

So Many Carrots!

Brenda Davis, RD

Who doesn't love carrots? I have had an affinity for carrots from a very young age. I can recall being dazzled the first time I ate one right out of a garden. What a treat! Why do carrots from the garden taste so different from the ones in the bags in the grocery store? How nutritious are carrots, anyway? How are they used around the world? This appendix will dig into all the juicy details about these wonderful vegetables. I have included some of my favorite carrot recipes at the end of this article.

While carrots come in a variety of colors, including orange, purple, white, and yellow, orange carrots are by far the most common. The history dates back to the 16th century in the Netherlands. Dutch growers selectively bred carrots to produce a variety that was rich in beta-carotene, resulting in the familiar, orange-colored carrots that we commonly see today. Beta-carotene is converted by the body into vitamin A, which is essential for maintaining healthy vision, skin, and immune function.



Colored carrots contain different pigments, such as anthocyanins (purple and red), lycopene (red), and various other compounds that give them their unique hues. Purple carrots may be one of the oldest varieties of cultivated carrots. They come in very deep purple to violet and are sometimes orange inside. Colored carrots often come from heirloom seeds and are often organically grown. Some, however, are hybrid varieties developed through selective breeding.

Carrots are one of the most versatile of all vegetables and are commonly used in both savory and sweet dishes around the world. In Western cultures, carrots are used in salads, vegetable side dishes, soups, stews, stir-fries, and desserts such as cookies, cakes, and puddings. In Asian cuisine, carrots are often thinly sliced and pickled, and featured in stir-fries and soups. In the Middle East, carrots are shredded for salads, used in Tzimmes (a traditional Jewish dish made with carrots, sweet potatoes, and dried fruits), added to soups and stews, and used in a carrot tahini dip. In India, carrots are often included in curries, grated salads, and desserts such as Gajar Halwa. This dessert is a grated carrot pudding made by cooking carrots in milk with spices, ghee, and sugar. It can be made plant-based by omitting the ghee and using plant-based milk.

Carrots are a root vegetable. They have many nutritional attributes:

1. **High in vitamins** – Carrots are rich sources of vitamin A carotenoids, vitamin K, and vitamin C.
2. **High in minerals** – Carrots are good sources of potassium and manganese.
3. **A source of fiber** – Carrots contribute to the intake of both insoluble and soluble fiber, helping promote gut health.
4. **Great sources of antioxidants and phytochemicals** – Carrots are concentrated sources of antioxidants and phytochemicals, especially carotenoids such as beta-carotene, alpha-carotene, and lutein. They help to neutralize free radicals.
5. **Low in calories and fat** – A large carrot (7.25-8.5 inches) provides only about 30 calories and less than 0.2 grams of fat. This makes carrots a great choice for weight loss and weight maintenance.

I have always been amazed that carrots can taste so wildly different. Some are tough and rather tasteless, while others are tender, sweet, and incredibly delicious. Of course, the best of the best are fresh from the garden. The taste of carrots can vary depending on many factors:

- **Variety** – Each variety of carrots has its unique flavor profile. Some are sweeter, while others may be more earthy or peppery. Varietal differences can influence the taste, texture, and color of carrots.
- **Growing conditions** – Variations in climate and soil can influence flavor. Factors such as soil composition, moisture levels, temperature, and sunlight exposure can impact the development of sugars, starches, and other flavor compounds in carrots.
- **Maturity** – Young, tender carrots tend to be sweeter and more delicate in flavor, while older carrots may have a stronger, more earthy taste. Storing carrots in the ground over winter or “overwintering” in regions that have milder winters (but not so mild that carrots continue to grow) can make carrots even sweeter.
- **Storage and handling** – Carrots that are stored in cool, dry conditions are more likely to retain their freshness and flavor. Improper storage, exposure to moisture, or prolonged storage can lead to deterioration in flavor and texture.
- **Cooking methods** – Steaming, roasting, grilling, or sautéing carrots can enhance their natural sweetness and caramelization while boiling or overcooking them can lead to a mushy, less flavorful product.



CARROT RECIPES

Carrot Cornmeal Muffins

Makes 12 big muffins

In these moist, hearty muffins, nut butter and prunes replace the oil and sugar. They are gluten-free (if using oat groats or gluten-free oats). If you like more spice, add ½ teaspoon each of ginger, nutmeg, cloves, and /or cardamom.

