

June 2023

COULD THESE PLANT-BASED MENU ITEMS HAVE BEEN PART OF THE FOOD PROFILE OF OUR ANCESTORS?

Algonquian Baked Beans

Black Olive Tapenade with Pine Nuts

**Butter-Simmered Artichoke Hearts with
Sweetpotatoes, Leeks, and Carrots**

**French Raspberry and Fig Sauce in the
Style of Brittany**

Italian Artichoke and Chick Pea Broth

Roasted Honeyed Almonds

**Stir-Fried Greens with Spring Onions, Water
Chestnuts, Mushrooms, and Lotus Root**

780,000 years ago a group of hominins, probably but not necessarily *Homo erectus*, was living in the area which is today the Hula Valley in Northern Israel. In 2016, paleobotanists began comparing plant remains at the site known as Gesher Benst Ya-agov with a control area which showed no signs of hominin activity. The mid-Pleistocene site is in the Levantine Corridor, an area through which our own ancient ancestors may have passed in their Great Migration from the African cradles of human development. It was a Mediterranean climate then as it is now so many of the plants in the sample from 780,000 years ago still grow there today.

Amazingly, this Paleolithic diet was a dramatically diverse mixture of both aquatic and terrestrial plants confirming a food security hitherto unknown. The seed and pollen data show that plants whose leaves and stems could be eaten immediately and whose rhizomes and seeds could be stored for future meals were clearly favored. Grasses like *Aegilops* – goat grass, and reeds like *Phragmites australis*, now considered an invasive plant, and fruits like *Ficus carila* – the fig, *Pyrus syraca* – Syrian pear, *Viti sylvestris* – wild grape, *Olea* sp. – olives, and *Prunus ursine* – bear's plum, were identified. The rhizomes of *Lycopus europaeus* – gypsywort or bugleweed, *Sparganium erectum* – branched bur-reed, and *Sciripus lacustrisi* – true bulrush, would have contributed carbohydrates to the diet. *Trapa natans* – the water chestnut – was another plant that contributed carbohydrates to the diet of these hominins. *Nuphar lutea* – the yellow water lily – and other aquatic plants provided starchy white seeds while bulrushes of the *Typha* genus were gathered for their starchy rhizomes. Almonds, *Prunus amygdalus*, were among available food sources. The caps, the *cupulea*, of acorns from the first growth oaks, *Quercus* sp., evidence that acorns were a food source just as they have always been for native peoples in this hemisphere. All kinds of greens including *Malva nicaeensis* – bull mallow or French mallow – and the greens of *Beta vulgaris* – the beet – would have been available to foragers. Soft seeds like chick peas and other legumes would have grown in this area but, of course, would leave no trace for us to find. Mushrooms would have been plentiful and the clan member who could identify safe fungi would have been an important member of the community as would those who learned to identify other edible plants.

The evidence from circa 780,000 years ago reveals another thing about this group of hominins either living in the Levantin Corridor or just passing through. They had discovered fire and had learned to control it. What a difference this

must have made in their lives. Once fire was discovered and a method devised for moving it from place to place, 1.7-2 million years ago, the energy from these foods could be accessed after ingestion without hours and hours of chewing and digestion and, probably most importantly, more foods could be added to the diet. Hominins could move on to other considerations of their lives including settling in one place. The keeper of the flame was also an important clan member.

The modern Paleo Diet, when it was first circulated, was as concerning to me as had been the weight loss diets which came and went in the 1970s and 1980s that also emphasized meat. The excessive animal-sourced protein made the possibility of ketoacidosis or ketosis a real possibility and overall fatigue from lack of carbohydrates, common. The emphasis on meat accounts for the name by which the Paleo Diet is sometimes referenced, “The Steak and Bacon Diet.” Early advocates, who based their food lists solely on foods that might have been eaten by Paleolithic man, felt that fats would provide the energy. A short list of “allowed” fruits and vegetables evolved to take care of the rest of a person’s nutritional requirements. The fruits and vegetables those who promote this diet have chosen to accept bear little resemblance to the foods foraged by hunter-gathers. Modifications, as one could expect, arose and were adopted by those who could rationalize butter and cheese if it was from grass-fed animals and contained no trans fats, eggs if they were from free-range chickens or from chickens whose diet was omega-3 enriched, dairy if it was minimally processed, low-fat, organic foods because they were “good for you,” wine, and even chocolate. These modifications represent a very wide departure from the foods of Paleolithic man and even from the diet of people of the later Neolithic period.

