



Plant-Based Diaries Week 3: Stewing, Simmering, Savoring

By Lucie Monk Carter
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I'm not much for measuring spoons in savory cooking. When the saucepan is warm to my touch, I upend the bottle of olive oil and count *One, two* as the green liquid squiggles across the pan's surface. So many evenings I make the same movement. *One, two*. I'm not going to increase my dish load for what's obviously a foundational part of most dishes I cook.

Or is it?

For all the dinners I picked from the [Forks Meal Planner](#) this week, neither muscle memory nor measuring spoon was necessary to begin cooking. Once I had my vegetables diced and chopped (oh, so much chopping; I'd like to thank Forks Over Knives for my new biceps), I simply heated the pan and tossed them in, no oil necessary. Some slight concern arose that I'd ruin my prized Le Creuset pot with charred sweet potato flesh—not among the signature colors in their line of enamelware—but water kept the ingredients from getting too clingy. (Vegetable broth works, too.) Even carrots roasted, without a drop of oil. It took a few minutes longer before they began to brown, but I didn't miss the slickness in the Roasted Carrot and Wheat Berry Salad, where the wheat berries and carrots were actually the only cooked ingredients among cauliflower, dates, chopped onion, and a creamy cashew-tahini dressing.



It's just the weather—cold, wet, dark too early—for staying in with stew, and the Moroccan Lentil Stew and African Peanut Stew met my craving and were well worth the small mountain of sweet potatoes and onions I chopped in the process. I'd come to associate stew as something hearty and a little greasy, crowded with meat and potatoes and sure to cause a breakout if any part touched my chin. But these stews were light and aromatic.



Without oil or braised meats, tender lentils and wafts of cinnamon rose up in the Moroccan Lentil Stew which had an earthy charm on its own but absolutely transformed when a squeeze of lemon let all individual flavors find space to pop. Similarly, ginger and garlic

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sparkled at the base of the African Peanut Stew; as I heaped on the unusual combination of tomatoes, peanut butter, and kale at the stew's end, I wondered what sort of weird treacle I was in for. No worry necessary—kale's bitterness fell off, the peanuts melded into a just-salty-enough complement to the sweet and sharp tomatoes, the ginger and garlic still sang, and the diced vegetables soaked up the medley of flavor. And so I ate every last one, so I could soak up the flavor, too.

Editor's Note: This month is the second annual Forks Over Knives Fresh Start Challenge, our free 21-day program for adopting a plant-based diet one meal at a time. Food writer Lucie Monk Carter is taking the challenge, and we've asked her to document her experiences with whole-food, plant-based cooking and eating in this series.

Looking for some practical support on your whole-food, plant-based journey? Check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.