



So Many Holiday Dishes!

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For many of us, holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Hanukkah are the occasions we most look forward to each year. Life doesn't get much better than spending time with the people we love—playing games, singing songs, watching movies, and perhaps most memorably, sharing delicious food. Whether it's a table crowded with family favorites or the aroma of something sweet baking in the oven, food is at the center of our celebrations!

Christmas, in particular, is a holiday I've always cherished. I love the preparation, the decorating, and the sense of anticipation that fills the season. In my childhood home, decorating was a big job—an all-hands-on-deck affair that marked the true beginning of the festivities. I've carried that tradition forward, making my home festive and welcoming each year. While the gifts are always fun, it is the *togetherness* that makes the holiday truly magical. Our meals growing up weren't plant-based, but over the years, I've embraced the joy of reimagining our traditional dishes in delicious plant-based forms. I've worked to create versions of all our favorites—so we can celebrate the same memories, values, and flavors in a way that aligns with how we live and eat today. You will find recipes for our traditional Christmas dinner at the end of this Appendix. If you are wondering how to continue with your cherished food traditions while staying true to your plant-based way of eating, this article will be right up your alley. You will be sure to find some perfect additions to the family feast!



Navigating the Holidays as a Plant-Based Eater: A Compassionate Guide for Mixed-Diet Gatherings

The holiday season is a time of joy, tradition, and connection—but for plant-based eaters, it can also bring emotional and logistical challenges. Whether you're new to this lifestyle or long-established, navigating gatherings filled with animal-based dishes, curious relatives, or differing values requires clarity, kindness, and confidence. This guide offers practical strategies for celebrating the holidays in a way that honors your values while fostering connection.

1. Clarify Your Boundaries in Advance

Before the invitations start rolling in, take time to define what feels right for you:

- Are you comfortable attending or hosting events where animal products are served?
- Are you okay with guests bringing meat into your home—or not?
- Will you bring your own food or offer to contribute plant-based dishes?

Strategy: Write down your personal boundaries—not for others, but for yourself. Clear self-awareness will help you communicate with calm confidence.

2. Communicate with Compassion and Clarity

Whether you're hosting or attending, a respectful, non-judgmental tone goes a long way:

- As a guest:
"I'm really looking forward to the holiday! I follow a plant-based diet and would love to bring a few dishes—would that be okay?"
- As a host:
"I'm so glad you're coming! Since I eat plant-based, I am making a plant-based feast. I promise it'll be delicious and abundant!"
- If you're okay with someone bringing a turkey but want plant-based sides:
"Feel free to bring a turkey if you'd like. I just ask that the shared side dishes be plant-based so everyone can enjoy them. I'll be making a beautiful plant-based main too—there will be plenty to go around!"

Strategy: Emphasize what you're offering, not what's off-limits. Frame your choices in terms of abundance, inclusion, and joy.

3. Prepare a Show-Stopping Plant-Based Main

A satisfying, festive main dish helps everyone see that plant-based doesn't mean "less." Consider:

- Lentil-walnut loaf with mashed potatoes
- Stuffed squash or pumpkin
- Tofu roulade or mushroom Wellington
- Seitan roast or a homemade tofu turkey

Strategy: Make enough to share—curiosity often leads to conversions!

4. Handle Social Friction Gracefully

Comments like “You’re missing out!” or “Where do you get your protein?” can be frustrating. Have a few responses ready:

- *“It is different, but I’ve discovered amazing dishes. I hope you give my creations a try – I would love your feedback.”*
- *“Let’s get together to talk about this at another time. Today, let’s just enjoy being together.”*

Strategy: Lead with kindness. You don’t have to debate or defend—your plate speaks for itself.

5. Navigate Shared Table Dynamics with Care

If hosting, be honest about your comfort level with animal products in your home. If attending a non-plant-based gathering, have a self-care plan:

- Step outside for a break if needed
- Sit away from triggering dishes
- Focus on connecting with people, not plates

It’s not about perfection. It’s about presence, values, and compassion—for yourself and others.