Lentils and a kind of primitive chick pea have been shown to have grown in the areas surveyed and have turned up in the larders of Neolithic caves. Why do the advocates of the Paleo Diet disregard these nutritional foods which have proven their nutritional advantages via the lives of thousands of vegetarians and vegans and yet choose to include foods like tomatoes and peppers whose appearance in Europe and Middle East date to the late 1400s? Dr. Loren Cordain, exercise physiologist and author of *The Paleo Diet* (revised 2011), supports the Paleo Diet ban on legumes by erroneously lumping this valuable protein source together with salty foods, high sugar foods, and dairy products as a food that causes chronic low-level inflammation. Legumes and whole grains are foods that most reputable nutritionists, rheumatologists, and institutions like the Mayo Clinic recommend to reduce inflammation. The Arthritis Foundation has gone so far as to express the exact opposite view concerning inflammation, claiming that meat instigates inflammation and the legumes and grains in the diet can reduce inflammation. In addition, legumes represent a reliable source of dietary iron for those who don’t eat meat.

On p. 47 of his book Dr. Cordain actually says, “I can assure you that there is no such thing as too much protein.” For those of us who actively ingest only our “fair share” of protein and who fight each day against world hunger, that is a discouraging and selfish statement not to mention patently false, the author’s assurance aside.

The low-carb, high protein approach to eating and weight management has been tried many times, under many different names but not with the highly saturated fat element which includes coconut and avocado oils that seems to be part of this diet in addition to various meats. It can not be said to help maintain good cholesterol levels nor would liver or kidney or pancreatic health be served. Also I see too much phosphorus and I do not see adequate calcium, iron, or Vitamin D in this diet; osteoporosis, rickets, and bone fracture risks are greatly increased and a bit of spinach now and then is not going to provide for bone health long term.

The early hunter-gathers to whom the Paleo Diet presumes to pay homage did not live long, healthy lives and one can be assured that their shortened lifespans were not just due to being attacked by newly-minted viruses, big cats, and woolly mammoths. We have learned something since then and have lengthened the lifespan of man. We have learned to utilize science and our abundance to feed the organism well. We just have to make educated choices. Recognition that minimally processed foodstuffs are better for us can’t be disputed. I can understand the elimination of dairy from one’s diet; it is a choice, not a choice we wished to make, but the avoidance of grains and legumes makes little sense to me. Complex carbohydrates have a definite role in nutrition especially if one is approaching nutrition from the point of view of an athlete.

If one is expending energy as an athlete, complex carbohydrates are an efficient source of body fuel; fats are not. This is confirmed in an article published in *The Journal of Physiology* which reported on a three-week study of speed-walking by trained athletes to determine whether a diet high in carbohydrates, in this case 60-65%, positively or negatively affected performance. Those on the high carb diet saw a pace increase of 7% while those on the low-carb Keto Diet saw no improvement in performance or stamina. Choosing legumes as the source of complex carbs can significantly impact lifespan. A 7-8% reduction in mortality was shown to correspond to a 20 gram per day increase in legume intake. In another study, published in 2017, legume consumption was linked to a 10% decrease in risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke.

A menu which harkens to earlier periods of human evolution, admittedly a bit later than the Paleolithic Era and with a few modern touches, now and again can be fun and a reminder that we owe a world of thanks to those who experimented with what nature provided to determine if that could sustain the upright, two-legged minor species that was finding its way to the top of the food chain.

Why not treat your family to a meal that evokes an earlier time?



