

Sandra's Tasty, Beautiful Meals on the Fly

by Sandra Miller

Being happy with my conversion to being vegan about 3 months ago, after being a vegetarian much of my adult life, I thought offering something, if even just a recipe, would be a cakewalk. Not so. This writing has become an opportunity to examine how I can take established and new practices and ideas into a framework that makes it easier to keep to my convictions, and maybe makes it easier for people sitting on the fence to think about veganism differently.

The truth is that living alone, having some health issues, as much as I love cooking I am not the person who spends even an hour prepping and cooking very often. If I do, it is to prepare enough to last for a few days in a busy week. There are a few considerations, whether something thrown together or something long considered, and those are flavor, fiber, and protein, which applies to every meal of the day. Food has to taste good, be good for me, and be satisfying emotionally.

Breakfast is easy as it is almost always the same thing. I am a devotee of Dave's Killer Bread because it fits my dietary requirements, tastes good, and has a good corporate foundation. It is the perfect sandwich vehicle for vegan mayo, sliced tomato, baby kale and/or spinach, and either a Beyond Burger or a Dr. Praeger's California Veggie Patty. On the side I eat 2 Persian cucumbers, and sometimes multicolor carrots or radishes (sometimes pickled). I endeavor to eat all organic or homegrown veggies as well. If I've been particularly energized and inspired, I will make breakfast patties myself, with lentils or chickpeas, some chopped veggies, a bit of nutritional yeast, and some potato or tapioca starch to hold it all together. Yes, I love tofu scramble, but I'm more

likely to order that at Busboys and Poets when having lunch with a friend, or make it for dinner. Sometimes, when I crave oatmeal for breakfast, this sandwich is dinner.

Dinner. Whether you are preparing for one or a family, what I want to offer is an invitation to make this easy, though it may sometimes be a bit time consuming, and fun. No exact measurements. The first step is stocking your pantry with staples that serve several purposes.

A Well-Stocked Pantry

Staples are the foundation: a main source of protein and fiber, texture, and taste. My pantry includes several kinds of lentils, beans, and grains, all dry. There are a few cans of beans for those times when I neglected to plan ahead. Carbs from pasta are bad for me, so my craving for pasta is met with soba noodles, made from buckwheat, an easy and satisfying fix as I love Asian food. I keep organic store-bought broths, usually from Trader Joe's, and TJ's Marinara with basil sauce, some olives, hearts of palm, artichoke hearts, various seaweeds, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean sauces and condiments, hot sauces, agave syrup (the only sugar in my home is small amounts for baking, and even then if I can use agave I do). And there's virtually always tofu in the fridge – from very soft to extra firm, and even pressed tofu. I can find the range of organic tofu types at H Mart, and can rely on TJ's for medium and firm. All of these are happy to be included in salads, soups, casseroles, and stir fries. And some frozen veggies to satisfy yens when things aren't in season, or, again, when I'm in a hurry.

To accompany those foundations items are flavorings, which form include extracts



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If you have a well-stocked pantry you are free to shop as I do – buy what looks good when you go to the store! I do sometimes go with a recipe in mind, especially when cooking for others, but being a creative type that reacts with my eyes, brain, and stomach engaged all at once, well, each shopping expedition is mostly fun.

Today's Stir Fry (made to last, from what's on hand...)

- 2 tbsp plain sesame oil
- 1 tbsp roasted sesame oil
- 2 onions, quartered and sliced (any type)
- 4 cloves (or more to taste) garlic, sliced or minced (how finely you treat cloves determines how much flavor they release)
- 3 stalks celery, sliced
- 1 pint button or brown mushrooms, washed and sliced
- 3-4 parsnips, peeled and sliced
- 3-4 carrots, scrubbed or peeled and sliced
- 3 sweet potatoes (any variety), scrubbed, quartered, and cut in chunks (peel if preferred)
- 3 zucchini, sliced (optional – I have some that need to be used!)
- Soy sauce to taste



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If you want a starch, serve over rice (short grain Japanese or Korean, or any rice except instant) or soba or japchae (Korean yam noodles). Prepare these according to package directions halfway through cooking veggies, drain, and toss with just enough roasted sesame oil to prevent them from becoming one solid mass.

Put oils in a heavy, large frying pan and heat over high heat until it shimmers. Reduce heat to medium-high, add onions to pan and fry, stirring occasionally until they just begin to brown at edges. Add garlic and celery, and fry until garlic becomes very fragrant, then add mushrooms. Fry, stirring occasionally, until mushrooms have sweated and their water has evaporated. Add parsnips, carrots, and sweet potatoes to pan, adding additional plain sesame oil if necessary. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the harder veggies are almost soft, then add zucchini, and pastes if using. Cook just until zucchini is softened but not at all mushy.

You too can have nutritious, beautiful, tasty vegan meals on the fly!

Enjoy,

Sandra