar or fresh lemon juice, pour over other veggies, like tomatoes, celery, cucumbers, or onions, let sit, then taste. It is not necessary to add oil to your homemade dressing, but if you don't mind, a tablespoon of olive oil can improve the taste.

In the West, condiments are commonly thought of as ketchup and mustard, but many more types are available throughout the world. Indian condiments are called chutneys, raitas, and achaars (which are pickles). Turks specialize in sauces including Ezme, which is a salsa, and the Japanese are known for complex condiments with wasabi (Japanese horseradish) being a hot delight. If the selection at your hometown grocery store is limited, search online using the words "*condiments*" and a specific ethnicity, such as Indian, Japanese, Turkish, or Mexican.

Keep an open mind about what you try, and your taste buds will thank you.

## Seasonings

If you eat out frequently, make note of the seasonings used to flavor the dishes you order, then find them at your grocery store, and buy for use in your own homemade food.

I, for example, love cayenne pepper so much, I carry a bottle with me and sprinkle it on almost everything.

While cookbooks will tell you precisely how much seasoning to use per volume of food, practice what generations before us have always done – just add seasoning “*to taste*.”

Buy small bottles of seasonings and use sparingly to decide whether you like them. If you don’t like your grocer’s selection, check websites for thousands of products through the web search phrase “[purchase seasonings](#).” Most of these websites also provide ideas on how to use them.

You can also buy non-packaged dried seasonings that often have more flavor than their packaged versions. These, however, require additional handling, such as with dried tea that must be soaked before the infused liquid can be sipped.

## Pre-made, whole-foods

Check your grocer’s freezer case for prepared foods that meet your requirements.

Trader Joe’s, for example, has frozen prepared rice, potatoes, and reasonably-priced bean burritos.

Amy’s foods ([Amys.com](#)), which now is available in most main-stream grocery stores, also sells vegan and vegetarian frozen and canned foods.

[Dr. McDougall suggests on his website a broad line of packaged food](#) that meets vegan requirements as well as sells his own *authorized* line of food called [Dr. McDougall’s Right Foods](#).

The brand, [Seeds of Change](#), sells preboiled grains and rice packages. To make, heat water, add the ingredients, let its contents soak for a minute, strain, then eat. Search the web to find where these are sold.

Most large grocery and natural foods stores sell various types of pre-made foods, so check freezer cases and fresh food isles.

For brands you can buy locally or online, search the web on the following subjects: [frozen vegan food](#) or [recommended prepared vegan food](#) or even [vegan food delivery services](#).

Add your own spices, nuts, veggies, and/or fruit to premade foods to give their flavors a personal boost.

# 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* provides tips related to eating any type of diet, but especially one based on the whole-food, plant-based diet plan.

*Chapter 6* reveals how to find wholesome, plant-based meals anywhere you are or go.

*Chapter 7* provides a summary, plus all links related to the information contained presented in this book



As of May 24, 2018, all but Chapter 7 is available on [www.Littleviews.com](http://www.Littleviews.com). The remaining chapter will be posted on or before June 10, 2018.

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Karen Little is a retired technical writer who specialized in creating corporate training materials and programs in Milwaukee, WI, and New York City, plus books and articles on travel, art, and computer programming. She was the founder of [LetsKickScoot.com](http://LetsKickScoot.com), which was turned over to a new publisher in 2017. Many of her articles remain on that site.

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