Roasted Vegetables

**Stir-Fried Greens with Spring Onions,
Water Chestnuts and Lotus Root**

Fried Eggs

Roasted Honeyed Almonds

Mixed Olives

Plums and Mixed Berries with Honey

or maybe:

Rolled Kale Leaves with *Hummus*
OR Black Olive Tapenade with Pine Nuts

**Greek Artichoke Hearts with Sweetpotatoes,
Leeks, and Carrots**

Steamed Barley

Sautéed Mushrooms

Sunflower Seeds or Pumpkin Seeds

Grape Clusters

or maybe:

Mixed Greens with Scallions and
Diced Beets Drizzled with Olive Oil

Italian Chick Pea Soup in Artichoke Broth

Whole Grain Crackers with Nut Butter

**French Raspberry and Fig Sauce
in the Style of Brittany over
whatever you can forage**

or maybe:

Algonquian Baked Beans

Steamed Barley

Sautéed mixed “power” greens with garlic
and pine nuts

Dates and Fresh Figs



ALGONQUIAN BAKED BEANS

TPT - 1 hour and 18 minutes

Using a bean pot somewhat replicates the technique that the early Algonquians taught the European colonists but today we do not bury our bean pot in a fire pit. Before tightly covering and burying in the coals, bacon strips were draped over the beans to provide fat and keep the beans from drying out during the long baking process. The version presented here can be prepared without the soy bacon if preferred but the flavoring contributed brings the taste closer to the original. The convenience of canned and frozen beans eliminates the long soaking and cooking periods that were just a part of a cook's life in the past.

1/2 can (about 6-7 ounces) baked beans*
1 tablespoon pure maple syrup

3/4 cup chopped onion
1/2 cup frozen baby lima beans
1/2 cup canned kidney beans**
1 garlic clove—very finely chopped

2 strips frozen soy bacon
1 teaspoon safflower or sunflower oil

1/4 cup commercially-available chili sauce
1 tablespoon light brown sugar
3/4 tablespoon apple cider vinegar
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard powder

Prepare a bean pot by coating with nonstick lecithin spray coating. In the bean pot, combine baked beans and maple syrup. Stir to combine.

Add chopped onion, lima beans, kidney beans, and *very finely* chopped garlic. Stir to combine. Set aside briefly.

In a skillet set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, combine julienned bacon and oil. Cook, stirring constantly, until bacon begins to brown. Add bacon to ingredients in bean pot. Stir to combine.

In a small bowl, combine *chili* sauce, brown sugar, apple cider vinegar and mustard powder. Stir to combine. Add mixture to ingredients in bean pot. Stir. Place bean pot in cold oven. Set oven at 325 degrees F. Bake for about 1 hour, or until hot and bubbling.

Yields 4 servings

Notes: *I prefer to make this dish with Heinz blue-labeled vegetarian baked beans. This low-fat, low-sodium product, produced and canned in the United Kingdom, is lightly seasoned and sauced. It is distributed throughout the Pacific and shipped to the U. S. and Europe as well.

**Instead of red kidney beans, I often substitute canned adzuki beans or black beans.

This recipe can be doubled, when required.



1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 9.0 g.; FAT = 2.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 35.4 g.;
CALORIES = 215; CALORIES FROM FAT = 9%

BLACK OLIVE TAPENADE WITH PINE NUTS

TPT - 24 hours and 7 minutes;
24 hours = flavor development period

In Namibia an assortment of olives or a tapenade is often served as part of a first course. A tapenade, made with black olives, can result in a delicious appetizer bruscheta but the typical mixture is made, not only with salty olives but also, with capers, and anchovy fillets. It is more than anybody's electrolyte balance should have to endure. We desalinated our life many years ago. A box of Salt Sense can last us several years. Instead of reaching for the myriad of salt varieties that challenge blood pressure levels today, I reach for grated Parmesan or pecorino Romano cheese if salt is needed. Granulated salt is useful to facilitate the shelling of hard-cooked eggs and for removing the bitterness from eggplant; it helps unwind the protein molecules when your goal is fluffy scrambled eggs; and it is a necessary addition to some potato dishes but reducing the sodium load is a worthy pursuit. This tapenade will amaze you because the addition of ground pine nuts gives it a creamy texture and moderates the sodium.

And, not only can this be served as an appetizer, it can be the taste sensation of a pasta entrée if a couple of tablespoonfuls is added to cooked and buttered fettucine. You will not soon forget that plate of fettucine.