6. Create a Celebration of Abundance

Showcase the richness of plant-based cuisine with:

- Creative main dishes such as individual filo “lentil walnut” pies
- Cashew cheese charcuterie boards
- Roasted vegetables with fresh herbs
- Amazing plant-based stuffings
- Vibrant salads and decadent vegan pies
- Tell the stories behind your dishes: *“This is my grandmother’s stuffing recipe—veganized. It’s now one of our new traditions.”*

7. Build Community Beyond the Table

Connect with others who share your values around food. Virtual potlucks, local meetups, or even plant-based holiday groups online can provide support and solidarity. And when you are with others who don't share your values around food, show up with compassion, joy, and beautiful, delicious food. No need to justify your choices. Just enjoy!



Plant-Based Celebrations from Many Cultures

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Holidays offer a powerful opportunity to celebrate culture, community, and continuity—and at the heart of these celebrations is food. For plant-based eaters, cultural traditions are not barriers but invitations to engage creatively with heritage dishes, honoring their spirit while adapting them in compassionate and healthful ways. Across the globe, there is no shortage of plant-based culinary heritage; in fact, many traditional holiday foods are either inherently plant-based or easily modified with thoughtful swaps. For those who follow oil-free or whole-food, plant-based (WFPB) protocols, even historically fried or rich dishes can be successfully reimaged using techniques like air frying, steaming, and broth-based cooking.

Take **Hanukkah**, for example, where fried foods symbolize the miracle of the oil. Traditional latkes (potato pancakes) can be made entirely plant-based by using a flaxseed or chia seed “egg” to bind the mixture or a plant-based egg replacement. For an oil-free adaptation, latkes can be air-fried at 375°F (190°C) with a light spritz of aquafaba to help them crisp. The result is golden and satisfying, without the need for deep frying. Serve them with unsweetened applesauce or a homemade cashew-based sour cream, and you preserve both the dish's flavour.

During **Las Posadas**, a cherished Mexican tradition leading up to Christmas, tamales take center stage. Plant-based versions can be crafted using olive oil alternatives in the masa—such as vegetable broth, pureed corn, or aquafaba—and filled with roasted poblanos, sweet corn, beans, or jackfruit simmered in guajillo chile sauce. Since tamales are traditionally steamed, they are naturally oil-free-friendly. Air fryers can be used to crisp reheated tamales post-steaming if desired, but the primary cooking method aligns beautifully with WFPB principles.

West African holiday meals, often featured during Kwanzaa or extended family gatherings, include vibrant, communal stews. A classic groundnut stew—rich with peanut butter, tomatoes, ginger, and dark leafy greens—can be made without oil by dry-sautéing the aromatics or using vegetable broth for depth. For added flavor and texture, components like sweet potatoes or plantains can be pre-roasted in an air fryer at 380°F (193°C) before being folded into the stew. Served with fufu or brown rice, the dish remains deeply satisfying while meeting therapeutic dietary goals.

Southern Italian holiday meals frequently feature stuffed pastas and vegetable-based antipasti. Dishes like stuffed shells or cannelloni can be adapted with a tofu-cashew “ricotta” and marinara. Individual portions can be crisped in the air fryer for 10–12 minutes at 340°F, enhancing texture without excess fat. Caponata, a traditional sweet

and sour eggplant relish, can be made by roasting or air frying eggplant instead of sautéing in oil, preserving flavor and tradition.

In the **Caribbean**, festive dishes like rice and peas, callaloo, and curried vegetables with roti are often naturally plant-forward. Use regular or light coconut milk, and seasoning with fresh herbs. Air frying can also be used for preparing breadfruit, sweet potatoes, or okra for a crisp texture.

