

Easy Plant-Based Cooking With Meat Alternatives

By Kay Bushnell

Those whose taste buds still crave the taste and texture of meat will find it in today's meat alternatives, foods made with soy and/or wheat protein that look and taste like meat. Meat alternatives can ease the transition to a pure plant-based diet and satisfy everyone in families with some members who still yearn for the taste of meat.

Meat alternatives include mock beef, mock chicken, mock turkey, and mock bacon. They are much more healthful (no cholesterol and low in fat) than foods from animals and much easier on the environment than the production of animal flesh.

They do undergo processing as they are seasoned and formed into shapes similar to the animal foods they replace, but the delicious end result is a cooked product, ready to eat. Ideally, it is best to eat plant foods in the form in which they come from the earth. However, judicious use of plant-based convenience foods such as meat alternatives can make meal preparation easier and save much time. A 100% plant-based meal that includes both fresh and processed plant-based foods can be a very healthful meal.

It is important to read labels carefully when purchasing plant-based convenience foods and avoid meat alternatives that contain milk solids, whey, casein or animal-based flavoring. Fortunately, there are plenty of 100% plant-based meat alternatives to choose from.

Meat alternatives can be found in refrigerated cases near the produce as well as in the frozen foods area of many grocery stores. Sales of meatless products are increasing dramatically as more people discover them. You'll find spicy soy chorizo sausage, links similar to frankfurters and sausage, amazing Unsteak, Unchicken, Unribs, meatless pepperoni, mock bacon and ham, and slices of every imaginable kind of mock meat, cooked and ready to use.

Usually a relatively small amount of a meat alternative is needed to impart the desired flavor and texture of meat to a dish. In many plant-based stews, casseroles, and stir fries, meat alternatives tend to play minor but important roles. It takes a mere tablespoon or two of soy-based bacon bits to flavor a pot of split pea soup. Some meat alternatives star as the main ingredients in a dish. *Unsteak*, for example, when sautéed with onions, mushrooms, and wine, is an elegant and easy main course. *Unsteak* is made primarily with wheat protein. Those who try meat alternatives often remark, "I wish everyone could taste meat alternatives. Why would anyone eat meat when these are so good?"

The following recipe uses frozen meatless meatballs and can be prepared in ten minutes. Next time you entertain, make this sauce the night before. When it is cool, pour it over the browned meatless balls. Refrigerate them overnight. Serve meatless balls in a chafing dish or place a bowl of them on a warming tray for your next buffet supper. They are available locally in the larger general grocery stores and in most natural food markets.