



VEGAN LUNCHBOX

Plant-Based Choices Provide Midday Boost

by Judith Fertig

We all have good intentions to eat more fruits and vegetables, and it's easier if we start with just one plant-based meal a day—lunch. Natural Awakenings has enlisted the help of vegan lunchbox experts to help us all enjoy easy-to-make and colorful feasts good for home, office, school and on the road.

"Vegan food offers so much variety,

especially at lunch," says Johanna Sophia, of Pine Plains, New York, who recently hosted the online series *The Raw Lunchbox Summit*. "A vegan lunch gives an extra boost in the middle of the day for more brain power, clarity and energy." She and her two children operate Johanna's Raw Foods, which makes vegan fast food such as veggie burger bites and carrot crackers, available at health food stores.

Laura Theodore, the vegan chef and recording artist who presents *The Jazzy Vegetarian* PBS television program, lives and works in the New York City area. After a childhood dominated by bologna sandwiches for lunch, she gradually changed to vegan dishes. "I began to notice a difference when I ate mostly plants," she says. "I could do more and think better."

Theodore favors colorful and delicious vegan foods that travel well in a lunchbox with a cold pack, so she can take them to rehearsals or wherever else she goes. She creates her zucchini fettuccine with a vegetable slicer and loves to end a meal with something naturally sweet, like her maple-raisin-date truffles. Such experimenting in the kitchen led to her newest cookbook, *Vegan-Ease: An Easy Guide to Enjoying a Plant-Based Diet*.

Brandi Rollins, Ph.D., a researcher at Penn State, in State College, Pennsylvania, found that switching her lunch habits to plant-based dishes made her feel better. The author of *Raw Foods on a Budget* determined that one of her favorites is a quick raw vegan pizza. She first marinates ingredients for 20 minutes: three medium mushrooms, thinly sliced, with one-and-a-half tablespoons of balsamic vinegar, one tablespoon of olive oil, one minced clove of garlic and a big pinch of Italian herb seasoning. Then she spreads half of a mashed avocado on a four-by-four-inch flax cracker and tops it with the marinated mushrooms, plus chopped tomato, peppers or other favorite options. Rollins advises, "You can pack all of the components individually, and then assemble the pizza at work."

Health Foods Chef Catherine Blake, in Maui, Hawaii, studied with renowned plant-based nutritional scientist T. Colin Campbell, Ph.D. She urges her culinary students to ask, "What can I do to sparkle a little bit more tomorrow?" The author of *Healthy Recipes for Friends*, answers the question in her online presentation, *Cooking for Brain Power*, at Tinyurl.com/ChefBlakeBrainPower.

Blake's favorite brain-power luncheon booster is a wrap with antioxidant-rich fillings, accompanied

by homemade almond milk, sunflower seeds or walnuts for vitamin E and some favorite blueberries or purple grapes. She makes fresh almond milk by grinding raw almonds in a nut grinder, and then adding them plus

an equal amount of filtered water to a high-speed blender. After processing and straining out the solids, the resulting nut milk is perfect for smoothies.

Changing our diets one meal at a time gives us an opportunity to see

if we can feel the difference, as our vegan lunchbox experts have, while we ramp up our taste for healthier eating.

Judith Fertig writes award-winning cookbooks and foodie fiction from Overland Park, KS. Connect at JudithFertig.com.



Zucchini Fettuccine with Fresh Tomato Salsa

Yields: 4 servings

This raw side dish is low in calories, a breeze to prepare and cool fare on a hot summer day. The zucchini strips look and taste a lot like fresh pasta.

- 2 medium zucchini
- 2 ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 10 to 14 leaves fresh basil, minced
- 1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1/8 to 1/4 tsp sea salt
- Freshly ground pepper to taste

Shave the zucchini lengthwise with a vegetable peeler to make the “noodles”.

Put them in a large bowl and add the tomatoes, basil, oil and garlic. Toss gently until thoroughly combined.

Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

Recipe by Laura Theodore, The Jazzy Vegetarian

Lots of Garlic Hummus

Yields: 4 servings

Accented with the tangy taste of fresh lemon juice and a bit of heat from the chili powder, this is an easy, ready-made sandwich spread for a lunchbox.

- 1 cup chickpeas (garbanzo beans), drained and rinsed
- 1/4 cup plus 2 Tbsp filtered or spring water, plus more as needed
- 5 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 Tbsp sesame tahini
- 2 Tbsp freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/2 tsp chili powder, plus more for garnish
- 1/4 tsp sea salt

Place all the ingredients in a blender and process until smooth. Add a bit more water if needed to achieve desired consistency.

Transfer the hummus to a decorated bowl and sprinkle the top with a pinch more chili powder to taste for a festive presentation.

Recipe by Laura Theodore, Vegan-Ease: An Easy Guide to Enjoying a Plant-Based Diet

Perfect Purple Smoothie

Yields: 2 servings

Homemade almond milk is the base and cayenne powder gives it a spicy punch that intensifies the rest of the flavors. Drink one serving for lunch and chill the other for a fast and easy mid-afternoon reviver.

- 12 oz acai juice
- 6 oz almond milk
- 1 Tbsp soy creamer
- 1 cup fresh or frozen wild blueberries
- 1 frozen banana
- 1/2 cup fresh or frozen raspberries
- 1 Tbsp whole ground flaxseed meal (blueberry variety if available; try Trader Joe's)
- 1 cup coconut water ice cubes
- 1 Tbsp macro greens or other vegan, non-GMO greens powder
- 1/2 tsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 to 3 dashes cayenne powder

Combine all ingredients in a high-speed blender and blend until smooth. Store in two insulated cups and keep chilled until ready to serve



Maple-Raisin-Date Truffles

Yields: 10 to 12 truffles

These truffles make an inviting healthy dessert or snack to satisfy a sweet tooth. They'll impress guests at any dinner party.

- 9 large Medjool dates, pitted
- 1/8 cup raisins
- 1/4 cup raw shredded unsweetened dried coconut
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup
- 2 Tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder

Line a small baking sheet with unbleached parchment paper.

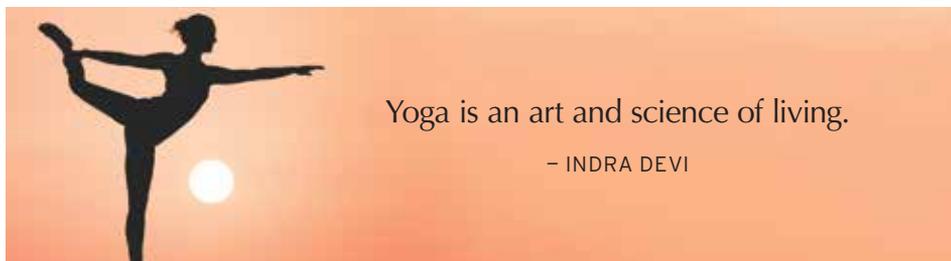
Place the dates, raisins, coconut and maple syrup in a high-performance blender and process to the consistency of soft dough. Transfer the date mixture to a medium-sized bowl.

Using a cookie scoop, spoon out a heaping tablespoon of the date mixture and roll it into a ball. Continue until all the dough is in balls.

Put the cocoa powder in a small bowl. Roll the truffles in the cocoa until coated and place on the prepared baking sheet. Refrigerate 1 hour.

Stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator, truffles will keep up to three days.

Recipe by Laura Theodore, Vegan-Ease: An Easy Guide to Enjoying a Plant-Based Diet



Yoga is an art and science of living.

— INDRA DEVI