

## Healthy Meals Made Easy

Confetti Rice and Bean Salad  
Surprise Nacho Cheese  
Date Pecan Bon Bons

This plant-based menu features the wonderfully simple combination of beans and rice, with color and flavor boosting red pepper, corn and cilantro. It is great as a main dish for easy weeknight dinner or the perfect side dish for BBQ's and potlucks. The surprise of the nacho cheese is that it doesn't actually contain cheese, but is made from potatoes, carrots and nutritional yeast. It is quite versatile and can be used as a dip for chips or veggies or as a sauce for pasta or baked potatoes. Lastly, the sweet finish to this plant powered meal is a wonderful no bake dessert that is packed with nutrients from pecans, dates, maple syrup and coconut.

**Trends: Four Reasons to Serve More Meat-Free Meals-** [humanesociety.org/meatfree](http://humanesociety.org/meatfree)

1. Save money: Meat prices are rising and expected to continue to do so. Reducing meat purchases and increasing plant-based options can save you money.
2. Meet growing demand: Meatless eating is on the rise. From flexitarians to vegetarians to vegans, people everywhere are interested in eating more plant-based foods.
3. Look fit, feel great: Diets rich in vegetable, fruits, whole grains, legumes and nuts are consistently linked to lower blood cholesterol and blood pressure levels.
4. Help the planet: Animal agriculture is the leading cause of climate change, which is why the United Nations urges people to eat less meat to help the planet.

"If Americans reduced meat consumption by just 20 percent, it would be as though we all switched from a sedan to a hybrid." –Sierra Club

### **Plant-based Diet Considerations:**

- Substantial health benefits can be achieved without an all or nothing approach and starting with one plant-based meal per week is a realistic and achievable goal.
- Focus on quality: increase plant-based whole foods such as legumes, nuts and seeds, whole grains, vegetables and fruits. Don't fall into the trap of relying on refined carbs and dairy.
- The rice in this recipe can easily be exchanged with quinoa, barley or a wild rice blend. To boost the veggies and reduce the carbs, try swapping out half of the grain for riced cauliflower.
- If you choose to follow a plant-based diet for the long term there are several micronutrients that need special attention: iron, selenium, zinc, vitamin B3, vitamin B6, and vitamin B12. With careful attention these deficiencies can be avoided by selecting a variety of nutrient dense foods. B12 supplementation may be needed if eliminating animal products in entirety.

## Menu Nutritional Highlights:

- What Is Nutritional Yeast? - <https://www.wholefoodsmarket.com/blog/nutritional-yeast-one-pantry-staple-your-cooking-missing>
  - Nutritional Yeast is a deactivated yeast related to brewer's yeast, which is used as a fermentation agent in beer making. The yeast is grown on a food source — some brands use molasses — then harvested, heated, dried and crumbled. This process deactivates the yeast, and creates a wonderfully nutty, tasty and versatile ingredient.
  - It is packed with B vitamins, thus the “nutritional” in the name:
    - Just one tablespoon of nutritional yeast can contain\*:
      - 180% Daily Value B1 (Thiamine)
      - 160% Daily Value B2 (Riboflavin)
      - 70% Daily Value B3 (Niacin)
      - 140% Daily Value B6 (Pyridoxine)
      - 40% Daily Value Folic Acid
      - 40% Daily Value B12
      - 3 grams protein
      - 1 gram fiber
    - \*All values based on Bragg Nutritional Yeast Seasoning, available at Whole Foods Market and may change from brand to brand. Yeast itself does not produce B12, so if it's listed on the label, it has been fortified with it.
  - To preserve all the B vitamins, store in a dark glass or a ceramic container to keep it protected from the light. Since it's a dry product, you want to lid tightly sealed to keep moisture out — as long as nutritional yeast stays dry, it can last for up to two years.
  - B vitamins help support the immune and nervous systems and help us convert food into the store of energy that we depend on each day. Since there is no vegan food source of B12, nutritional yeast is one of the easiest ways to add it into a vegan diet.
- Ever heard the combination of beans and rice make a complete protein?
  - It's true; however, it is a little bit misleading as they don't need to be eaten in the same meal in order for our bodies to utilize all the nutrients.
- Kidney and black beans pack in the protein for this plant-based meal and serve as a rich source of fiber. Fiber can help curb cravings and promote satiety, as well as regulate digestive function and blood sugar. Two cups provide the entire daily value for fiber!
  - While there isn't much difference nutritionally between canned beans and dry beans, canned beans may include extra sodium and some cans are lined with BPA. Rinsing canned beans with water can reduce sodium by up to 40% and some brands advertise BPA free lining. Dry beans are very budget friendly but do require extra cook time or a pressure cooker.