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# Secrets of a raw culinary artist

Raw menu planning for optimal health, by Cherie Soria

**H**ow can you be sure that you are providing the most nutrient-dense, well-balanced meals for yourself and your family? The truth is that most of us are happy if our families eat raw foods, and nutrition is secondary. But raw is not enough – in fact, some lightly cooked foods are better choices than many raw foods might be.

Why? Because a diet high in fats – even raw fats like soaked nuts and seeds or extra-virgin olive oil – fills us up too quickly and doesn't allow room for other, more nutritious, foods. Good fats are essential, but the majority of what we eat, by volume, should be green vegetables. At Living Light we say, "Make green your favourite colour!"

There are a lot of reasons health-conscious raw food chefs have much more to consider than traditional chefs when planning a menu. In addition to balancing flavour, texture and appearance, raw food chefs need to balance their desire to please and impress their families and guests with their responsibility to provide meals that are easy to digest and contain all the nutrients required for optimal health.

Most raw food chefs also demand the freshest, ripest, most nutrient-dense seasonal raw, organic ingredients, while limiting fats and salt. Wow, that's a lot to think about! But wait, there's more!

Let's not forget your budget. This is even more important today than ever. Just because money is tight doesn't mean that meals have to be less nourishing. In fact, it is sometimes just the opposite. When

times are tough, people often cut back on richer ingredients and eat more in-season, garden-fresh foods.

In many ways it's easier to create menu plans for the family (even your finicky eaters) than for guests, since you know their preferences, whereas lots of unknowns come into play when preparing a menu for guests. Do they like spicy food? Are they on a special diet? Do they have food allergies? Are their tastes simple or sophisticated?

In any case, remember to balance rich foods with lighter ones, and to keep fat to less than 30% of the meal's calories. That sounds high, but it isn't unusual for raw food meals to be more than 50% fat. Here is an example of a typical high-fat raw food meal:

**Appetizer** Guacamole or hummus with crudités or flax crackers

**Green salad** Made with sun-dried olives and dressing made with oil, avocado, or tahini

**Soup** Made creamy with the use of avocado or nut cream

**Main course (entrée)** With avocado, nut paté or cream sauce

**Dessert** Made with avocado, coconut or nuts

If three of the five menu items above were replaced with low-fat or fat-free choices, the menu would still be more than 30% fat, so a keen eye on fat is essential. (See my article in the previous issue, "Cutting Fat without Cutting Flavour.")

**Other things to think about when preparing a menu:**

- **The order in which foods are served** Flavours should build in a menu, or the palate cannot perceive the subtle flavours of subsequent courses.
- **Colour** The human appetite responds to colour, and a variety of colours ensures an abundance of phytonutrients in the meal. Of all the colours, make sure green predominates.
- **Quantity** Serve enough food to satisfy, without offering so much that people overeat.
- **Preparation time** Make your menu realistic. One gourmet item is enough to showcase the potential of raw food (and your skill as a chef), and the remainder can be simple, easy-to-prepare, lower-fat selections.
- **Budget** Buy seasonally for the freshest, most nutritious and least costly menu. Choose common seeds like sunflower or pumpkin over more costly, exotic nuts like macadamia or pine nuts.
- **Textures** Contrasting textures like a creamy dip paired with a crispy cracker are always more pleasing than when everything is the same texture.
- **Range of flavours** Include all

# A few different kinds of menu-planning methods

- 1 A daily menu planned the night before** This approach is most often used for immediate family, whose preferences are known. It is usually based on what is in the refrigerator or the garden at the time, what is available at the market (if you have time to shop), and how much time you have to prepare the meal. Organizing your menu the night before allows you a little advance preparation for steps like soaking nuts and seeds or making a component that is required for the next day.
- 2 A weekly menu of meals you might prepare for your family** This approach is also used most often for immediate family, whose preferences are known. It takes into consideration what is on sale or available at the farmers' market and in your garden, as well as what is left over from one day to the next. It also allows time to shop and gather ingredients in advance, considers how much food-preparation time you anticipate having on particular days, and provides the opportunity to make a few things in advance.
- 3 A rotating set of a dozen or more menus, based on family preferences** These menus vary little, except for seasonal ingredients that can be easily replaced by others that are available all year. Most families enjoy the same 10 or 12 meals and appreciate knowing what to expect. Having a set of rotating favourites takes the guesswork out of meal planning and ensures that the family will be happy. This approach takes a while to organize, but once it's done, it makes life very easy. Then, if you wish to try new dishes, you can set a day aside specifically for that purpose.
- 4 A special-occasion menu for your family and friends** This approach comes into play during holidays and other celebrations. The menu is usually planned in advance and takes into consideration the event or theme, family preferences, what is on sale or what is available at the farmers' market and in your garden, and how much time and energy you have for preparation. Presumably it includes time to make a few things in advance.
- 5 A special event menu for a variety of guests, many of whom you do not know** This approach encompasses the factors listed in point 4 above, with the addition of several added considerations. To address these, we at Living Light teach a course entitled Catering and Elegant Entertaining. Some of the things we advise students to focus on include:
  - **Event location/venue** Note the amount of refrigeration required, the available preparation space, and whether the room layout and furniture are more amenable to a buffet or service menu.
  - **Guests** Considerations include the number of guests and their general food preferences.
  - **Type of event** Holiday, wedding, art show, etc.
  - **Menu or event theme** Ethnic, seasonal, appetizers, etc.
  - **Budget** It's easy to exceed budget if you don't buy seasonally. Limit exotic ingredients and expensive nuts.
  - **Production time** Consider preparing some simpler dishes, especially if you are serving a lot of people. Plan to prepare some dishes in advance.

five flavour categories in your menu: sweet, salty, sour, bitter and pungent. Also, complement strongly flavoured dishes with milder ones.

- **Digestibility** Follow food-combining principles as much as possible, to ensure easy digestion.
- **Nutrition** Make sure your menu is nutritionally adequate. (See my book *Raw Food Revolution Diet* for sample menus containing nutritional evaluations.)

Menu planning is fun and creative when you know the rules. It's also an important

part of health assurance, so don't just make a bunch of delicious foods without a well-thought-out plan. With some forethought, you can showcase your beautiful culinary creations and ensure that you, your family, and your friends are getting all the nutrients you need!

Overleaf is a French-themed menu that is fit for entertaining, yet it has an eye on total fat content. All recipes serve six.

For everyday eating, the Salad Nicoise would be plenty, with its central feature of "Not Tuna" Croquettes and Stuffed Mushrooms with Spinach, Pine Nuts and Herbs, along with colourful marinated vegetables on a generous bed of leafy greens. For special occasions, the appetizer

and soup may be added for a meal that few would notice has its eye on total fat content and ease of preparation.

At first glance, the Salad Nicoise appears to be high in fat, but the marinade will be discarded. That means the entire full meal salad contains 2 teaspoons of oil, 2 tablespoons each of almonds and sunflower seeds, 2 teaspoons of pine nuts, and 4 olives per person. If the soup and appetizer are included in the menu, they will add 1 tablespoon of tahini and a sixth of an avocado per person. Of course, any of the components of the salad or menu can be omitted to allow for a lower-fat meal.

## Appetizer

### Tomato Towers with Broccoli Tahini Paté

#### Paté

- 3 cups chopped broccoli florets
- ¼ cup raw tahini
- 2 tablespoons sliced green onions
- 1 tablespoon ground flax seeds
- 1 tablespoon nutritional yeast flakes
- 1 tablespoon tamari
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
- 2 large cloves garlic, crushed
- Large pinch of cayenne

#### Other ingredients

- 4 heirloom tomatoes, sliced 0.6cm (¼ inch) thick
- 2 cups alfalfa sprouts
- 2 teaspoons chilli oil

- 1 Put the broccoli into a large bowl and pour 1 litre (1 quart) of nearly boiling water over it. Drain the broccoli after 1 minute and plunge it into cold water. This will turn the broccoli bright green and make it more palatable without negatively affecting the nutrients. Drain the broccoli well and place it on clean kitchen towels to remove any excess water.
- 2 Transfer the broccoli to a food processor fitted with the "S" blade. Add all of the remaining ingredients in the first list above and process until the mixture is completely smooth and creamy.
- 3 Place one slice of tomato on a plate and spread with 2 tablespoons of paté. Then place two more tomato-paté layers on top, and finish with a final slice of tomato.
- 4 Top with sprouts and garnish the plate with a few drops of chilli oil.

Stored in a sealed glass jar in the refrigerator, Broccoli Tahini Paté will keep for up to 3 days.



## Soup

### Cucumber Fennel Bisque

- 2 cucumbers, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 cup chopped fennel
- 1 courgette (zucchini), chopped
- 1 avocado, peeled and seeded
- 1 tablespoon red onion
- 1 tablespoon light miso
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon dried dill weed
- ½ teaspoon Himalayan crystal salt (or to taste)
- 1-2 cups purified water, as needed
- ½ cup thinly shaved fennel
- 1 green onion, sliced (optional)
- 2 teaspoons slivered mint

- 1 Combine the cucumber, fennel, courgette (zucchini), avocado, red onion, miso, coriander, dill and salt in a high-powered blender, and purée until smooth and creamy, adding water to achieve the desired consistency.
- 2 Pour into individual serving bowls and garnish with thinly shaved fennel, optional green onion and mint. Serve chilled.

Store in a sealed glass jar in the refrigerator for up to one day.

## Main course (entrée)

### Salad Nicoise

Composed salads make a beautiful meal and clearly demonstrate the love that went into them. Each item is placed on the bed of lettuce in a creative and appealing design. A traditional Salad Nicoise features cooked fish and hard boiled eggs as well as groupings of colourful vegetables. In our raw vegan version, the central feature is a paté made to look and taste like tuna and we are using stuffed mushrooms in place of eggs. If you are making this recipe for a number of people, it can be served either as one large salad, or as individual, composed salads.

