

Girl's Weekend Recipes & Fun

Writing this on my flight back home to Austin from an annual get-together with my high school girlfriends and I just can't stop smiling. First and foremost, my smile is because I am literally filled to the brim with love for those amazing women. The other reason is for the outright healthy fun we had cooking and eating together. I realize girl's weekend doesn't naturally scream "plant based eating" in most circles but it does when you have friends like mine, who desired a change for themselves in 2017. And just to be clear- it wasn't me who made the suggestion of a plant based weekend, but rather my dear friend Dianne who was hoping for some firsthand experience and ideas to implement at home. While Dianne takes phenomenal care of herself in countless ways, cooking plant based felt like a big leap to her skill set. My job was simply to demystify the process because she was already sold on the concept. If helping one buddy along wasn't satisfying enough on its own, we were joined by Sandra, cook and hostess extraordinaire, who was not only a willing participant but offered her skills as sous chef. Completely at home with veggie prep and plant based eating, Sandra's request was to get over her cheese addiction. Sound familiar?



Who could ask for more, right? Well, luckily for me, our gathering was planned for Santa Cruz, CA where finding gorgeous produce in January is not a problem. In fact, if there was any problem at all this past weekend, it was controlling my urge to buy up the entire Saturday morning market held just across from Twin Bridges State Park! When we hit our first Farmer's Market and I quickly realized January in Santa Cruz is Veggie Heaven. Or at least that is how it felt to me. Outside of a spring market in France, I don't think I've ever seen so much bounty in one place AND it was all organic. What a treat! The challenge, of course, was controlling my desire to buy everything in sight.





Seriously, just check out our finds! I couldn't resist those baby romanesco and loved getting a lesson in choosing artichokes from this expert at Rodoni Farms. As a native Californian and lifelong consumer of artichokes, even I honestly had no idea that a larger stem indicates a larger heart and that a squeaky choke is the sign for freshness! I honestly can't tell you how tempted I was to fill my suitcase with those organic beauties at 3 for \$5.



Along the way, our bags were soon brimming with handfuls of mixed baby lettuce, red potatoes, radicchio, clementines, plenty of fuyu persimmons, and more! With both Sandra and

Dianne to keep me in check I was able to exert some constraint and we put together the following menus for the weekend:

Friday

Dinner: Pumpkin Thai Curry with Basmati Rice



Saturday

Breakfast: Citrus-Berry Smoothies

Lunch: Baby Greens Salad with Toasted Hazelnuts and leftover curry

Dinner: Steamed Artichokes followed by Romanesco and Potato Bake with Cashew Cheese Sauce



Sunday

Breakfast: Fresh, Local Persimmons, Tangerines and Grapefruit

Dinner: Baby Greens Salad with Almond Butter Dressing and a Feast of Roasted Veggies with two sauces to try- Lemon Tahini and Cilantro Lime Cashew.



I'll be filling this section with the recipes as the week goes on, but here are a few of the sauces to get you started.

Cilantro Cashew Sauce

1 cup of soaked cashews (3 hours in cold water or $\frac{1}{2}$ hour in hot water; drain before use)

1cup cleaned packed cilantro leaves

1 clove garlic, 1 small shallot, or 2 scallions (optional)

$\frac{1}{2}$ medium heat pepper (jalapeno is a good choice)

Juice from one lime

Sea salt to taste

2-3 tbsp olive oil

Unsweetened almond milk (use to thin to desired consistency)

Add all above ingredients to your food processor or Vitamix and blend til smooth. (We actually used an immersion blender because that's what we had and while the sauce was delicious, it was not as smooth as I would have liked.)

Lemon Tahini Sauce

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup raw organic tahini

Juice from 2 medium lemons

$\frac{1}{2}$ -1 cup water

Blend juice and tahini, then add water to achieve desired consistency.

Sea Salt to taste

This could not be easier to make! (These ingredients can be blended by hand, but an immersion blender does make for a beautiful consistency.)

Cashew Cheese Sauce

2 cups soaked and drained cashews

1 cube of veggie bouillon (Rapunzel)

3 cups of water

1 cup of organic unsweetened almond milk

Juice from one lemon

Salt to taste

Blend until smooth in high powered blender or with an immersion blender. (While I play with a several versions of this recipe when I cook at home, we needed a quick and easy version for our dinner prep so this is what we used.)

Stay tuned for more to come!