

Art of Olive Green

Towards Art, an Ethics & a Laugh

Archives

All posts for the month June, 2014

Refusion Cuisine—Hummus

Posted by *getraer* on *June 13, 2014*

Posted in: Refusion cuisine, Self-Sufficiencies. Tagged: caramelized onions, Cuisinart, extra virgin olive oil, garbanzo beans. Leave a comment



Balanced hummus accompaniments L to R: Turkish simit (sesame pastry), fresh celery, pickled peppers, cornichons, Madras curry sauerkraut. Baby carrots offstage.

Hummus has reportedly been around since [Biblical times \(http://www.hummusguide.com/2009/12/is-hummus-mentioned-in-bible.html\)](http://www.hummusguide.com/2009/12/is-hummus-mentioned-in-bible.html). Much like pizza, which has possible origins but no certain genesis, hummus is a pre-state, nearly pre-historical food. As such it admits of great variation—or it ought to.

Pizza has been interpreted in so many ways as to be nearly unrecognizable in some expressions. (Smh at you, Germanophones. Gefroren “[Mickey Mouse Pizza Salami \(http://www.uglyfood.com/2007/10/08/mickey-mouse-pizza/\)](http://www.uglyfood.com/2007/10/08/mickey-mouse-pizza/)”?) But hummus suffers a staid orthodoxy: chickpea-based, maybe some pine nuts or roasted red peppers. The variations are few and obvious. It needn’t be this

way, but it will be up to us to redeem it.

I've been making hummus since I was in college. Early '90s veganism made homemade hummus indispensable. My Iraqi professor told me to add soy sauce and olive oil to it while blending. I made it with these and conventional ingredients for years before seeing white bean and basil hummus on a Soho (NYC) menu. I never tried that, but the idea of changing everything about the formula stuck. The only constants should be beans and nut butter, the axes of vegan protein intake.

I have to insist on a couple of things, though, if you want optimal results. You must use a Cuisinart (https://www.google.com/shopping/product/11884493626471274515?q=cuisinart&rlz=1C1CHFX_enUS525US525&es_sm=93&bav=on.2,or.r_cp.r_qf.&bvm=bv.68911936,d.aWw,pv.xjs.s.en_US.LsU8tgs6eAk.O&biw=1242&bih=585&tch=1&ech=1&psi=a-CZU9n2HoGyyASLnoH4DA.1402593389231.3&ei=cOCZU9LwINSzyATOxoCYDw&ved=0CIoBEKYrMAE). No blenders, janky French mills, weird juicers or second-rate food processors. I read in some long-lost book about making sprouted wheat bread that a Cuisinart must be used for blending the dough, because it had the best blade-to-bowl size impact ratio. (!) Regardless, anything else I've tried does not yield a creamy hummus. And don't moan about the price. You'll have a Cuisinart for at least 2 decades and if you have a smartphone, it's silly to complain about a \$179 tool you'll use for half your life while holding something that costs three times as much and barely outlives an inchworm.

You should almost certainly use a pressure cooker—it's not necessary, but is vastly more efficient than boiling beans at atmospheric pressure. And whichever beans you use, they must be dried. (Fresh is probably even better but I've never tried that...note to self.)

I have thrown practically everything in hummus and usually it works great. You can also pair it with different foods so that it never gets boring. If you'd rather make it in bulk, it freezes just fine. As I write this, I'm eating it with Korean seasoned bonnet bellflowers. Here are some of my standard variations, but I encourage you to experiment.

Standard topping

Ground [sumac berries](https://www.google.com/search?q=sumac+berries&rlz=1C1CHFX_enUS525US525&oq=sumac+berr&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.3006j0j7&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8#q=sumac+berries&tbm=shop) (https://www.google.com/search?q=sumac+berries&rlz=1C1CHFX_enUS525US525&oq=sumac+berr&aqs=chrome..69i57j0l5.3006j0j7&sourceid=chrome&es_sm=93&ie=UTF-8#q=sumac+berries&tbm=shop) and caramelized onions—I used to drizzle extra virgin olive oil and some smoked paprika on the top after stippling it into overlapping micro-wells with a spoon, but you really can't beat ground sumac berries and caramelized onions. The berries are tart, lemony, astringent with an interesting granular texture, and the onions are smoky, chewy, a little plasticky – plus they trap all the oil so you don't have to bring that along too. These toppings are best applied right before eating, as the berries become sodden and insipid and the onions soggy after a few hours on the wet hummus.

