



# What Is Agar, and How Do You Use It?

By Mary Margaret Chappell  
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Ever since a 17th-century Japanese innkeeper discovered some leftover seaweed soup had gelled overnight (or so the legend goes), agar has been used as a gelatin-like setting agent in the kitchen. The tasteless, odorless seaweed derivative is a staple throughout Asia, where it's used to thicken sauces, drinks, jellies, custards, and candies. It made its way to Western cuisines in the 20th century as a plant-based alternative to gelatin. Read on for more info about agar (also known as agar-agar), plus recipes to try.

## Agar vs. Gelatin

Gelatin is typically made from the collagen of cows and pigs, making it unsuitable for vegetarians and vegans. Agar is derived from seaweed and free of animal products, making it a handy ingredient for the plant-based home cook.

## Types of Agar

Agar comes in two main varieties: powder and flakes.

### Powdered Agar

Powdered agar is the more potent of the two. A single teaspoon of the powder will set a cup of liquid to a firm jelly.

### Agar Flakes

Agar flakes are less concentrated than the powder and allow more control over the final texture of a recipe. The powder and flakes can be used interchangeably in recipes as long as you adjust the amounts to account for their differences. (See Conversion Chart, below.)

## Conversion Chart: Agar Flakes vs. Powder

Per 1 cup liquid	SOFT + JIGGLY (custard, panna cotta)	FIRM + SMOOTH (pie filling, jellied desserts)	EXTRA-FIRM + SLICEABLE (vegan cheese, veggie pâté)
Agar Flakes	2 tsp.	1 Tbsp.	4 tsp.
Agar Powder	½ tsp.	¾ tsp.	1 tsp.

## Where to Find It

Agar powder is sold in small packets and can also be found with the bulk spices in natural food stores. Agar flakes are often stocked near the seaweed products in the international aisle. It can also be ordered [online](#).

## Vanilla Panna Cotta With Agar

Cooking with agar is as easy as boiling a liquid on the stove. Give it a whirl with this simple vanilla panna cotta recipe.

- 2 Tbsp. agar flakes or 1½ tsp. agar powder
- 3 cups unsweetened plant milk
- 3 Tbsp. pure maple syrup

(continued)

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- 1 tsp. pure vanilla extract

1. In a large saucepan whisk agar flakes or powder into unsweetened plant milk.
2. Slowly bring mixture to boiling; boil 5 minutes, whisking constantly. (The heat activates agar's setting properties.)
3. Strain through a fine-mesh sieve to remove any lumps.
4. Whisk in maple syrup and vanilla.
5. Divide among six ramekins. Chill at least 4 hours before unmolding and serving.

## More Agar Recipes to Try

Put agar to delicious, luscious use with these healthy vegan recipes from Forks Over Knives.

- [Peanut Butter-Chocolate Marble Pudding](#)
- [Crispy Potato Cheese Sticks](#)
- [Strawberry Kantan Japanese Jelly Treats](#)
- [Date-Sweetened Chocolate Panna Cotta](#)
- [Creamy Corn Butter](#)
- [Vegan Key Lime Pie](#)
- [Mini Peach Tarts](#)