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How to Make Vegetarian (or Vegan) Chili without a Recipe

By kim place-gateau - October 7, 2013 - 39 Comments

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Here at Food52, we love recipes -- but do we always use them? Of course not. Because once you realize you don't always need a recipe, you'll make your favorite dishes a lot more often.

Today: As the days get shorter and the nights get cooler, we start craving chili. Now it's simple enough to make any night of the week, without a recipe.



There's something about chili -- so versatile and satisfying. Top it with cheese, sour cream, avocado, crumbled crackers, or diced fresh onions and hot peppers. Roll it into a tortilla with some rice. Pour it over a burger. It's all good.

My favorite recipe is a vegetarian version from my former restaurant in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Dedicated carnivores and vegans alike happily slurped it up. If you prefer meat in yours, by all means go ahead -- it'll be terrific.

I like to think of chili in terms of ratios. However you decide to proceed, and whatever ingredients you use, stick to about 2 parts diced vegetables: 2 parts cooked or canned beans: 2 parts tomatoes: a little less than 1 part (optional) added protein like tofu. This is a loose guideline, of course, but it gives you something to jump off from.

Let's make it happen.

How to Make Vegetarian Chili Without a Recipe

1. In a big heavy pot, heat up a pat of butter or a glug of oil of your choosing. Sauté some diced onions, whatever combination of hot and bell peppers you like, and garlic. If you feel like some finely diced carrots, leeks, or celery, too, go for it. Add some salt and stir.

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2. Add spices. I've used chili powder, cumin, turmeric, smoked paprika, chipotle, and various ground peppers; you should use whatever tastes like chili to you. Use 2 to 3 times as much assorted chili powders as cumin and turmeric. This is really to taste, but start with 1/2 teaspoon of cumin per cup of tomatoes if you need a benchmark. Salt and pepper to taste. If you didn't put in fresh garlic, add garlic powder here — shoot for about the same amount of garlic powder as cumin.



3. Now, get your can opener ready! You'll need beans and diced tomatoes. Hove to use fire-roasted diced tomatoes and diced tomatoes with green chilis, but you can use your favorite. As for beans, I prefer a combination of kidneys, garbanzos and black beans. If you like to work with dried beans, I recommend cooking these first and then adding them now. You will probably also need to add 1 part water or stock at this point. Fill your empty tomato cans with stock or water as a measuring guideline and pour in liquid until it looks like chili.



4. Add more protein if you like. I'm a fan of tofu, so I cut a block of extra-firm into smallish cubes and toss it in. Tip: If you freeze tofu ahead of time, then thaw, then squeeze all the water out before you use it, you'll be blown away by the texture.



5. Now just simmer for about an hour, mostly covered. Then add spice as needed and enjoy! Don't forget to serve it over scrambled eggs for tomorrow's breakfast.

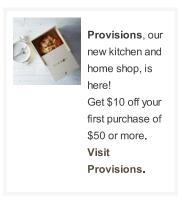


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MAKE IT SPICY





Tags: chili, how to, step by step, vegetarian, chili



I've cooked and eaten in a bunch

of beautiful countries, and I still haven't found anything that smells better than mushrooms sautéing in red wine and butter.

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