

MODULE 6: COMFORTING STAPLES | TRANSCRIPT

LESSON 2

Meaty Alternatives

How do you get meaty flavor without meat?

Well, it's a bit about the ingredients and a lot about the cooking techniques. Remember, dry-heat cooking methods like braising, roasting, searing, even grilling add meat-y depth of flavor to ingredients because they catalyze the Maillard reaction. Maillard means caramelization, and that means big flavor. Most techniques you'd use to prepare or season meat, should absolutely be considered for plant-based ingredients, too. Think about it: unseasoned, raw meat isn't thaaat exciting flavor wise. It's the searing, grilling, braising, and the seasoning that bring it to life. Same goes for a simple carrot or some mushrooms.

Here are some meaty bases to try solo or in combination, and a few thoughts about each. Unless otherwise specified, try them in sauces, soups, scrambles, casseroles, tacos, wraps, lasagnas, with pasta, rice, and cooked grains—anywhere you could use meat.

Mushrooms

Seared and/or roasted, mushrooms are sponges for flavor, spices, and seasonings, so dress them up like you would any meat-based dish. For meatiness they're best cooked using dry-heat cooking methods in a little oil and/or with aromatics like onions and garlic.

You want to see the Maillard reaction when cooking mushrooms for “meaty” flavor—it enhances their inherent umami taste and adds complexity to a dish. The trick is to not over stir. Allow the mushrooms to sear undisturbed in a skillet or pan then utilize their absorbent, sponge-like qualities. See, once all that Maillard reaction creates delicious fond in the bottom of your pan, deglaze the pan by adding some stock, water, wine, or soy sauce to release it. The mushrooms will soak up all that tasty flavor.

Season mushrooms with spices and or spice blends, or simple salt and pepper. A little searing and a little salt can be enough for wow-factor flavor.

Good Food Cooking Tip: to really get some drool-worthy searing action on mushrooms when they're cooking in a skillet or pan, place a cast-iron skillet on top of the mushrooms to press them down. Let it sit there for 2–4 minutes. Remove, stir, and repeat. This is also a great tip for grilling mushrooms, too. Lay mushrooms on a greased grill or grill pan and then set the cast iron skillet on top for gorgeous grill marks and meaty flavor.

Lentils

With the exception of red lentils—they're more potato-like, starchy, and better for mashes and stews—brown, green, beluga, and French lentils add earthy umami and slightly pepper-y flavor to a variety of dishes. Their plump, round shapes en masse also add ground-beef-like texture to recipes from tomato sauces to tacos. You can cook them in salted water, but try seasoned and salted water or broth for more flavor infusion from the inside out. Try liquid smoke, smoked salt, onions, and/or garlic in the cooking water for big flavor.

Once cooked and drained, you can then sear or roast them, or cook with aromatics to add caramelization and lip-smacking layers of flavor. Season lentils with spices or spice blends as you sear to build flavor everyone will love.

Chickpeas & Beans

Prepare these ingredients just like you would lentils using our tips—they have similar properties and take on seasonings very well. Use when you want more sizeable texture and when you want to add creamy, buttery flavor, and texture to a dish.

Buckwheat & Rice

These ingredients are terrific additions to a blend with the others mentioned because in combination with them, or on their own, they add the fatty, toothsome texture you'd find in sausage or ground beef. If using 1 cup of mushrooms, beans, lentils, and or chickpeas, add ¼ cup of buckwheat and/or rice to the mix for a scramble, taco filling, burger, or sausage patty texture. Buckwheat and rice also act as a bit of a binder for these recipe creations thanks to their starchy properties.

Lesson Action

Use what you've learned here to prepare a creation using the Meatless Crumbles Template. Try different combos and techniques and document what you find in your cooking journal. Share with friends, family, or the course community if you like.