

.Easy Plant Based Cooking I

By Kay Bushnell

What's the easiest way to prepare plant-based meals? Most people would agree that hiring a cook to prepare plant-based food may be easy, but it is usually not cost effective. Even fetching a meal from the local deli or frozen food section requires a trip to the store, waiting in line, and toting the meal home, usually in plastic or paper containers. All things considered, home made, earth-friendly meals require relatively minimal effort.

Plant based meals that we prepare ourselves have many advantages. We know what is in them; we can control costs; we can make sure that the ingredients are fresh and organic; and we have the personal satisfaction of knowing that we created them. Easy meals often include timesaving convenience foods and fresh produce in season.

Planning is an important part of easy cooking. Thinking ahead, choosing recipes, and organizing one's shopping list gets easier as it becomes a weekly routine. For nutritional balance a rough rule of thumb is to include within a twenty-four hour period food from each category of the healthful plant-based food pyramid. The pyramid consists of a foundation of grains and potatoes, a second tier of vegetables and fruits in approximately equal amounts; a somewhat smaller tier of legumes, and a top tip consisting of seeds and nuts. Keeping this pyramid in mind can serve as a guide in meal planning.

Plant based stir-fries, chili with rice or cornbread, pasta entrees, stews, and hearty soups are refreshing contrasts to the typical American meal with its focus on meat. A good 100% plant-based cookbook such as *The Peaceful Palate* by Jennifer Raymond is invaluable. Simply leaving out the meat in favorite traditional recipes or replacing it with chopped nuts, beans, or a meat alternative yields surprisingly delicious results.

Here are some other timesaving tips. Open a bag of frozen vegetables and add them directly to chili, stews, and soups. Quick-cooking potatoes, rice, and oatmeal may not taste quite the same as their longer cooking versions, but they are still tasty and can save cooks much time and effort. Add commercial blends of spices to bean, tofu, and vegetable dishes to simplify the seasonings. Chopping vegetables is not as difficult as it may seem. With a little practice chopping onions from scratch many people find that they can soon perform the job quickly, skillfully, and even enjoyably. (Tip: use a sharp knife, and wet the onions as you chop to keep them from stinging your eyes.)

In addition to the benefits of high quality ingredients, economy, and personal satisfaction, home cooked meals often provide enough food for more than one meal, which means that you'll have dinner already made for the next several days. Leftovers are the busy cook's friends. Look for more information about easy plant-based cooking in the next issue of *The Loma Prieta*.

If you use canned pinto beans the following recipe will be ready to eat in minutes and will last for several days. It has already received thumbs up from many chili lovers.