South Asian cuisines offer one of the richest plant-based legacies. During Diwali or winter solstice celebrations, items like samosas, pakoras, or stuffed parathas can be reimagined without oil. Samosas, for instance, can be air-fried at 375°F for 12–15 minutes, using aquafaba to promote browning. The dough can be made from whole wheat flour and water, while fillings of spiced potato and peas retain the celebratory flair. Similarly, sweet dishes like besan ladoos can be adapted using dry-roasted flours and date paste in place of ghee and sugar.

Even **Eastern European** holiday foods like pierogi or cabbage rolls—often rich in butter and meat—can be transformed. Pierogi dough can be made oil-free and filled with mashed potato and caramelized onions (sautéed in broth). After boiling, pierogi can be crisped in the air fryer at 375°F for 8–10 minutes for a traditional texture without pan-frying. Cabbage rolls filled with rice, lentils, and herbs are naturally oil-free when baked in tomato sauce or with sauerkraut.

The key to successful plant-based cultural adaptations lies in honouring the dish's intention while finding techniques that align with plant-based principles. Air frying, steaming, roasting, and broth-sautéing are not just substitutions; they are culinary innovations that make tradition more accessible and health-promoting.



Keeping Holiday Foods Healthy (Without Losing the Magic)

It's easy to get carried away during the holidays—we've all been there. Rich foods, second helpings, and sweet treats seem to appear around every corner. But eating well during this season doesn't mean missing out. In fact, honoring your health can *enhance* the experience—helping you feel energized, grounded, and fully present with those you love. Here are seven strategies to enjoy holiday meals without sacrificing well-being—or joy.

1. Center Your Plate Around Whole Foods

Build meals around colorful vegetables, fruits, legumes, intact whole grains, nuts, seeds, and herbs. These nutrient-dense, fiber-rich foods are naturally satisfying and can help prevent overeating later. Try starting with a fresh salad, hearty vegetable soup, or a vibrant crudité platter to gently curb hunger while still leaving room for favorite dishes.

2. Slow Down and Savor

Holiday meals are best enjoyed mindfully. Eat slowly, chew thoroughly, and pause between bites to help your body register fullness. Putting your fork down, enjoying conversation, and noticing the flavors and textures of your food makes the experience more pleasurable—and naturally moderates intake.

3. Choose Treats That Matter Most

You don't have to skip indulgent dishes—but enjoy them with intention. Pick the ones that hold the most meaning or nostalgia and skip the rest. Many traditional favorites can be made more nourishing with simple plant-based swaps, like cashew cream in mashed potatoes or date-sweetened desserts.

4. Try Lighter Cooking Methods

Air frying, steaming, baking, or broth-sautéing can lighten up holiday classics without sacrificing taste. Latkes, samosas, roasted veggies, or even pierogi can be crisp and satisfying with much less oil—ideal for keeping meals both delicious and balanced.

5. Weave in Movement

Staying active doesn't mean hitting the gym—it can be as simple as a walk after dinner, dancing in the kitchen, or morning stretches. The holidays also offer opportunities for festive outdoor fun: tobogganing, skating, skiing, snowshoeing, or hiking with loved ones. These joyful activities support digestion, energy, and emotional well-being.

6. Share a Dish You Love

Whether you're hosting or bringing a contribution, offer a dish that aligns with your values—like a lentil-stuffed squash, roasted winter vegetables, or fruit-sweetened baked

goods. It ensures you'll have something satisfying to eat and often delights others as well.

7. Let Go of Perfection

This season is about connection, not restriction. One meal—or even a few indulgent days—won't derail your health. Focus on how you want to *feel*, not just what you want to avoid. With intention and flexibility, you can enjoy the celebration and nourish yourself in every sense of the word.

With a little planning and self-care, holiday meals can be both joyful and health-promoting—grounded in abundance rather than rules.



