



The Plant-Based Cook's Guide to Cashews

By Mary Margaret Chappell
2025-05-21 10:14:21



colorful, tropical cashew apples. Because the nuts are encased in a thick double shell that contains irritants and bitter oils, they are inedible straight off the tree. Getting to the tasty, buttery kernels requires steaming or boiling to soften the hulls which are then completely removed to eliminate any toxic residue. (That's why cashews are always sold hulled and ready to eat.)

Raw vs. Roasted Cashews

Raw and roasted cashews are usually sold side by side, which means you should check the label carefully before buying.



Is there anything cashews can't do? Ever since some clever soul figured out how to soak the crescent-shaped nuts in water then blend them to creamy smoothness, cashews have become an essential ingredient in vegan cooking and baking, right up there with [tofu](#), [flaxseeds](#), and [egg substitutes](#). Here's everything a plant-based cook needs to know about cashews, from how to select, measure and store them to the best ways to maximize their creamy factor in plant milk, dressings, dairy-free cheeses, and desserts.

What Are Cashews?



Cashews are tree nuts that grow out of the base of

Raw Cashews

Raw cashews are the plain, hulled nuts that have been calibrated, dried, and packed for extended shelf life. Choose raw cashews for creamy recipes like cashew milk, cashew-based sauces, and cashew creams. They're also the best for sautés and stir-fries where the cashews cook and brown with the other ingredients.

Shopping and storage: When buying raw cashews, check their expiration date, especially if you are planning to buy a large quantity to keep on hand. Raw cashews will remain fresh for six months when stored in an airtight container in a cool, dark, dry place. Raw cashews can also be stored in the freezer for up to a year. Just remember to use freezer-friendly packaging

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and to squeeze all the air out first so the nuts won't develop ice crystals.

Roasted Cashews

Roasted cashews are great for salad toppers and snacking in moderation. While you can use roasted cashews to make milk and cashew creams, they may produce a grainier texture than recipes prepared with raw cashews, and the nutty flavor will be more pronounced.

You can also roast your own cashews. To do so, preheat the oven to 350°F. Spread raw cashews in a single layer on a baking sheet, then bake them for 7 to 10 minutes, shaking the pan once or twice so that they brown evenly. Cool completely before using.

Shopping and storage: Look for cashews that have been dry-roasted (not cooked in oil) with no salt added. Store in an airtight container at room temperature to keep them from going stale or losing their crunch.

Cashew Pieces: A Budget-Friendly Option

Both raw and roasted cashews are sold not just whole but also in halves and pieces. These options taste the same as whole but cost about one-third less, which is a great deal if you soak and blend a lot of cashews. One question that often comes up for cooks is how to substitute cashew pieces in a recipe that calls for whole cashews. In fact, cashew halves and pieces have same volume and weight, so you can substitute equal amounts of cashew pieces for whole cashews called for in a recipe—and vice versa.

Cashew Nutrition

Nutrition-wise, cashews are on par with almonds and pistachios, with about 160 calories per ounce. They are lower in fat than other nuts, and most of cashews' fat content is unsaturated. Cashews also have the highest iron content of all nuts and are a good source of zinc.

2 Ways to Soak Cashews

Here are two ways to soak cashews for use in milks, creams, dips, and sauces.

Quick-Soak Method

Place 1 cup raw cashews in a heat-resistant container, then cover with 3 cups boiling-hot water. Let stand for 30 minutes to 1 hour. Drain, and use as directed.

Cold Water Method

Place 1 cup cashews in a large bowl and cover with 3 cups cool water. Let the cashews soak at room temperature for two to 12 hours. (The time range is up to you and your cooking schedule. Two hours of soaking time is enough for most recipes, including cashew milk. Longer soaking times can be more convenient because they let you start the soaking process early, then use the soaked cashews when you're ready to cook.)

Soaking cashews softens them and helps make them more blendable and digestible. For best results, use a 1:3 ratio of nuts to water ratio when soaking, and always drain and discard the soaking water. Whole soaked cashews are highly perishable and should be stored in the fridge for no longer than 24 hours.

Basic Recipe for Cashew Cream

Here is an all-purpose method for making thick cashew cream. *Makes 2 cups*

1. Soak 2 cups raw cashews or cashew pieces in water using one of the methods above.
2. Drain the cashews well, then combine them in a blender or food processor with $\frac{1}{3}$ cup to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cool, fresh water. Blend for 3 minutes, or until smooth and creamy.
3. Flavor the cashew cream with a little maple syrup and/or vanilla for a dessert topping, or spike it with lemon juice and use it like sour cream on savory dishes. (It's delicious on baked potatoes!) Store up to 1 week in the fridge.

Basic Recipe for Cashew Milk

The great thing about cashew milk? It doesn't have to be strained like other nut milks. *Makes 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups*

1. Soak 1 cup raw cashews or cashew pieces in 3 cups water using one of the methods above.
2. Drain the cashews well, then combine them in a blender or food processor with 3 cups cool, water. Blend for 3 minutes, or until smooth and creamy. Store the cashew milk in the fridge up to

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5 days.

Using Cashew Butter in Place of Cashew Cream

Unsalted raw cashew butter can be used as a substitute for blended cashews or cashew cream in savory dishes where the goal is to add a creamy or buttery factor to the dish. Try it as an in-a-pinch swap in sauces, salad dressings, casseroles, and stews.

Our Favorite Cashew Recipes

Ready to get more cashews in your meal repertoire? Here are some tasty ideas that use cashews as garnishes, cream bases, and crunchy additions.

- [Cilantro-Cashew Dressing](#)
- [Pumpkin Parfait with Cashew Vanilla Cream](#)
- [Green Bean Pasta with Cashew Pesto](#)
- [Vegan Kale Caesar Salad](#)
- [Shellroni Salad with Jackfruit and Creamy Cashew Dressing](#)
- [Vietnamese Eggplant with Cashews, Sesame, and Chile](#)
- [Summer Pasta Bowls with Grilled Veggies and Cashew Cream Sauce](#)
- [Vegan Vegetable Korma](#)
- [Homemade Vegan Cashew Pesto](#)
- [Almost Egg Salad](#)