1½ cups ground rolled oats (or oat flour)

1/3 cup ground flax

½ cup cornmeal

1 teaspoon baking powder

2 teaspoons cinnamon

½ teaspoon allspice

¾ teaspoon salt (optional)

1/3 cup nut butter

1 cup soft dried prunes

1/3 cup organic blackstrap molasses

1½ cups nondairy milk

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 cup finely grated carrots, packed

1 cup raisins or currants

1 cup walnuts, chopped



1. In a blender, grind oats into flour. Empty into a large bowl.
2. Stir in ground flax, cornmeal, baking powder, cinnamon, allspice, and salt.
3. Puree the nut butter, prunes, molasses, nondairy milk, and vanilla in a blender until smooth.

4. Make a well in the center of the dry ingredients and pour in the liquid ingredients. Stir just to combine the ingredients. Fold in grated carrots, raisins, and walnuts.
5. Heap the batter into a 12-cup muffin tin.
6. Bake at 400 F (375 F convection) for about 22-25 minutes or until nicely browned.
7. Remove from oven and let cool for a few minutes before removing from tin.



Carrot Cake Overnight Oats

Makes 2 servings

This is such a fun twist on overnight oats – it is perfect for those who love a little spice! For a little sweetness, stir in a grated apple in the morning.

- 1 cup rolled oats
- 1 cup finely grated carrots
- 1¼ cups nondairy milk
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon nutmeg
- 3 tablespoons seeds (flax, chia, hemp, pumpkin, sunflower)
- 3 tablespoons chopped walnuts
- 2 tablespoons unsweetened shredded coconut
- 2 tablespoons raisins or currants

1. In a medium-sized bowl with a lid or a mason jar, combine oats, carrots, nondairy milk, cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla extract, seeds, walnuts, coconut, and raisins.
2. Let sit overnight. In the morning stir the cereal and add extra milk, if needed. Serve warm or cold with additional nondairy milk.

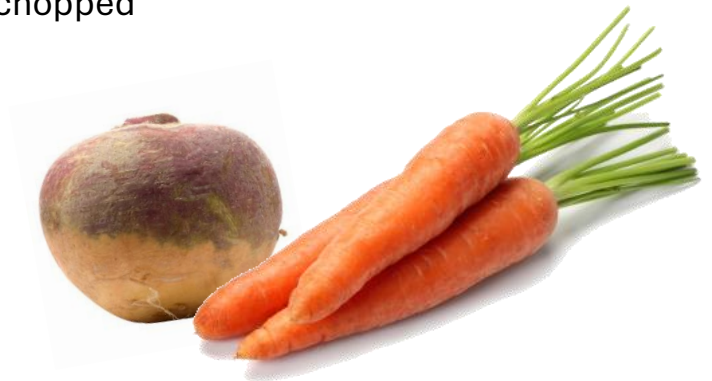


Mashed Carrots and Rutabaga (or turnips)

When I was growing up, one of the key side dishes that accompanied every holiday meal was mashed turnips and carrots. This was a dish that came from my Dad's French-Canadian background. Traditionally, it is mashed with cream, butter, brown sugar, salt, and pepper. In this healthy version, we use a cashew cream to replace the cream and butter and omit the sugar (which is not needed!). Other lovely additions are parsnips (boil with other veggies), onions, rosemary, thyme, and roasted garlic.

