

Plant-Based Diets Grow In Popularity: Veggie Tostada Towers, Orange Dark Chocolate Yogurt Parfait Bowl Recipes Included

by Erin McGraw

August 31 2020 2:20 PM



The term “plant-based diet” has recently garnered increased attention and headlines. While 2020 has been marked by events beyond our control, choosing foods to bolster our health is one thing within our power.

So are what exactly is a “plant-based diet,” and does it have superior health benefits? “Plant-based diets” have no official definition.

For some, it means choosing plant foods first, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, legumes, and whole grains, before adding foods from animal sources, such as cheese, yogurt, chicken or beef. For others it means only choosing plant foods, omitting the other food groups, and potentially the nutrients they provide.

The term ‘plant-based’ can allow for flexibility in personal food preferences, while aiming to increase daily plant food consumption.

”What are the health benefits? There is no denying the benefits plant foods offer. Fruits and vegetables provide a variety of vitamins and minerals, including antioxidants with numerous health benefits. Whole grains, nuts, seeds, and legumes offer protein and an array of vitamins and minerals. All plant foods offer fiber, important for satiety, digestion, and cardiovascular health. Recognizing their benefits in overall health and disease prevention, does this mean choosing only plant foods is best?

“Eating from a variety of food groups is the best way to meet your nutrient needs and allows for the flexibility that is important for successful lifestyle changes,” says McGraw. How do dairy and plants work together?

Decades of research show plant and dairy foods can help reduce the risk for various diseases and help Americans get more of the nutrients they are lacking. For example, most Americans do not get enough calcium, vitamin D, potassium, and fiber in their diets. Milk is the leading food source of calcium, vitamin D, and potassium, while plant foods provide fiber. Together, they are a perfect team to cover all of these nutrients.

Additionally “probiotics,” the healthy bacteria found in fermented dairy foods like yogurt and kefir, offer a variety of health and digestive benefits. Plant foods also function as “prebiotics,” helping to feed the healthy bacteria present in the digestive tract. Together, dairy foods and plant foods can help maximize these individual health benefits.

There are many different nutrients our bodies need every single day to be as healthy as possible. Specific nutrients, such as vitamin B12, are important components of a healthy diet that plants cannot supply.

Complete proteins, which are proteins with all the necessary building blocks, are also more difficult to get from only plant-based foods. By incorporating dairy with your plant sources, you can ensure nutrients such as vitamin B12 and complete, quality protein are consumed. To learn more about how dairy and plant-based foods work together to maximize health, visit www.stldairy council.org and check out our “Dairy + Plant-Based Diets” under “Our Resources.”

Reach Erin McGraw at 314-835-9668 or emcgraw@stldairycouncil.org. Follow the St. Louis District Dairy Council on Facebook and Instagram at [STLDairyCouncil](#).



Recipes

Veggie Tostada Towers

A fun, interactive recipe, that the whole family can help assemble. Tostada towers are packed with delicious dairy, and can be customized to your favorite vegetables.

Servings: 4 Adapted from: Undeniably dairy
Ingredients 12 (6-inch) corn tortillas 1 ½ teaspoon olive oil 2 medium zucchinis, chopped 2 plum tomatoes, chopped 1 medium red onion, chopped 1 each green and red bell pepper, chopped 2 jalapeno peppers, with seeds, mince 1 cup frozen corn kernels, thawed 4 scallions, green and white parts, minced ¼ cup chopped cilantro (plus 4 sprigs for garnish) ½ teaspoon salt 1 ½ cups grated pepper jack cheese ¼ cup fat-free sour cream
Instructions 1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees Fahrenheit. Place corn tortillas on baking sheets. Bake for 10 minutes or until crisp. 2. While tortillas are in the oven, heat a large, nonstick pan over medium-high heat. Add oil. Once hot, sauté zucchini, tomatoes, onion, peppers, corn and scallion for 4 minutes. 3. Drain excess liquids through a mesh strainer. Return vegetables to pan. Stir in cilantro and salt. 4. Onto each of 4 baked tortillas, sprinkle 3 tablespoons of the

cheese and 1/8 of vegetable mixture. Top each with another baked tortilla. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese and vegetable mixture. Top with remaining baked tortillas. 5. Serve each "tower" with 1 tablespoon sour cream, and if desired, fresh cilantro. Nutrition facts: 460 Calories, 18 grams fat, 60 grams carbohydrate, 18 grams protein, 29% DV calcium





Orange Dark Chocolate Yogurt Parfait Bowl

This 4-ingredient recipe is a quick and delicious breakfast or snack option, and the combination of orange and dark chocolate adds a level of decadence. It can easily be customized with your favorite fruits and nuts. Servings: 1 Adapted from: Modern Honey
Ingredients 1 cup vanilla Greek yogurt 1 fresh orange, chopped ¼ cup pistachios, shelled 1 tablespoon dark chocolate chunks. Instructions 1. Add yogurt to bowl, top with remaining ingredients. 2. Enjoy! Nutrition facts: 406 Calories, 14 grams fat, 57 grams carbohydrate, 19 grams protein, 22% DV calcium.

Erin McGraw, MS, RDN, LD Nutrition Educator St. Louis District Dairy Council