Plant-Based Holiday Recipes – From Our Family to Yours

Let this be the year you celebrate the holidays with both tradition and innovation. Plant-based eating doesn't take away from the joy of the season—it adds to it, bringing new flavors, health, and inclusiveness to your holiday table. Wishing you a joyful, delicious, and nourishing holiday season!

Our traditional Christmas dinner includes a stuffed tofu dish, mushroom gravy, cranberry sauce, a Brussels sprouts or green bean dish, mashed rutabagas and carrots, mashed potatoes, baked sweet potatoes, and a fruit salad with pear cashew cream. We end the meal with a delicious tray of homemade treats. I hope you enjoy this meal as much as we do!



Tofu Celebration Roast

Makes 10-12 servings

This festive, savory roast is a beautiful centerpiece for a vegan or vegetarian holiday table. It is a perfect main dish for plant-based families—or for hosts accommodating vegetarian guests. Instead of turkey, the protein-rich tofu forms a flavorful shell, filled with a hearty stuffing and basted to golden perfection. Feel free to substitute your own family stuffing recipe, and serve with mushroom gravy, cranberry sauce, and all your favorite holiday sides.

Ingredients

Tofu Layer

4-5 pounds medium firm tofu

1 tablespoon poultry seasoning (or a mix of thyme, rosemary, savory, and sage)

1 teaspoon onion powder

½ teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon salt

Fresh ground pepper to taste

1. Mash tofu in a large bowl until crumbly. Stir in seasonings and mix well.
2. Line a large colander with a double layer of cheesecloth, letting the excess hang over the sides.
3. Press the tofu mixture evenly into the colander, filling it about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up. Press down to flatten the surface.
4. Fold the cheesecloth edges over the top of the tofu.
5. Set the colander over a rimmed pan to catch liquid.
6. Weigh it down: Place a bowl or plate snugly over the tofu and add a weight (e.g., cans or a bag of beans) to create a cavity for the stuffing.
7. Let the tofu stand in the refrigerator for at least 3 hours or overnight to firm and drain.

Stuffing

1 loaf whole grain bread, toasted in the oven and torn into coarse bread crumbs

2 tablespoons olive oil or 3 tablespoons vegetable broth

5 ribs celery, chopped
2 large onions, chopped
3 large cloves garlic, minced (optional)
2 full-sized vegan sausages, boiled and crumbled
2 large potatoes, cut into 2 or 3 pieces
1 large apple, diced
½ cup pecans or walnuts, chopped (optional)
½ cup chopped parsley (optional)
4 Tbsp fresh herbs (sage, rosemary and thyme) or

OR

2 Tbsp poultry seasoning plus 1 tsp each of sage and thyme
1 tsp salt
Pepper to taste



Instructions

1. Boil or steam the potatoes in a medium pot until tender. Drain and mash.
2. Sauté the onions, celery, and garlic (if using) over medium heat, adding oil or broth as needed. Cook for ~15 minutes, or until soft.
3. In a large bowl, combine breadcrumbs, crumbled sausages, mashed potatoes, apples, and nuts.
4. Add the sautéed vegetables and mix to combine.
5. Fold in the parsley, nuts and seasonings.

Basting Liquid

3 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
¼ cup tamari
Black and/or white sesame seeds (optional)



Assembly of the Tofu Unturkey

1. Remove the tofu from the refrigerator and unwrap the cheesecloth from the top.
2. Fill the cavity with the prepared stuffing, pressing it in firmly.
3. Lightly oil a round pizza pan or large baking dish.
4. Flip the tofu onto the baking pan by placing the baking pan over the top of the colander, then quickly and carefully invert the colander so the tofu rests flat on the pan.
5. Remove the cheesecloth completely.
6. Baste the surface of the tofu roast with the sesame oil–tamari mixture.
7. Sprinkle with sesame seeds, if using.
8. Bake at 350°F for 2–3 hours, basting every 30 minutes. The outside should become golden and slightly crisp.
9. **Serve:** Transfer carefully to a serving platter using two large spatulas or leave on baking pan. Garnish with fresh herbs, cranberries, mandarin oranges, or seasonal greens.