Caramelize onions by sautéing them in olive oil—as soon as the pan hits the flame, add salt. You'll need a lot, about a tablespoon for 5 medium yellow onions. The salt leaches the moisture from the onions and speeds evaporation. Give it 45 minutes, stirring occasionally for even browning. If you do it right you can keep them at room temperature, but leave in any moisture and they'll mold in a few days.

If it's around, I sprinkle some nutritional yeast on top. This treehugger at [Treehugger](http://www.treehugger.com/green-food/11-ways-use-nutritional-yeast-and-why-you-should.html) was just recommending [nutritional yeast with garbanzo beans](http://www.treehugger.com/green-food/11-ways-use-nutritional-yeast-and-why-you-should.html) (<http://www.treehugger.com/green-food/11-ways-use-nutritional-yeast-and-why-you-should.html>) among 10 other things, so you know it's good...for nutrition (esp. B12) and taste.

Beverage pairing

If you tipple, I suggest a stout with hummus. You won't believe what happens when the caramelized onions and sumac hit the bitter chocolate smokiness of a Guinness. I think other beers might get lost; a porter, brown ale, Canadian or Belgian ale might soldier through tho.

Now the production:

3 c. cooked beans

Adzuki, Baby Lima, Black, Navy, Northern, Garbanzo all work great. Baby Lima has lower yields but is mad creamy.

1/4 c. nut butter

I think tahini is best, for both consistency and flavor. I don't think sunflower seed butter worked. Other nut butters are either prohibitively expensive, less nutritious, or both.

Juice of one tart citrus

Lemon, lime, calamansi, etc. Flavors and preserves

1/2 oz med/light vinegar

Apple Cider is best, white balsamic also OK. Palm, rice wine and herb vinegars less desirable. Darker vinegars have overwhelming flavors

4 tbsp red miso

White hasn't enough flavor. Miso has a great harmonizing and preservative effect on hummus; hummus will ferment before it goes

bad—a different kind of tasty, more zippy & tangy. I ate 3c at once, quite safe.

EVOO

Extra virgin olive oil is healthier & tastier than virgin for non-heated food applications.

2-3 cloves garlic (by size)

Too much garlic, while nice, overpowers other flavors. The miso is capable of integrating it nonetheless given 2-3 days' time.

1-2 tbsp cayenne pepper

Cayenne is not only a preservative, but very health-promoting. Its spiciness helps distinguish the flavor of other ingredients, or give them some definition. A small amount (at the least) of it in everything you cook improves it.

1 tbsp black pepper

Fermented fish sauce (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fish_sauce) or anchovy paste

(<https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8#q=anchovy+paste&tbm=shop>) These add an indescribable umami (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Umami>), but are Dead Sea salty, so use w/ care. The miso & caramelized onions are already salting it up hard.

These are the base ingredients and their variations, but the real magic is in the spices and condiments. Below is a table of combinations that worked, which I plan to update as I find new formulae. The best way to season hummus is to add things while blending it; give a good 30 seconds of blending to each batch of ingredients to be sure they meld thoroughly.

Baby Lima Bean + horseradish (2 tbsp) (fresh grated or jarred in vinegar) + fresh dill (one handful chopped)

Black Bean + cumin (1 tsp) + fresh parsley (handful chopped) + black pepper + lime (not lemon) + beer (bitter, e.g. Czech pilsner, 3 oz.) + a couple drops of hickory smoke flavoring

Garbanzo bean + Worcestershire sauce + cumin (1 tsp)

Soak 3 cups beans in fresh-boiled water for 12 hours. Change water once, rinse, repeat for a total of 24 hours. This is key to leaching of (<http://www.whfoods.com/genpage.php?tname=foodspice&dbid=2>), or degrading indigestible compounds from (<http://wholehealthsource.blogspot.com/2009/04/new-way-to-soak-brown-rice.html>), all beans and grains.

