

A VEGAN'S DIARY

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Bake a cake – vegan style!

They say baking is an exact science. "They" would be right.

Baking relies on some simple principles about what ingredients you are using, how you combine them and how you cook them. The same principles apply to vegan baking. Except, vegans do not use dairy milk, butter, or eggs.

THE VEGAN INGREDIENTS

Flour-milk-sugar-eggs. Those are pretty much the main ingredients for most baking recipes. A vegan bakers' ingredients are the same, but there are a few things to look out for when shopping.

Sugar

First up is sugar. The vast majority of sugar is not bleached with bone char so most brands are fine. If you need a liquid sugar, you can swap date syrup, maple (flavoured) syrup (the real stuff is expensive!), or even our local molasses.

Margarine (instead of butter)

Margarine is an excellent baking ingredient that provides good value for money. Some recipes call for oil instead of solid fat, so look for a neutral oil such as coconut oil, or vegetable oil. Strong oils such as olive oil may give your product a strange flavour.

Plant milk instead of dairy milk

The best part about using plant milk is that you have a wide variety of options to choose from and the measurement is the same as dairy milk. I use homemade almond milk or canned coconut milk in my cake recipes. Keep in mind that canned coconut milk comes in two consistencies – plain milk and full cream. The full cream one is thick, solidifies when refrigerated, and is good for making mousse, icing etc. The 'regular' stuff is more watered down, and suitable for making batters.

Egg substitutes

And of course, what about eggs? Eggs are used to add moisture, lift, and

structure, and to help the ingredients bind together. Different egg replacers perform different functions. Depending on the recipe you are looking at, you will find all kinds of alternatives including plant milk, bananas, beans, flax seeds (Tishi in Bangla), apple sauce, etc. There will often be multiple versions of similar recipes online that use different types of egg replacements so you can find one that suits you and what you have in the kitchen.

Baking with yeast

First of all, yes, yeast is suitable for vegans. Yeast is a fungus, like mushrooms. As long as the yeast has not been prepared using animals or animal products, the yeast itself is perfectly fine.

Here are some general tips to help you get the most out of recipes —

Weigh your ingredients properly, and use the same units of measurements for everything. Get a set of American style cups — a lot of vegan recipes come from the US and a set of cups will help you accurately measure out your ingredients.

Follow the recipe. If it says "sift the dry ingredients" then sift them, if it says "use a wooden spoon," use a wooden spoon. I once 'followed' a bread recipe that asked to mix the flour in two steps. I figured that was too much work, and mixed it all in one go. That bread never made it out of the oven. Rest-In-Pan, dear bread.

In almost all situations, you should be adding wet ingredients to dry rather than the other way around. This helps you blend more effectively and results in a better tex-

ture. When you need to combine a lot of different dry ingredients, do that into a separate bowl, and the same for wet ingredients, then combine the two.

Use the right size pan or dish and always make sure you grease it well so the finished product will actually come out of the pan.

Always pre-heat your oven so items go in at the right temperature.

Now that you are armed with all the information about vegan baking, here is another incentive to try it. Anyone who is baked with young children knows that

curious little people love to lick spoons, fingers and bowls along the way. When recipes contain raw eggs, however, this becomes a safety concern. Not so with eggless vegan recipes, although! I cannot wait for the 1.5 year old at our house to grow a tad bigger. He loves oatmeal and he loves chocolate. I think oatmeal chocolate chip cookies will be the first one we will make together!



VEGAN CARROT CAKE

Ingredients

- 2¼ cups (256g) flour
- 3 tsp baking powder (*see note below)
- 1 tsp baking soda
- 3 tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup full fat coconut milk
- 2 tsp vanilla
- 1 cup date syrup or brown sugar
- ½ cup (melted) coconut or canola oil

2 cups (240g) grated carrots, medium-packed

½ cup carrot cake

Frosting

½ (68g) cup raw cashews (soaked, drained and rinsed)*

¼ cup coconut milk

¼ cup maple syrup

2 tbspc coconut oil

1 tsp vanilla

2 tsp fresh lemon juice

½ tsp salt

Method

Preheat the oven to 350°F and grease a 9x13 baking pan. In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, nutmeg and salt. In a separate bowl, whisk together the coconut milk, vanilla, sugar and oil. Mix the dry ingredients into the bowl with the wet ingredients. Fold in the carrots and walnuts and stir until just combined.

Bake for 30 to 40 minutes or until a toothpick inserted comes out clean. Let cake cool completely before frosting.

To make the frosting—

Combine all frosting ingredients into a high speed blender. Blend until very smooth, for 1 to 2 minutes or more, and scrape down the sides occasionally. You can add an extra tablespoon of coconut milk if necessary to get your blade moving. Chill for at least 30 minutes before spreading (it will firm up a bit). Store frosted cake in the fridge.

*Soak your cashew for at 15 minutes in boiling hot water, preferably overnight, then drain and rinse before using. I recommend using a very high speed blender (vitamix, blendtec, or similar) for this frosting. You can also use a good quality food processor, but I recommend soaking the nuts overnight so that your frosting will blend smoothly.

Photo: Shahrear Kabir Heemel

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