Mushroom Gravy

Makes about 4 cups

This deeply savory, elegant vegan mushroom gravy is made with white wine, onions, mushrooms, and herbs. It is perfect for holiday meals, lending richness and umami without any animal products.

Ingredients

- 1 small onion, diced
- 2 cups mushrooms, chopped
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- ½ cup water (to make cornstarch slurry)
- 3½ cups water or low or no-sodium vegetable broth
- 3 tablespoons cup tamari
- 2 tablespoons light miso
- 1 tsp each marjoram and thyme
- ½ tsp basil
- Black pepper, if desired



1. Dry sauté onions and mushrooms for about 10 minutes or until tender.
2. In a small bowl or measuring cup, mix cornstarch with ½ cup of cold water.
3. Add the white wine to the mushrooms and onions and simmer for about 10 minutes.
4. Add 3½ cups of water or broth to the onions and mushrooms.
5. Bring to boil over high heat, stirring often. Lower the heat.
6. Stir in the tamari, miso and seasonings.
7. Slowly whisk in the flour mixture, then simmer uncovered over medium heat for 10 minutes stirring occasionally until nicely thickened.

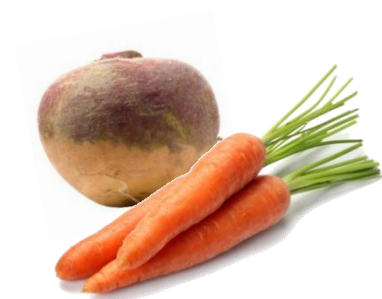
Mashed Carrots and Rutabaga

Makes 8-10 servings

When I was growing up, this side dish was served at every holiday meal. It was a recipe 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 and drained
- 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.



Brussels Sprouts with Cranberries and Toasted Nuts

Makes 6 servings

Ingredients

- 1½ lbs Brussels sprouts, trimmed and halved
- 2 tablespoons broth
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- ¾ cup fresh cranberries
- ½ teaspoon salt, more to taste
- Fresh black pepper, to taste
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup
- ⅓ cup pecans or hazelnuts, toasted and roughly chopped
- Optional garnish: zest of ½ orange, fresh thyme, or parsley



Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. Prep the Brussels sprouts: Toss halved sprouts with broth, salt, and pepper. Spread in a single layer on a large baking sheet (spray sheet with an oil spray or use a silicone mat).
3. Roast for 15 minutes, then remove the pan from the oven. Scatter cranberries and sliced onion over the sprouts. Drizzle with maple syrup and toss gently to coat.
4. Return to oven and roast another 10–12 minutes, until Brussels sprouts are golden and tender, and cranberries have softened and begun to burst.
5. While the veggies finish roasting, toast pecans or hazelnuts in a dry skillet over medium heat for 4–5 minutes until fragrant and lightly browned. Cool slightly, then coarsely chop.
6. Transfer Brussels sprouts and cranberries to a serving platter. Sprinkle with toasted nuts, a touch of orange zest or a squeeze of orange juice, and fresh herbs if desired.

Holiday Fruit Salad with Pear Cashew Cream

Makes 6-8 servings

A vibrant, naturally sweet fruit salad made extra luscious with a velvety pear cashew cream. Perfect for brunches, potlucks, or a refreshing holiday dish—this dish is rich in fiber, phytonutrients, and heart-healthy fats, yet free from added sugars or oils.