2 1/2 tablespoons pine nuts (*pignoli*)*

1/2 jar (about 3 ounces) pitted Kalamata olives

—well-drained

1 tablespoon preserved capers—well-rinsed and well-drained

1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard with white wine

1/2 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 small garlic clove—very finely chopped

1 1/2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil

In the work bowl of the food processor fitted with steel knife, process pine nuts (*pignoli*) until they form a paste, scraping down the bowl several times during the process.

Add well-drained, *pitted* olives and capers, mustard, lemon juice, and garlic. Process by pulsing the processor until the olive mixture is finely and uniformly chopped, scraping down the bowl several times as required.

Add olive oil and process only until oil has been mixed into the olive mixture. Transfer to a container or covered dish, cover, and refrigerate for at least 24 hours to allow for flavor development.**



Serve as a spread for dry toasts, bread, or crackers, or rolls in young, tender kale leaves.

Yields 12 servings
adequate for 2-3 people

Notes: *When selecting pine nuts in your store or online, be sure to avoid the small, dull, oval nuts. These have been reported to leave an unpleasant aftertaste for days in those sensitive to a malady known as PNS, Pine Nut Syndrome. These generally are an export product of China, although they may be labeled as a product of Korea or Russia. Choose instead pine nuts grown in the Mediterranean. The large, elongated, brown-tipped pine nuts from the Italy are the most desirable, and, unfortunately, the most expensive.

**This will keep well for several weeks in the refrigerator.

If necessary, this recipe can be doubled.

1/12 SERVING – PROTEIN = 1.0 g.; FAT = 0.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 0.5 g.;
CALORIES = 24; CALORIES FROM FAT = 79%

BUTTER-SIMMERED ARTICHOKE HEARTS WITH SWEETPOTATOES, LEEKS, AND CARROTS

TPT - 1 hour and 8 minutes;
30 minutes = cooling period

Unlike some vegetables, artichokes should not be thought of as tasteless just because they are not mature. These very refined thistles are very flavorful and much more tender at this early stage, with little or no choke to be removed. From late Spring through the Summer green grocers in Italy and Greece can usually supply baby artichokes. We substitute frozen artichoke hearts and even canned artichoke hearts in this flavorful vegetable entrée because it is rare to find fresh baby artichokes unless you know a resourceful green grocer. Thistles, true yams, wild carrots, wild onions, garlic, and all sorts of herbs were available to our ancient forbearers. We generally serve this with steamed barley.

1 cup vegetable stock of choice
5 ounces frozen artichoke hearts—defrosted—or canned artichoke hearts—soaked in cold water to desalinate
1 small sweetpotato—peeled and cut into large chunks*
2 small carrots—scraped or pared, sliced lengthwise and cut into 2-inch pieces
1 large leek—white and light green portions only—split lengthwise, very well-rinsed, and sliced into 2-inch pieces
2 garlic cloves—finely chopped
1/4 teaspoon crushed, dried thyme
1/4 teaspoon crushed, dried oregano
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
2 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon olive oil

Salt, to taste

In a Dutch oven or kettle with cover, set over *LOW* heat, combine vegetable stock, artichoke hearts, sweetpotato chunks, carrot pieces, leek slices, *finely* chopped garlic, crushed dried thyme and oregano, and pepper. Stir to combine. Add butter and olive oil. *Do not stir.* Allow to simmer for 30 minutes, or until vegetables are tender, but not mushy.

Salt to taste.

Turn into a serving bowl and place in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes. This dish should be served at room temperature —*neither hot nor chilled.*

Yields 4 servings

Notes: *Halved or quartered baby white potatoes can be substituted for sweetpotatoes or yams but note that Paleolithic hominins did not have the white potato. It is an emigrant from South America. Add any vegetable that appeals like green beans or squash or even greens, if you wish.

This recipe may be doubled, when required.

1/4 SERVING – PROTEIN = 2.0 g.; FAT = 8.7 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 12.2 g.;
CALORIES = 131; CALORIES FROM FAT = 60%



FRENCH RASPBERRY AND FIG SAUCE
IN THE STYLE OF BRITTANY
Sauce aux Framboises et Figues

TPT - 52 minutes;
20 minutes = cooling period

Today, without the need to forage for ripened figs and ripe raspberries or blackberries in the fall with the hopes of finding them before the birds do, this sauce can appear on our table often. Coffee ice cream served with this extraordinary sauce has become one of our Christmas traditions. One might wonder if our ancient ancestors figured this out and served a sauce like this over freshly fallen snow.

