

Elevate Your Plant-Based Pantry: Smart Shopping, Wholesome Staples, & Label Literacy



Here are some approaches and strategies for shopping for plant-based foods in a supermarket, stocking a pantry with staples, and effectively reading labels to ensure products are free from animal products:

Shopping for Plant-Based Foods:

1. **Plan Ahead:** Before heading to the supermarket, take some time to plan your meals for the week and create a shopping list based on plant-based recipes you'd like to make. This will help you stay focused and avoid impulse purchases. A helpful strategy for budgeting too.
2. **Explore New Ingredients:** Be adventurous and explore the variety of plant-based foods available. Try incorporating different grains (like quinoa, farro, and bulgur), legumes (such as lentils, chickpeas, and black beans), fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, and plant-based meat alternatives into your meals for variety and nutritional diversity. You may discover foods that you have not tried before and love.
3. **Shop the Perimeter:** The perimeter of the supermarket typically houses fresh produce, whole grains, nuts, seeds, and other plant-based foods. Spend the majority of your time shopping in these areas to fill your cart with nutrient-rich whole foods.
4. **Read Ingredient Lists:** Check the ingredient lists of packaged foods to ensure they are free from animal products. Look out for common animal-derived ingredients such as dairy (milk, cheese, butter), eggs, gelatine, and honey (if you choose to avoid this).
5. **Look for Plant-Based Labels:** Some supermarkets now have dedicated sections or labels indicating plant-based or vegan products. Keep an eye out for these labels to make shopping for plant-based foods easier.

Staples for the Plant-Based Pantry:

1. **Whole Grains:** Stock up on whole grains such as quinoa, brown rice, oats, barley, and whole wheat pasta to serve as the foundation for your meals and provide essential carbohydrates and fibre.
2. **Legumes:** Keep a variety of canned and dried legumes on hand, including beans (black beans, chickpeas, kidney beans), lentils, and split peas, for adding protein and fibre to soups, stews, salads, and more.
3. **Nuts and Seeds:** Incorporate nuts (almonds, walnuts, cashews) and seeds (chia seeds, flaxseeds, pumpkin seeds) into your pantry for healthy fats, protein, and added crunch in salads, smoothies, oatmeal, and baked goods.
4. **Plant-Based Milk Alternatives:** Opt for unsweetened varieties of plant-based milks such as almond milk, soy milk, oat milk, or coconut milk for use in cooking, baking, cereals, and beverages.

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5. **Herbs and Spices:** Build a collection of herbs, spices, and seasonings to enhance the flavour of your plant-based meals without relying on animal products. Experiment with different flavour profiles to keep your meals exciting and flavourful.

Reading Labels Effectively:

1. **Scan for Key Ingredients:** Focus on scanning the ingredient list for key animal-derived ingredients such as dairy, eggs, gelatine, and honey, which may be hidden under different names (e.g., whey, casein, albumin).
2. **Look for Vegan Certifications:** Some products may display vegan certifications or logos from recognized organizations, providing assurance that they are free from animal products. Look for symbols such as the Vegan Society logo or the Certified Vegan logo. **Example:** Many cereals state vegetarian but not vegan. If the cereal is not vegan, the vitamin D may come from animal-derived sources such as lanolin, which is derived from sheep's wool. Lanolin undergoes a chemical process to produce vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), which is then used for fortification purposes. However, if the cereal is vegan, the vitamin D is likely sourced from plant-based sources or synthesized through a process that does not involve animal-derived ingredients. Plant-based sources of vitamin D3 include lichen-derived vitamin D3, which is suitable for vegan products.
3. **Be Cautious of Additives:** Pay attention to additives and flavourings, as some may contain animal-derived ingredients or be tested on animals. Look for natural, plant-based alternatives whenever possible.

Here are some common additives that are not plant-based or vegan:

Gelatine: Derived from animal collagen, typically obtained from the skin, bones, and connective tissues of cows, pigs, or fish. It is commonly used as a gelling agent in foods such as gelatine desserts, marshmallows, and gummy candies.

Casein: A protein found in milk and dairy products. It is often used as a binder, thickener, or emulsifier in processed foods and may be listed under different names such as caseinate or sodium caseinate.

Carmine (Cochineal, Carminic Acid): A red pigment derived from the crushed bodies of cochineal insects. It is used as a natural food colouring in products such as candies, beverages, and cosmetics.

Shellac (Confectioner's Glaze): A resin secreted by the lac insect. It is used as a coating on candies, pills, and fruits to provide a shiny finish.

L-cysteine: An amino acid often derived from duck feathers, hog hair, or human hair. It is used as a dough conditioner in baked goods to improve texture and extend shelf life.

Isinglass: A substance obtained from the swim bladders of fish, particularly sturgeon. It is used as a fining agent in the clarification of wine and beer. Incidentally, some wines contain egg and milk.

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Rennet: A complex of enzymes derived from the stomach lining of calves, lambs, or kid goats. It is used in the production of cheese to coagulate milk and separate it into curds and whey.

Whey: The liquid remaining after milk has been curdled and strained, often during the cheese-making process. It is used as a byproduct in various food products and may be listed as whey protein, whey powder, or whey solids.

Shellfish-derived ingredients: Certain additives and flavourings may be derived from shellfish such as shrimp, crab, or lobster. These may be used in processed foods, seasonings, or sauces.

4. **Research Brands:** Familiarize yourself with plant-based brands and products that you trust and rely on. Check their websites or contact them directly to inquire about their ingredients and manufacturing processes if you are unsure.
5. **Ask for Assistance:** If you are unsure about a product or its ingredients, do not hesitate to ask a store employee for assistance. They may be able to provide information or direct you to plant-based alternatives.

By following these strategies and guidelines, you can shop for plant-based foods with confidence, stock your pantry with nutritious staples.