Ingredients

Fruit Salad

~8 cups fresh fruit, chopped (e.g., strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, apples, pears, pomegranate seeds, pineapple, bananas, tangerines, kiwi, grapes)

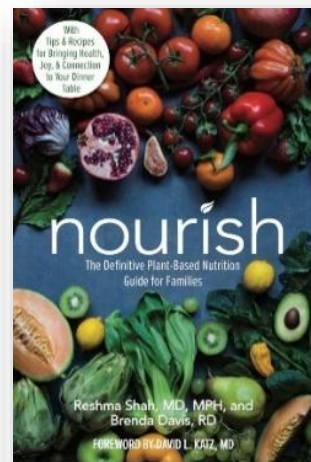
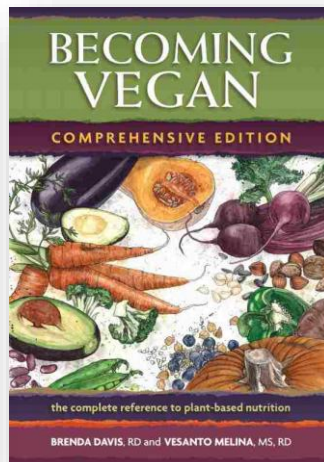
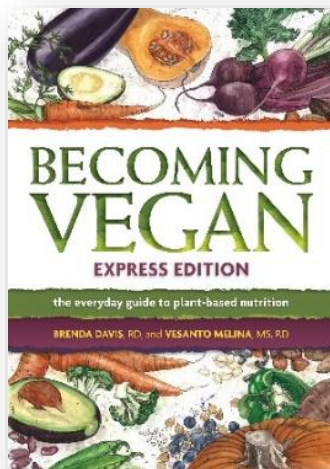
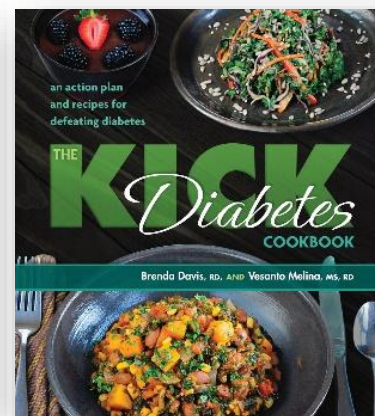
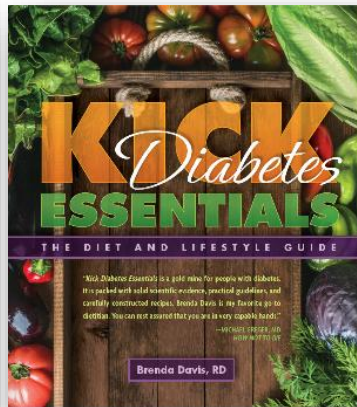
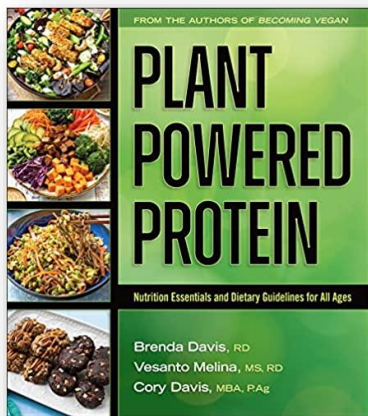
Pear Cashew Cream

15 oz can pears in pear juice or water (do not drain)
1 ¼ cups raw cashews, soaked 2–4 hours and drained
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

Instructions

1. **Prepare the Pear Cashew Cream:** In a high-speed blender, combine the canned pears with their juice, soaked cashews, and vanilla extract. Blend until completely smooth and creamy.
2. **Assemble the Fruit Salad:** In a medium-sized mixing bowl, combine chopped fruits. Gently fold in about 1½ cups of the prepared pear cashew cream, or more to taste. Mix until the fruit is well coated. Transfer to a pretty glass bowl.
3. **Chill and Serve:** Refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving, if possible, to allow flavors to meld and the cream to thicken slightly. Garnish with fresh mint or chopped nuts.





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 plant-based diets. She is the author/co-author of Plant-Powered Protein, Nourish, Becoming Vegan: Comprehensive and Express Editions, Kick Diabetes Essentials, and The Kick Diabetes Cookbook.

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