

## Choosing and Using Nondairy Milk

by Kay Bushnell

In the last issue of the Loma Prietan this column contained some of the reasons for choosing nondairy milk over cow's milk. For example, nondairy milk is cholesterol-free and most is low in saturated fat. The fat content of regular soymilk is about the same as 2% cow's milk. Nondairy milk can be enjoyed by many people who cannot tolerate cow's milk. It is unusual for someone to be allergic to nondairy milk unless they have a specific allergy to soy or almonds, and their choices happen to contain these ingredients. Unlike cow's milk, nondairy milk contains no lactose, and those who are lactose intolerant can drink it in comfort. Recipes from 100% plant-based cookbooks such as *The Peaceful Palate* by Jennifer Raymond and *Sweet and Natural* by Meredith McCarty demonstrate that sumptuous food need not contain cow's milk.

Here are a few guidelines to use when selecting nondairy milk. The many varieties that are now available include soymilk, rice milk, multi-grain milk, almond milk, and oat milk. Some are naturally sweet and others not at all. Soymilk was the first non-dairy milk to become popular and is the most widely used. Sales of soymilk have skyrocketed in the last fifteen years. The amount of protein in soymilk is very similar to that in cow's milk, which makes soymilk a good choice for children and those who rely on a beverage for a major portion of their daily protein. (Breast milk or soy-based formulas are recommended for infants.) Rice milk is also very popular and tasty.

It's important to read the list of ingredients on the container. Soymilk and rice milk labeled "enriched" have been fortified with nutrients such as calcium, Vitamin D, Vitamin B12, and riboflavin. Soymilk also contains a plant chemical called isoflavones that appears to have important health benefits, according to Reed Mangels, Ph.D., R.D. The quantity of isoflavones is usually noted on the soymilk container.

Learning some basic tips for cooking with nondairy milk can ensure successful, tasty meals. Certain non-dairy milks are better than others for specific uses. In general, plain, "original," or "unflavored" nondairy milk is commonly used in cooking, especially in savory recipes such as creamed soups, creamy sauces, salad dressings, and main dishes. The flavored milks are used as beverages, in smoothies or desserts, and with cereal. Soymilk or a soy/rice blend thicken easily and are the best choices when preparing foods that need to be thickened such as pudding, pie filling, or quiche. Corn bread, biscuits, shortcakes, Boston brown bread, and scones are delicious when made with any non-dairy milk.

When using a recipe that calls for buttermilk, any nondairy milk will do. Simply add 1 Tbsp. of lemon juice or apple cider vinegar to each cup of nondairy milk to create nondairy "buttermilk." Surprise your family with tangy, tender pancakes made with non-dairy "buttermilk."

Recipes that list cow's milk as an ingredient become more earth-friendly and healthful when nondairy milk is substituted for cow's milk or cream. The amount of liquid may need to be increased or decreased slightly depending on the thickness of the nondairy milk you choose. Most people find that a basic soymilk, soy/rice blend, and/or rice milk can easily meet all their needs.