1/2 cup water
1/2 cup stemmed and chopped, preservative-free dried
Kalamata or Calimyrna* figs—4-5 ounces
1 tablespoon wildflower honey
1/4 vanilla bean

1/2 package (5 ounces) frozen raspberries in syrup
—defrosted

In a saucepan set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, combine water, chopped figs, and honey. Split vanilla bean in half and scrape seeds into sauce ingredients. (Save vanilla bean to flavor other desserts or sugar.) Cook sauce ingredients, stirring constantly, until honey dissolves. *Increase heat to MEDIUM.* Cook, stirring frequently, until figs are *very tender* and sauce has thickened into a syrup—about 20 minutes.

Add *defrosted* raspberries and syrup. Continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until sauce is of desired consistency.

Remove from heat and set aside to cool to room temperature—about 20 minutes—before serving over cakes, puddings or ice cream.* Refrigerate leftovers.

Yields 1 cupful

Notes: *Dried figs are often treated with sulfiting agents, to which many people are sensitive. Sulfite-free figs and other dried fruits are available in natural food stores and from mail order firms. Be aware that imported dried fruits frequently are unlabeled, but do contain preservatives.

**This sauce may be made early in the day or a day ahead of time and refrigerated. Bring to room temperature before serving.

This recipe may be doubled, when required.

1/16 SERVING (i. e., per tablespoonful) –
PROTEIN = 0.2 g.; FAT = 0.1 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 7.0 g.;
CALORIES = 27; CALORIES FROM FAT = 3%



ITALIAN ARTICHOKE AND CHICK PEA BROTH

Brodo de Carciofini e Ceci

TPT - 1 hour and 13 minutes;
1 hour = artichoke heart soaking period

The owner/chef of the Olive Tree Restaurant in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, a creative cook and baker who collected and reworked Greek and Italian recipes into imaginative and tempting luncheon offerings, mentioned a vegetarian soup made with an artichoke base. I ruminated on the idea until this soup recipe was born. As I note below, I do prefer to make this broth with frozen artichoke hearts but that is not always possible.

7-8 ounces canned artichoke hearts—well-drained*
2 cups water

1 cup water
1 cup canned or cooked, dried chick peas (*garbanzos*)
—well-drained

1/2 cup water
1 cup vegetarian stock of choice
1 1/2 tablespoons *pesto* sauce (*Pesto alla Genovese*) or
2 finely chopped garlic cloves

Tiny fresh spinach leaves (as for *mesclún*) or chopped
fresh spinach leaves, for garnish
2 fresh *porcini* mushrooms, sliced, for garnish

In a mixing bowl, soak canned artichoke hearts in the 2 cupfuls water for about 1 hour to desalinate. Drain well.

Using the food processor, fitted with steel knife, or the electric blender, purée the artichoke hearts, 1 cupful water, and the drained chick peas into a smooth purée. Set a sieve over a clean saucepan. Strain the purée through the sieve, discarding any fibrous material and the seed coats which will not pass through the sieve.

Set the puréed broth base over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat. Add the remaining 1/2 cupful water, vegetable stock, and *pesto* sauce. Stir well to combine.** Season with black pepper. Heat the soup until it simmers, stirring frequently.



Serve into heated soup plates, garnishing each serving with spinach and mushroom slices.

Yields about 4 cupfuls

Notes: **Defrosted* frozen artichoke hearts are preferable but are not as readily available as are the canned product. If you have access to frozen artichoke hearts, combine *defrosted* artichoke hearts and the 2 cupfuls water in a saucepan set over *MEDIUM* heat. Bring to the boil, lower heat to *LOW-MEDIUM*, and cook, stirring frequently, for about 30 minutes, or until artichoke hearts are *very soft*.

**A definite convenience of this soup base is that it may be frozen at this point for future meal plans.

This recipe may be doubled, when required.

