

Get Shopping

The beauty of thinking plant-first is that it inspires you to not only reimagine your go-to produce, but also to open up to fresh, whole-food finds in every aisle. Here's how to fill your cart with smart staples and some healthy packaged options to make for a smooth, tasty transition.

BY SUSAN SAGAN LEVITAN



Take it from me: You won't need a whole new grocery routine to stock up for

plant-based eating—just a little shift to your shopping list so that it skews toward the produce, grains, legumes and other whole foods that are to become the (whole-grain) bread and (vegan) butter of your weekly meals. As a certified holistic health coach, I get many people seeking my help to incorporate plant foods into their diets.

One of my favorite steps is joining them for their regular grocery run to not only set them up for success, but also show them how small moves add up to a well-rounded cart that you can cook by. Use this aisle-by-aisle approach including expert nutrition advice and foodie tips to shop happy and eat healthy any day of the week.

1 Produce

Your plant-based shopping trip starts here on the store's perimeter. With so many good options, you can't go wrong, but how best to check off all the boxes? A little-known fact is that the government guidelines not only give you big-picture goals for getting in your veggies, but also break down specific color-coded categories to target—along with the suggested weekly minimums for those—so that you cover your nutritional bases. Take your pick of a couple different items from each produce subgroup below to color inside the lines (or above and beyond them!) throughout the week.

Dark Green Veggies

(1½–2 cups per week)

You'll likely go well beyond this minimum on a plant-based diet—indeed, I tell my clients that the sky's the limit with dark leafy greens. Besides spinach, broccoli and kale, think about a dark leafy lettuce or watercress you'd like to introduce in your salad, says dietitian Su-Nui Escobar, RDN, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. And don't overlook lighter shades, adds Jen Nguyen, RDN, director of nutrition at Sweet Pea Plant-Based Kitchen in Rochester, New York. "While it's true that the deeper and darker the color, the more nutritious, iceberg lettuce can still have benefits such as providing more water content."

Red and Orange Veggies

(4–6 cups per week)

Carrots, tomatoes, bell peppers and sweet potatoes may already be in your repertoire, so consider easy adds like acorn and butternut squash—and even canned pumpkin puree (though



Make sure red or orange veggies are in your cart.

not the pie filling). "Canned pumpkin is great in smoothies or baked goods," says Escobar.

Starchy Veggies

(4–6 cups per week)

Corn, peas, lima beans and potatoes of all types fit the bill. You may lean toward whole grains to supply the starch on your plate, but there's a

reason to save a spot for these veggies, too. "Keep in mind that the nutrient profile of starchy veggies is different than whole grains," says Nguyen—and those are nutrients you don't want to miss out on.

Other Veggies

(3½–5 cups per week)

What's left? Favorites like beets, cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, squash and zucchini. Basically, when you've got your colors covered, follow your taste buds. "Cruciferous vegetables like cauliflower tend to be the most versatile veggies," says Nguyen. (Think cauliflower rice, mash and even cauliflower bread!)



Looking for tofu? It may be in the produce aisle.



You can't go wrong no matter which fruit you pick.

Quick Moves to Reduce Food Waste

You know to check the fridge before you grocery-shop so that you don't inadvertently double up on the fresh produce you already have at home. And there's more you can do to make sure every tasty bit you buy makes it to your plate—not waste, says Amanda Frederickson, author of the cookbook *Simple Beautiful Food*. Her weekly Instagram, *Fridge Foraging* (@amandafrederickson), gives creative ways to use what's in your kitchen.

UNWRAP ALL PRODUCE BEFORE PUTTING IT INTO THE FRIDGE "This not only prevents condensation from building up and creating rot, but also shows you what you have in the fridge when you go to cook."

REVIVE WILTED VEGGIES IN THE OVEN "Just because something like a carrot or bunch of kale is limp doesn't mean you can't use it. When they are past their perfect crispness, cook them and no one will know the difference."

BLEND OR FREEZE BORDERLINE ITEMS "Throw almost-too-ripe produce into a blender and make a smoothie. Or you can freeze just about any fruit or vegetable."

EXTEND THE LIFE OF FRESH HERBS "Put soft herbs like parsley and cilantro in a small cup with water and they will last for weeks."

"I use beans in veggie chili, baked falafel, hummus and lentil soup," says Saperstein.

Grains

Opt for whole grains over white rice and you'll get more fiber and nutrients. Varieties such as brown rice, kasha, couscous, barley, farro and quinoa can sub into your favorite rice dishes.

Bread and Pasta

"For bread products, find those high in fiber, and choose corn over flour tortillas," suggests Escobar. Consider pastas made from lentil, quinoa and chickpeas for an easy nutrition boost. "Chickpea pasta is high in fiber and protein and resembles the texture of refined pasta, so it hits the button for many consumers," says Nguyen.

Spreads and Sauces

Looking for a new nut butter—almond, walnut, hazelnut or cashew—for your PB&J? Reach for one with no sugar or oil added. You may also want to pick up plant-based versions of products like bottled creamy salad dressing and mayonnaise that you use often to effortlessly swap out dairy.

