

VN DPG Culture Plates: Latin Cuisine

Vegetarian Nutrition

a dietetic practice group of the
eat right. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics
Experts in Plant-Based Nutrition



Shifting to a plant-based diet:

Latin cuisine is a term used to include a combination of different foods, backgrounds, and cultures that principally mix the Latin American native indigenous cuisine with African, English, and Spanish cuisine. The roots of Latin American dishes had plant-based foods as their plates' main or only component. A great example is when the Spaniards arrived in Mexico, natives cooked primarily with chili peppers, black beans, tomatoes, squash, and corn. The Spanish culture then introduced cattle, pigs, and other livestock. The popularity of plant-based diets is moving many Latin American communities back to their origins or roots, where plant-based foods were the main component of their plate. Beans and other protein-rich plant-based products are being used as substitutes in many traditional dishes, taking center stage throughout many countries once again. Latin cuisine is known for its diversity in its dishes that incorporate spices and herbs in “adobos” (stocks) and “sofrito” (sauce or puree bases), which gives this cuisine its distinctive flavor. Dairy also plays an important role in the Latin American community. However, numerous plant-based options have made it easy to replace them with options that can offer the same or increased nutritional value.

Portion plate mockup:

How to eat:

Building a well-balanced Latin American plate is rather simple. Many regions achieve this thanks to the variety of fruit, vegetables, beans, and grains consumed. Although tofu, tempeh, and seitan are not local food items commonly

consumed in Latin America, these can easily replace animal protein in many traditional dishes. A well-balanced Latin American plate can include tortillas or rice under the grains group (1/4 of the plate); beans, tofu, or tempeh in the protein group (1/4 of the plate); and a mix of starchy or non-starchy vegetables in the vegetable group (1/2 of the plate).

Building your plate:

Vegetables - cabbage, carrots, cassava, chard, chayote, chili peppers, corn, eggplant, garlic, jicama, kale, lettuce, nopales, onion, okra, peppers, potatoes, pumpkin, onion, okra, spinach, yams, yuca, zucchini.

Fruit - acai, avocados, bananas, breadfruit, cacao, caimito, cherimoya, coconut, grapefruit, soursop (guanabana), guava, lemons, limes, mangoes, melons, oranges, papayas, passion fruit, pineapple, plantains, pomegranate, prickly pear, sapote, starfruit, sugarcane, tamarind, tangerine, tomatillos, tomatoes.

Whole grains - amaranth, arepas, breads, corn, pasta, quinoa, rice, tortillas.

Proteins – black beans, black-eyed peas, garbanzo beans, kidney beans, pigeon peas, pinto beans, lentils, tofu, tempeh, seitan. Almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, peanuts, pine nuts, pecans, pepitas.

Dairy (substitutes) – Plant-based alternatives for milk, yogurt, cheese, cream, etc.

VN DPG Culture Plates: Latin Cuisine

Regional local foods:

Mexico	Central America	Caribbean	South America
Tamales, tacos, sopes, mole poblano, pozole, chili peppers, black beans, chocolate, avocados, hearts of palm, mangoes, papayas, cactus (nopales), fava and pinto beans, epazote, cilantro, amaranth, and potatoes.	Gallo pinto, pupusas, heart of palm salad, empanadas, tamales, ripe plantains, unripe plantains, picadillo, chili peppers, beans, rice, coconut, papaya, plum, mangoes, and melons.	Mofongo, mangú, fufu, “ropa vieja,” plantains (ripe and green), white rice, coconut milk, corn, yams, yuca, peanuts, guavas, pineapple, green pigeon peas (gandules), black-eyed peas, lima beans, sofrito (a purée of cilantro, parsley, pepper, onion and garlic), adobo (mix of salt, pepper, turmeric, oregano, garlic powder, and onion powder), Jerk seasoning.	Ceviche, peanut soup, empanadas, chimichurri (a fresh sauce made from parsley, olive oil, vinegar, and oregano), quinoa, amaranth, oats, barley, rice, wheat, yuca, yams, chili peppers, eggplant, corn, avocado, citrus, coconut, cherimoya, mango, guava, papaya, acai, plantains, passion fruit.

Cultural preferences and common practices:

Sample menu:

Breakfast

- Scrambled tofu (extra firm tofu, garlic powder, onion powder, turmeric, tomato, onion, salt, and pepper)
- Onion, peppers, salsa
- 2 whole grain corn or flour tortillas
- 1 orange

Lunch

- 1 cup chickpea stew (chickpea, potatoes, carrots, tomato paste, sofrito, spices)
- ½ avocado

- 1 cup zucchini

- 1 cup melon

Dinner

- Stuffed avocado (1 avocado, ½ cup cooked quinoa, ½ cup kidney beans, ½ cup baked sweet plantain, ¼ cup corn, 2 tbsp lemon juice)
- ½ cup pineapple

Snacks

- 5oz unsweetened plant-based yogurt
- ½ cup mixed berries
- ¼ cup mixed nuts, seeds

Number of cultures/groups/languages, etc.:

Mexico	Central America	Caribbean	South America
Baja California, Pacific Coastal Lowlands, Mexican Plateau, Sierra Madre Oriental, Sierra Madre Occidental, