So Many Savory Fruit Dishes!

Brenda Davis, RD

When I was a little girl, I adored fruit. If my mom brought home a basket of peaches, it disappeared within days. If we went blueberry picking, I'd happily eat blueberries for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I vividly remember one road trip when my mom bought a bag of large plums. I politely offered them to my parents and brother. They all declined. About an hour later, my brother changed his mind and asked if he could have a plum. I replied, "I thought you didn't want any — I ate them." My mom had bought a dozen.

For most of my life, fruit meant bowls of berries, refreshing wedges of watermelon, juicy peaches and plums, bright red cherries, crisp apples, and tangy oranges — vibrant, sweet, and always a treat. But over the years, I discovered something unexpected and wonderful: in cuisines around the world, fruit is not just a sweet delight — it's also a savory star.

From mango curries and pineapple salsas to pumpkin soups with a hint of roasted apple, savory fruit dishes are as rich in history as they are in flavor. When used thoughtfully, fruit adds brightness, acidity, sweetness, and depth to main courses, salads, sauces, and beyond. This article explores how savory fruit pairings can open up an exciting new dimension in plant-based cooking — one that is colorful, nourishing, and perhaps a little surprising!



A Global Tradition of Savory Fruits

While North American and European cuisines often reserve fruit for dessert or breakfast, many traditional cultures routinely weave fruits into savory fare:

- **Middle Eastern and Persian cuisines** are famous for dishes like Fesenjan, a rich walnut and pomegranate stew, or rice pilaf studded with dried apricots and raisins.
- **Indian cooking** masterfully blends fruits like mango and tamarind into chutneys, dals, and curries, balancing sweet, sour, and spicy notes.
- **Mexican salsas** often feature pineapple or mango alongside chilies, lime, and cilantro, adding a bright flavor to dishes ranging from tacos to grain bowls.
- **Southeast Asian salads** often pair tropical fruits, such as green papaya or pomelo, with chilies, lime juice, and fresh herbs for zesty starters or sides.
- **African cuisines** incorporate plantains, bananas, and dried fruits into stews and savory porridges.

These traditions remind us that fruits can do far more than sweeten a dish — they can enrich the savory palate, add balance, and infuse a meal with complexity.



Fruits Commonly Used in Savory Dishes

Nearly any fruit can work in the proper context, but some lend themselves exceptionally well to savory recipes:

- **Apples & Pears** — Great in grain or green salads, slaws, or cooked into savory autumn soups and braises.
- **Bananas & Plantains** — Staples in African, Caribbean, and Latin American savory cooking.
- **Berries (strawberries, blueberries, blackberries, cranberries)** — Add bursts of acidity and color to salads, grain bowls, and sauces; often paired with balsamic reductions.
- **Citrus fruits (oranges, lemons, limes)** — Used for zest, segments, and juices to brighten marinades, dressings, and sauces.
- **Mango** — Wonderful in curries, salsas, and salads; green (unripe) mango adds a tart punch.
- **Pineapple** — Brings bright acidity to stir-fries, salsas, and grain bowls.
- **Pomegranate** — Adds sweet-tart pops to salads, grain dishes, and Middle Eastern stews.
- **Stone fruits (peaches, plums, apricots)** — Delicious roasted into vegetable dishes, tossed into salads, or pureed for savory glazes.
- **Tomatoes & Avocados** — Botanically fruits, these are foundational to countless savory dishes worldwide.



How to Enjoy Savory Fruits in Everyday Meals

Here are a few easy ways to work more savory fruit dishes into your plant-based routine:

- **Add fruit to salsas and chutneys.** Try pineapple salsa over black bean tacos or mango chutney with lentil curry.
- **Toss fresh fruit into salads and slaws.** Orange segments, sliced peaches, or diced apples pair beautifully with leafy greens, shredded cabbage, or quinoa.
- **Roast or grill sturdy fruits.** Peaches, pineapple, pears, and plums caramelize wonderfully when roasted with savory herbs and served over grains or beans.
- **Use fruit-based dressings and marinades.** Blend fresh-squeezed citrus juice, mango, or pureed berries with vinegar, herbs, and spices for vibrant, oil-free dressings.
- **Combine fruit with legumes and grains.** Try adding dried apricots or raisins to a pilaf, quinoa, or bulgur for Middle Eastern flair.



Savory Plant-based Fruit Recipes

Below are three recipes to spark your creativity — each is simple, flavorful, and features fruit in a savory context.

Mango, Chickpea and Veggie Curry
Makes 4 servings.

This deeply nourishing, whole-food, plant-based curry is rich in fiber, phytonutrients, and bold South Asian-inspired flavor. Mango brings a delicate sweetness, cauliflower offers body, and vibrant kale (or spinach) and red pepper enhance texture and color—all without a drop of oil. Get creative by varying the vegetables.

Ingredients:

1 medium onion, finely chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
1-inch piece fresh ginger, peeled and minced
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground coriander
½ tsp ground turmeric
1 jalapeno pepper, finely chopped or ¼–½ tsp chili powder or cayenne pepper
1/2 cup broth or water
3 cups small cauliflower florets (~½ of a medium head)
1 red bell pepper, sliced into thin strips
19 oz can chickpeas, drained and rinsed (2 cups cooked chickpeas)
1 large mango, peeled and cubed
2 cups chopped spinach or baby kale (packed)
1 cup coconut milk (use light or full-fat, based on dietary needs)
¾ teaspoon salt (or to taste)
Freshly grated black pepper, to taste
Juice of 1 lime
Fresh cilantro, chopped, for garnish

Instructions:

1. Dry sauté the chopped onion over low heat for about 5 minutes. If it sticks to the pan, add a little water or broth.
2. Add garlic and ginger; cook another minute until fragrant.
3. Add cumin, coriander, and turmeric. Stir constantly for 1 minute to bloom the spices, adding a splash of broth or water if the pan becomes too dry.
4. Add ½ cup broth or water along with the cauliflower florets, red pepper strips, and jalapenos. Cover and simmer for 10-15 minutes.
5. Add the chickpeas, diced mango, greens, and coconut milk. Simmer uncovered for an additional 5 minutes, allowing the flavors to meld and the sauce to thicken slightly.
6. Stir in the lime juice and season with salt and pepper to taste.
7. Garnish with chopped fresh cilantro before serving. Serve with rice or quinoa.



Fresh Pineapple Salsa

Serves: 4–6 (as a topping)

Ingredients:

- 1 medium-sized fresh pineapple, diced
- ½ red onion, finely diced
- 1 red pepper, chopped
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced
- ½ cup chopped fresh cilantro or parsley
- 3 tablespoons fresh-squeezed lime juice (1-2 limes)
- ¼ teaspoon salt (or to taste)

Instructions:

1. Gently combine pineapple, red onion, garlic, red pepper, jalapeño pepper, cilantro, lime juice, and salt in a bowl. Mix gently
2. Chill briefly before serving with tortilla chips, tacos, burgers, salads, or grain bowls.



Apple, Butternut Squash Soup

Makes 7.75 cups (1.94 L)

This recipe is adapted from the Kick Diabetes Cookbook by Brenda Davis and Vesanto Melina. It is a creamy, comforting soup. Roasting the squash first provides a greater depth of flavor and makes removing the flesh a breeze! The apple adds a natural sweetness that further elevates the flavor.

Ingredients:

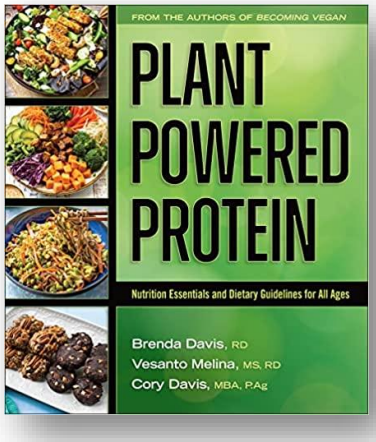
3 pounds fresh butternut squash (generous medium-sized squash)
1 large apple
5 cups water
1 large onion, chopped
3 tablespoons light miso
3 tablespoons peeled and grated fresh ginger
1 tablespoon mild Indian curry paste
½ red chili, seeded and diced, or ⅛ teaspoon cayenne (optional)
½ teaspoon ground turmeric
½ cup raw cashews
Salt to taste
Freshly ground black pepper

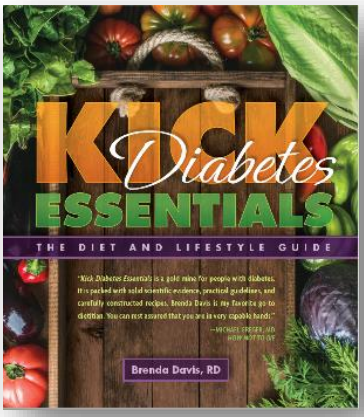
Instructions:

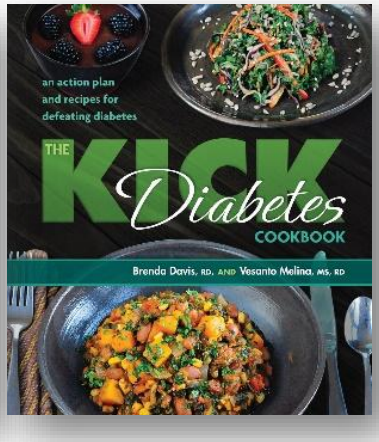
1. Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.
2. Cut the squash in half lengthwise. Scoop out and discard the seeds and membranes. Place the squash face down on the cookie sheet.
3. Bake for 30 minutes. Cut the apple in half and core it. Place it on the cookie sheet with the squash and continue cooking another 25-30 minutes.

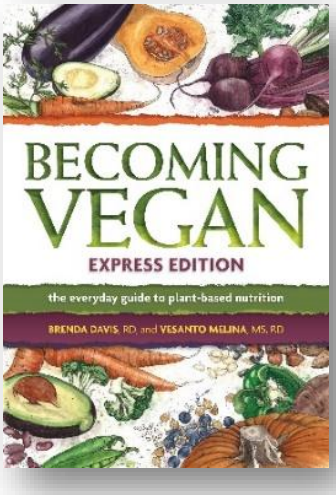
4. Remove from oven. Scoop out the flesh (discard the skin) of both the squash and apple and transfer it to a large soup pot.
5. Add 4 cups of water, onion, miso, ginger, curry paste, optional chili, and turmeric. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes.
6. Transfer to a blender and process until smooth. Pour back into the soup pot.
7. Put the remaining 1 cup of water and the cashews in the blender and process until smooth and creamy.
8. Pour into the soup and stir to combine.
9. Cook over medium heat until warmed through, 5 minutes.
10. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Decorate with seeds, dried peppers, or herbs. Serve hot.

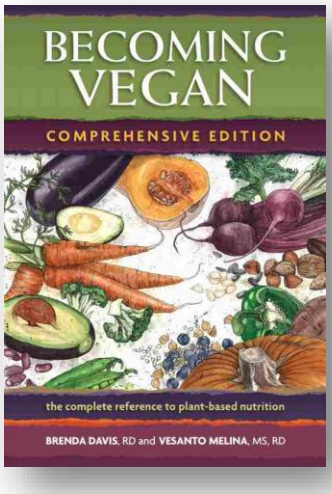


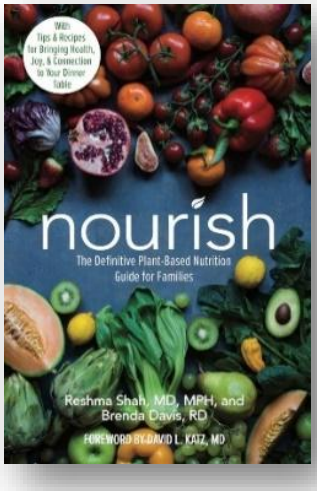












This article was originally written for So Many Cooks in the Kitchen. Brenda Davis, RD is a plant-based pioneer and author/co-author of 13 books on plant-based diets. She is the author/co-author of Plant-Powered Protein, Nourish, Becoming Vegan: Comprehensive and Express Editions, Kick Diabetes Essentials, and The Kick Diabetes Cookbook. www.brendadavisrd.com