STOCK-UP TIP Don't skip the bulk aisle. You can load up and save on nuts, grains, dried fruits, oatmeal, rice and dried beans.



Fruits

(1½–2 cups per day)

With fruits, there are no color quotas to aim for as with vegetables—still, feel free to mix it up. The more variety, the more good stuff you bring into your diet. If it's easier to picture your goal as pieces of fruit rather than cups, aim for at least two to four a day. "One serving of fruit is a small apple, a medium orange, a medium-sized banana or a handful of grapes," says Halle Saperstein, RDN, a clinical dietitian at Henry Ford Health System in West Bloomfield, Michigan.

STOCK-UP TIP In many supermarkets, you can also find plant-based proteins such as tofu, seitan and tempeh in the produce section.

2 Dairy

As you know, this aisle is not just for, well, dairy anymore. Plant-based alternatives usually reside right next to whatever dairy might be in your current rotation: milk, yogurt, creamer, butter, sour cream and cheese in all its forms. With regard to swapping out milk, make sure to check the label of the alternative you pick—whether that's soy, almond, oat, rice or any other plant-based option. "Choose an unsweetened or lightly sweetened nondairy beverage to avoid added sugar," says Escobar. Also look to see that it's fortified with calcium.

STOCK-UP TIP Healthy dips like refrigerated hummus and guacamole are located here, too.

3 Meat and Seafood

If you crave the taste and textures of surf and turf, you're in luck. At most grocery stores,

Fresh or frozen veggies pack the same nutrition boost.



you can find everything from meatless burgers to plant-based chicken nuggets and patties, seitan bacon, tofurkey, soy chorizo and a choice of several different faux deli slices. Many of these products are sold frozen, so check the freezer section as well to know your options.

The name of the game here is to read the label. "Meat alternatives may contain a lot of preservatives, binders, saturated fat and sodium," says Nguyen. "Look at the percentage of daily value for saturated fat and sodium—they should not exceed 20% and ideally they should be 5% or lower."

STOCK-UP TIP Other alternatives for patties include veggie burgers and bean burgers.

4 Freezer

Besides offering the aforementioned variety of plant-based meat alternatives, the frozen section is a key source of affordable out-of-season produce. Frozen produce comes in handy when you run low on fresh fruit or veggies and makes a great addition to smoothies, soups and baked goods.

STOCK-UP TIP Consider frozen pizza crusts made with cauliflower, zucchini, kale, chickpea, sweet potato and quinoa. Also, there are plenty of plant-based ice creams to choose

from—just be aware that these delicious treats likely taste a little different than the dairy version you're used to, but can still contain the same fat and sugar.

5 Dry Goods

In the center of the store, you'll find a plethora of processed foods (candy aisle, anyone?), but also a large variety of staples for your pantry. Stay focused on scoring your beans, legumes, grains and nuts here.

Beans and Peas

This grouping gets its own subcategory and weekly goal under the dietary guidelines the way veggies do: Your aim is to have at least 1–2 dry cups per week. On a plant-based diet, you will likely find you're putting them in heavier rotation to sub them in for meat, as they are rich in protein. You can't go wrong with whichever kind you pick—black, white, pinto, kidney, garbanzo, lentils and more.

Bring on the beans!



Top Swaps

These plant-based picks are delicious substitutes for foods you may regularly put on repeat—and just a sample of the plentiful options out there.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10

1 Butter Up!

Made with cashews and coconut oil, **Miyoko's Creamery Cultured Vegan Butter** spreads and bakes beautifully. (\$6.50, miyokos.com)

2 Yummy Yogurt

Silk Almondmilk Yogurt Alternative gets the creaminess just right. (\$1.50, silk.com)

3 Eggcellent Fun

Made from cashews and almonds, **WunderEggs Plant-Based Hard Boiled Eggs** are a one-step breakfast. (\$45 per six-pack, craftycounter.com)

4 Say Cheese

Its tofu magic and a mild, mouthwatering flavor make **Field Roast Chao Slices** -

Creamy Original, the perfect pairing for sandwiches, pasta and nachos alike. (\$5.80, fieldroast.com)

5 A Cold Cut Above

The savory taste and texture of **Tofurky Deli Slices** creates a hit for sandwiches (\$4, tofurky.com)

6 Simple as Pie

Banza Chickpea Pizza Crust aces the crispy base for your latest pizza creation and supplies fiber and protein. (\$7.50 per two-pack, eatbanza.com)

7 A Twist on Noodles

When you want to switch up your zoodle game, **Palmini Hearts of Palm Linguine** packs a real-pasta experience. (\$4, eatpalmini.com)

8 MVP for Meat Dishes

They brown just like ground beef, but **Noble Plate Meatless Crumbles** are made of 100% pea protein and have a neutral taste you can flavor. (\$14, wholesomeprovisions.com)

9 Great Catch for Fish

Mind Blown Plant-Based Dusted Scallops turns a medley of plant flours and starches into a creative way to fill your seafood craving. (\$12, plantbasedseafoodco.com)

10 Savory Snack Hack

Moku Plant-Based Jerky from celebrity chef David Chang delivers a mushroom version that tastes like the real thing and may even convert those who don't go for jerky. (\$6.70, mokufoods.com)