Cooking & blending

Cook beans in pressure cooker for 10-15 minutes with 3 medium-size bay leaves (bay leaves help extract the remaining aluminum salts and oligosaccharides (http://www.localharvest.org/blog/10524/entry/beans_and_why_they_make) from beans, and impart a nice flavor). Let cool or rinse, I'm not sure which is best, but I never put hot beans in the bowl. (If there's BPA in the bowl's plastic, that's a cancer bonus.) Add to Cuisinart bowl with the primary ingredients and blend while you assemble the secondary ones.

Then have fun adding them to taste! Salud!

Refusion Cuisine

Posted by *getraer* on *June 12, 2014*

Posted in: Culture crit, Engaged art. Tagged: fast food, hummus, refusion. Leave a comment

Is the above just a cheap, obvious pun? Not entirely.

Much of what working folk eat in the U.S. today, particularly in cities and their suburban nodes, is preposterously easy and cheap to produce. See restaurants like Applebee's, Ruby Tuesday, and California Pizza Kitchen, where pre-chopped ingredients are thrown on a frozen thing and heated, or units of factory hacked and extruded food are nuked and served in a "family dining" environment.

Consider also city food depots like Pret a Manger, which take perfectly ordinary highly-perishable ingredients, trawl them through the Dead Sea (most sandwiches contain 1000-1500 mg sodium), and serve them in sandwiches or soups in Manhattan financial centers. Or Melt Shop, which makes every type of grilled cheese with amendments like caramelized onions, prosciutto, or pickles, and little else (n.b.: I love their "Dirty" sandwich). Or any of these buffet dumps in Manhattan that get various casseroles, salads, steamed vegetables, unctuous goos with objects, etc. from regional processing centers. The food is dismayingly similar from one such establishment to the next, varying largely in the patina that distinguishes how many times it has been re-served.

Even more grim is the booming speedfeed biz which undercuts the above by just a few dollars: "organic" dumplings (totally uncertified) locally produced and clamshelled in a grocery deli section, TV dinners, that appalling sushi you can get at convenience stores, gas stations, and any other place with refrigeration including morgues.

The most unworthy speedfeed is hummus. Cheap ingredients, easy preparation and long shelf life made it an obvious choice in which for industry could bury us. But its elemental simplicity and potential variations (different nut butters / beans / condiments / spices / accompaniments) make it an ideal template for experimentation, particularly if you haven't cooked much—and those qualities only enhance the ones industry prefers. I think a whole cookbook could be dedicated to it!

I made hummus dogmatically for 20 years: garbanzo beans (dried), tahini, lemon, olive oil, soy sauce (a suggestion from an Iraqi friend), too much raw garlic. Maybe some cumin. Then I had too many dried beans around and started fooling with all the parameters: sprouted black beans with lime? sunflower butter? horseradish? Dijon mustard? beer? And this is not even considering what you can layer *on top of* hummus: caramelized onions, sumac, smoked paprika. It was the greatest fun because the results were never inedible, and always somewhere on the spectrum of tasty.

They did terrible violence to hummus orthodoxy, however. This is not the fusion cuisine of wasabi on a hamburger or Asiago teriyaki buffalo wings in a burrito. This is refusion cuisine, refusing to eat the dreck in our trough but always striving to embody a) ease, b) shelf life, c) affordability, d) versatility, e) transportability, f) internationality (leave “cosmopolitan” to chefs with cable shows). That's a high bar, but after a lot of food poisoning, wasted money and diabetogenic levels of sodium, I am making more of my own food than ever—and never getting bored of it.

One could even argue that refusion cuisine is a form of engaged art: a creative effort invested into something to nourish and inspire, a thing best shared—but that also returns and redounds to its creator.