### "Not Tuna" Croquettes (Yields 12 pieces)

- 1½ cups peeled, shredded courgette (zucchini)
- 1 teaspoon Himalayan crystal salt
- ¾ cup dry almonds, soaked 8-12 hours, rinsed and drained
- ¾ cup dry sunflower seeds, soaked 4 to 6 hours, rinsed and drained
- ¼ cup purified water, if needed
- ½ cup minced celery
- ½ cup minced red onion
- ½ cup minced fresh parsley

- ½ cup lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon kelp powder
- ½ teaspoon Himalayan crystal salt
- 1 teaspoon dried dill weed, or 1 tablespoon fresh dill weed
- 1 cup ground golden flax seeds

- 1 Put the shredded courgette (zucchini) in a bowl and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon of salt. Toss well and set aside.
- 2 Run the almonds and the sunflower seeds through a Champion or Green Life juicer fitted with the homogenizing plate. Use very small amounts of water, in an alternating fashion with the nuts and seeds, to facilitate the homogenizing.
- 3 Gently squeeze out the excess water from the zucchini and discard the salty liquid (or reserve it to use in a dressing or soup). Towel dry the softened zucchini.
- 4 Put the almond and sunflower mixture into a large bowl and add the zucchini and other remaining ingredients. Mix well by hand.
- 5 Form into 12 oval-shaped patties and cover each one with ground flax seed. Dehydrate for 2 hours at 125 degrees, or until an outer crust is formed.

Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

### Stuffed Mushrooms with Spinach, Pine Nuts and Herbs (Yields 18 pieces)

- 18 mushrooms, cleaned and stemmed

#### Marinade

- 3 tablespoons tamari
- 3 tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

#### Filling

- ½ cup finely shredded spinach (towel dry spinach after washing, prior to cutting)
- ¼ cup pine nuts, soaked 1-2 hours and drained

- 3 tablespoons minced parsley
- 2 teaspoons light miso
- 2 teaspoons minced fresh basil
- ½ teaspoon garlic, puréed

- 1 In an 18cm (7 inch) square glass baking dish, combine the oils, tamari and lemon juice, and whisk to blend. Add the mushrooms and marinate for at least one hour.
- 2 Combine the spinach, pine nuts, parsley, miso, basil and garlic in a food processor fitted with the "S" blade and pulse to create a chunky paté. Do not over process – the mixture should not be a smooth paté.
- 3 Leaving the mushrooms in the same dish of marinade, fill them with the paté mixture, then place the dish in a dehydrator set at 115 degrees for 2 to 3 hours before serving. Serve warm or cool.

Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to two days.

### Salad dressing

- ¼ cup olive oil
- ¼ cup orange juice
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon minced shallot or onion
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1 clove garlic, puréed
- ½ teaspoon powdered mustard
- ½ teaspoon Himalayan crystal salt
- Freshly ground pepper

#### Marinade for vegetables

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh basil
- 1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
- ½ teaspoon solar-dried sea salt

#### The salad

- 1 courgette (zucchini), diced
- 1 pound green beans, sliced in half lengthwise
- 1 head green leaf lettuce

- 3 tomatoes, each cut into eighths
- 24 sun-dried olives
- ¾ cup capers
- 12 small Not Tuna Croquettes (see recipe on previous page)
- 18 Stuffed Mushrooms (see recipe below left)

- 1 For the dressing: In a small bowl, combine all of the ingredients, and set aside.

- 2 For the marinade: In a medium bowl, combine all of the ingredients, and stir. Remove half the marinade to another bowl. Add the courgette (zucchini) to one bowl of marinade and toss. Add the green beans to the other bowl of marinade and toss. Place both the uncovered bowls in a dehydrator set at 115 degrees for 1 to 2 hours to warm, or place in the refrigerator overnight to marinate.

- 3 To assemble: Place a bed of lettuce on a serving platter, and put the Not Tuna in the centre (or use individual plates with small Not Tuna Croquettes on each).

- 4 Attractively group the mushrooms, tomatoes, olives, capers and marinated courgette (zucchini) and green beans atop the lettuce.

- 5 Evenly pour the dressing over the top of the vegetables.



#### Cherie Soria

is the founder and director of Living Light Culinary Arts Institute, the author of *Angel Foods: Healthy Recipes for Heavenly Bodies*, and co-author of *The Raw Food Revolution*

*Diet: Feast, Lose Weight, Gain Energy, Feel Younger!* She has trained many of the world's top raw food chefs and instructors, and is considered the "mother" of gourmet raw vegan cuisine. Visit [RawFoodChef.com](http://RawFoodChef.com) or write to [info@RawFoodChef.com](mailto:info@RawFoodChef.com).