Ingredients

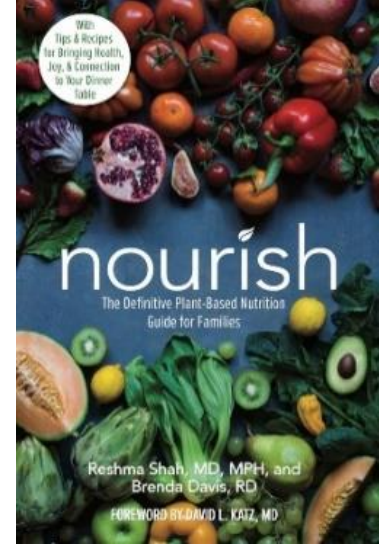
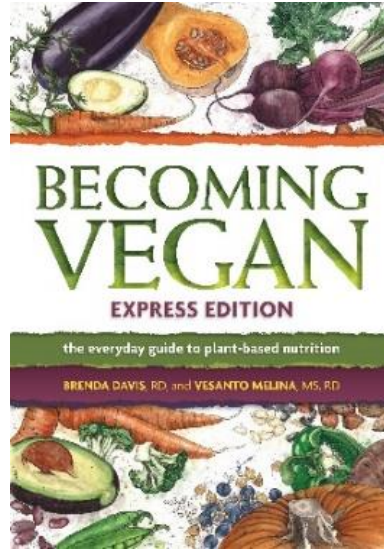
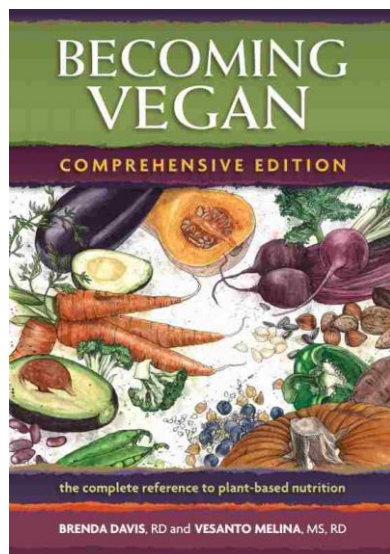
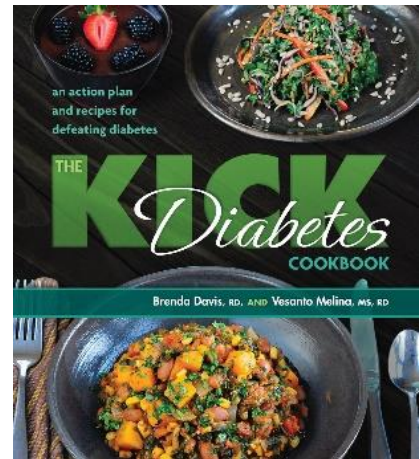
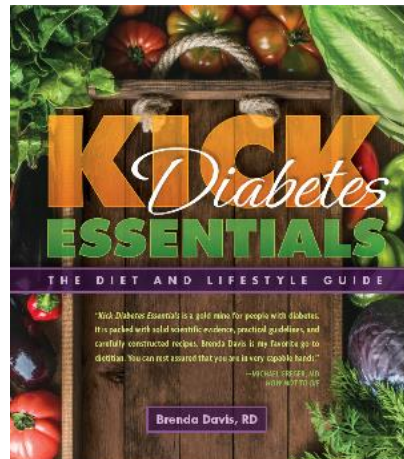
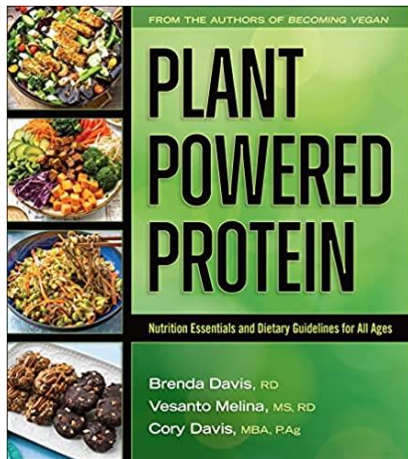
- 1 medium-sized rutabaga, peeled and chopped
- 2 pounds of carrots, washed or peeled and chopped
- ½ cup cashews, soaked for 2-4 hours
- ½ cup nondairy milk
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Sprinkle of parsley (optional)



Directions

1. Boil carrots and rutabaga until soft (about 45-60 minutes).
2. Blend milk and cashew until smooth and creamy.
3. Drain carrots and rutabaga. Mash.
4. Pour in cream. Mash until well combined. Add salt and pepper to taste.





This article was originally written for So Many Cooks in the Kitchen. Brenda Davis, RD is a plant-based pioneer and author/co-author of 13 books on plantbased diets. She is co-Author of Nourish: the definitive plant-based nutrition guide for families, Becoming Vegan: Comprehensive and Express Editions and Kick Diabetes Essentials. www.brendadavisrd.com