

A Festive Plant-Based Winter Dinner

BY **DARSHANA THACKER**



The Menu

SERVES 6 TO 8

Polenta Crostini with
Chickpea Pesto



Winter White Bean
Minestrone



Kale and Sweet Potato
Salad with Dried
Cranberries



Festive Vegetable
Pot Pie



Jam Dot Cookies

Here's a festive plant-based dinner party menu that will impress everyone around the table—vegans, vegetarians, and omnivores alike. This menu revolves around a cozy vegetable pot pie with a flaky homemade crust and a veggie-packed filling that's fragrant with cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. For an elegant starter, toasted polenta slices get topped with pesto and fresh tomatoes. To round out the menu, we have a comforting white bean minestrone and a hearty kale salad with diced sweet potatoes and a creamy tahini dressing. Colorful jam-dot cookies with walnuts make the perfect sweet ending.





Polenta Crostini with Chickpea Pesto

MAKES 20 CROSTINI
READY IN 30 MINUTES

This polenta crostini recipe is one of my go-tos for quick and filling appetizer or snack. It is very easy to make, and a great reason to keep premade, tube-style polenta on hand, which I always do.

POLENTA CROSTINI

- 2 (18-ounce) packages pre-cooked, tube-style polenta**
- 1 small tomato, cut into ¼-inch dice (1 cup)**
- 1 small wedge of onion, cut into ¼-inch dice (¼ cup)**
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil**

CHICKPEA PESTO

- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas (¾ cup)**
- 1 cup packed fresh basil**
- 1 small clove garlic**
- 1 teaspoon white wine vinegar**
- Sea salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper**

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Preheat the oven to 425°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
- 2.** To make Polenta Crostini, slice the polenta on the bias into ½-inch thick slices. Arrange the polenta slices on the prepared baking sheet. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until light brown around the edges.
- 3.** In a bowl, mix together the tomato, onion, and basil; set aside.
- 4.** To make Chickpea Pesto, combine the chickpeas, basil, garlic, and vinegar in the bowl of a food processor and pulse into a smooth, spreadable texture. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- 5.** To serve, spread pesto over each polenta slice, then top with tomato mixture. Serve immediately.



Winter White Bean Minestrone

MAKES 6 CUPS

READY IN 35 MINUTES

A delicious addition to a holiday menu or a hearty one-pot meal on a winter night, this comforting white minestrone is full of vegetables and fresh herbs. Top with chopped roasted red peppers for a pretty color contrast.

- 1 medium turnip, peeled and cut into ½-inch dice (2 cups)**
- 1 small onion, cut into ¼-inch dice (1 cup)**
- 1 cup mushrooms, cut into ½-inch dice**

- 2 teaspoons fresh garlic, minced (4 cloves)**
- 2 cups cauliflower, cut into ½-inch florets**
- 1 medium zucchini, cut into ½-inch dice (1 cup)**
- 1 (15-ounce) can white beans, rinsed and drained (1½ cups)**
- 1 cup whole grain macaroni**
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh sage**
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley**
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning**
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar**
- Sea salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 roasted red pepper (from the jar), cut into ¼-inch dice, for garnish**

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Sauté turnips, onions, mushrooms, and garlic in a soup pot over medium-low heat, stirring frequently, until onions start to turn golden brown, about 10 minutes. (There is no need to add water; the mushrooms will release enough liquid to prevent sticking.)
- 2.** Add the cauliflower, zucchini, beans, macaroni, sage, parsley, Italian seasoning, and 4 cups of water; cook for 10 minutes until the macaroni is al dente.
- 3.** Add the vinegar, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook for 5 minutes longer, until the flavors merge. Add more water if the soup gets too thick.
- 4.** Serve soup hot, garnished with chopped roasted peppers.



Kale and Sweet Potato Salad with Dried Cranberries

MAKES 6 CUPS

READY IN 30 MINUTES

This simple kale salad recipe delivers big on flavor. Steamed sweet potatoes, cranberries, and cashews bring an array of colors and textures. The dressing gets its creamy texture and smoky-sweet flavor from a combination of tahini and smoked paprika.

SALAD

- 1 medium sweet potato, cut into ¾-inch dice (about 3 cups)**
- 6 ounces kale, shredded (6 cups)**
- ½ cup dried cranberries**
- 2 tablespoons chopped cashews**
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley**

DRESSING

- 2 tablespoons tahini**
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice**
- 2 teaspoons smoked paprika**
- ½ teaspoon fresh garlic, minced (1 clove)**
- Sea salt**
- Freshly ground black pepper**

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** Place a steamer insert in a saucepan over 1 or 2 inches of water. Bring water to a boil, add sweet potatoes, cover, and steam for about 20 minutes, until potatoes are very tender when pierced with the tip of a sharp knife. Transfer potatoes to a large bowl to cool.
- 2.** To make the dressing, combine the tahini, lemon juice, smoked paprika, garlic, and ½ cup water in a Mason jar. Cover jar with a tight-fitting lid, and shake well to blend the ingredients; taste dressing, add salt and pepper to taste, and shake again.
- 3.** In a large salad bowl, combine the sweet potatoes, kale, cranberries, cashews, and parsley. Pour the dressing over the salad, and mix well. For best results, let the salad stand for 15 to 20 minutes before serving.