If desired, this broth can become the base for more complex vegetable soups. We especially like to add *pasta* or vegetarian meatballs and greens such as spinach, escarole, and Swiss chard.

1/8 SERVING (i. e., per cupful) –
PROTEIN = 4.3 g.; FAT = 4.0 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 12.3 g.;
CALORIES = 77; CALORIES FROM FAT = 47%



ROASTED, HONEYED ALMONDS

TPT - 24 hours and 29 minutes;
24 hours = drying period

We often tuck confectionery cups filled with these almonds in among the cookies and candies that we deliver to neighbors at Christmas. During the holidays, when I have a supply of this delicious confection, I scatter a bit of a good gorgonzola cheese and a generous handful of these roasted, honeyed almonds over the top of a fruit salad. It's a divine combination.

1 cup whole, preservative-free almonds

**2 tablespoons wild flower honey or other honey,
of choice**
1 tablespoon butter

Spread almonds on a jelly roll pan or cookie sheet. Place in *cold* oven. Turn oven on, setting it at about 300 degrees F. Roast almonds, stirring occasionally, for about 15-20 minutes, or until well-roasted. *Remove from oven.*

In a saucepan set over *LOW-MEDIUM* heat, combine honey and butter. Bring to just below the boil. Simmer for 2 minutes. Add almonds. Simmer, while stirring constantly, for an additional 2 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer almonds to a *non-stick-coated* jelly roll pan, or cookie sheet with sides.* *Spread almonds into a single layer.* Allow to dry completely—about 24 hours. Transfer to another non-stick surface during the drying period to escape the residual honey if convenient.



Store airtight in a secure place where nobody can find them or they will disappear in an instant. *Warning – they even disappear as they are drying!!*

Yields 1 cupful

Notes: *A large non-stick-coated skillet works well too.

This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/16 SERVING (i. e., about 1 tablespoonful/6 almonds) –
PROTEIN = 1.4 g.; FAT = 4.7 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 3.5 g.;
CALORIES = 58; CALORIES FROM FAT = 73%

STIR-FRIED GREENS WITH SPRING ONIONS, WATER CHESTNUTS, MUSHROOMS, AND LOTUS ROOT

TPT - 6 minutes

Wild greens, carrots, onions, garlic, and mushrooms were available to hunter-gatherers. In this dish, water chestnuts and lotus roots can represent the aquatic foods our ancestors may also have been able to forage. Even though we have to gather the foods for this stir-fry in our produce departments, we may be revisiting a dish our ancestors could have assembled.

For safety, remember to forage your mushrooms from a reputable green grocer.

2 teaspoons high heat safflower or sunflower oil

1 small carrot—peeled and *thinly* sliced

4 canned water chestnuts—sliced

1/2 cup boiled lotus root slices

2 medium scallions—trimmed and cut into 1-inch pieces

1 large garlic clove—peeled and sliced

8 oyster mushrooms—cut from stalk, trimmed, and well-rinsed

1/2 cup *enoki* mushrooms—trimmed and well-rinsed

3 cups mixed greens—escarole, spinach, beet greens, garlic scapes, *bok choy*, and/or kale—stems trimmed and well-rinsed

1/4 teaspoon sesame seeds

In a wok or skillet set over *MEDIUM-HIGH* heat, heat oil. Add carrot and water chestnut slices. Stir-fry for 2 minutes.

Add lotus root, scallion, and garlic slices, oyster mushrooms, and *enoki* mushrooms. Stir-fry for 1 minute.

Add greens and sesame seeds. Stir-fry for about 1 minute more, or until greens wilt. Turn out onto a heated platter.

Serve at once.

Yields 2 servings

Note: This recipe can be doubled, when required.

1/2 SERVING – PROTEIN = 7.3 g.; FAT = 5.6 g.; CARBOHYDRATE = 15.7 g.;
CALORIES = 180; CALORIES FROM FAT = 28%



*Members of the onion family, as we have seen,
were fighting inflammation and flavoring the diet of very early man.*

*Next month we'll look at some more modern uses
for this extraordinarily large and useful plant family.*

Do drop by,

Judy

Please note that all food value calculations are approximate and not the result of chemical analysis.

Copyright © 2022