Festive Vegetable Pot Pie

MAKES ONE 9-INCH PIE

READY IN 1 HOUR 30 MINUTES

This pie may take some time to bake, but the flaky crust and the well-spiced filling make it totally worth the effort. The crust is made with almond flour and mashed potatoes, and the savory vegetable filling is fragrant with warming spices including cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, and allspice.

CRUST

- 2 large potatoes (about 1½ pounds), cut into large pieces**
- 1½ cups oat flour, plus more for dusting**
- ¼ cup almond flour**
- 1 tablespoon ground golden flaxseed**
- 1 tablespoon fresh rosemary (or ½ tablespoon dried)**
- ½ teaspoon sea salt**
- 1 teaspoon baking powder**

FILLING

- 1 medium onion, cut into ¼-inch dice (2 cups)**
- 8 ounces button or cremini mushrooms, cut into ¼-inch dice (about 3 cups)**
- 1 tablespoon fresh garlic, minced (6 cloves)**
- 1 (15-ounce) can diced tomatoes (1½ cups)**
- ¼ teaspoon ground allspice**
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon**
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg**
- ⅛ teaspoon ground black pepper, plus more to taste**

- ⅛ teaspoon ground cloves**
- 4 cups frozen vegetable medley (20 ounces)**
- ¼ cup nutritional yeast**
- 2 tablespoons oat flour**
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice**
- Sea salt**

- 1.** Preheat oven to 425°F. To make the crust, place a steamer insert in a saucepan over 1 or 2 inches of water. Bring water to a boil, add potatoes, cover, and steam for about 10 minutes, until the potatoes are very tender when pierced with the tip of a sharp knife. Remove pan from the heat, and transfer potatoes to a large bowl to cool. Mash the potatoes well with a potato masher.
- 2.** Mix together the oat and almond flours, flaxseed, rosemary, salt, and baking powder in a bowl. Add the potatoes, and mix well with a spatula or by hand, to bind the dough; if needed, add up to 3 tablespoons water in 1-tablespoon increments. Without kneading, gather the dough into a ball; it should be crumbly/flaky in texture.
- 3.** Divide the dough into two equal portions. Line a wood cutting board with plastic wrap, and lightly dust the plastic with oat flour. Place one portion of dough on the plastic, cover it with a second piece of plastic, and roll out the dough to a 10- to 11-inch disk. Lay the dough in a dry pie dish, pressing up the sides to the edge of the dish. Poke dough with a fork a couple of times. Bake for 20 minutes.
- 4.** Meanwhile, roll the second portion of dough out to a 10- to 11-inch disk; set aside.
- 5.** To make filling, sauté the onions, mushrooms, and garlic in a saucepan over medium heat, stirring frequently, for 10 minutes or until the onions start to turn translucent. (There is no need to add water; the mushrooms will release enough liquid to prevent sticking.)
- 6.** Add the tomatoes, allspice, cinnamon, nutmeg, pepper, and cloves, and let the mixture cook for another 5 minutes.
- 7.** Add the frozen vegetables, nutritional yeast, oat flour, lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste. Mix well. Cook for another 5 minutes.
- 8.** Pour the filling into the pie crust. Lay the top crust over the filling, and crimp dough around the edges. If there is any dough left over, shape it into leaves or use cookie cutters to make decorations for the top crust.
- 9.** Bake the pie for about 60 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove from oven and let it sit for 10 minutes before cutting and serving.



Jam Dot Cookies

MAKES 20 (1½-INCH) COOKIES

READY IN 1 HOUR

These walnutty vegan cookies will disappear as fast as you can make them—so you might want to make a double batch. To bring more color to your cookie platter, use an array of different colored jams—such as strawberry, mixed berry, mango, and apricot—for the dot fillings. Store the cookies at room temperature in an airtight container for up to one week. If the cookies lose their crunch, reheat them in a 350°F oven for 10 to 15 minutes.

- ¾ cup oat flour
- ½ cup sorghum flour
- 6 tablespoons cane sugar
- ¼ cup chopped walnuts
- 2 tablespoons coconut flakes
- 1 tablespoon ground flaxseed
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 pinch sea salt
- ½ cup unsweetened, unflavored plant milk or water
- ¼ cup fruit-sweetened jam, any flavor

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. In a mixing bowl, whisk together the oat flour, sorghum flour, sugar, walnuts, coconut flakes, flaxseed, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt. Mix well.
3. Add the plant milk, and use your hands or a spatula to thoroughly mix the dough. Scoop out 1 tablespoon of dough and roll it into a ball. Place on the prepared baking sheet and continue with the remaining dough, positioning balls about 1½ inches apart.
4. Press the balls into small 1-inch disks, then press the center of each cookie with your thumb or the back of a small spoon to create a well to accommodate ½ teaspoon of jam.
5. Dollop ½ teaspoon of jam in the center of each cookie.
6. Bake cookies until lightly golden-brown, about 30 minutes.
7. Once cookies are done, transfer the baking sheet to a cooling rack for a few minutes.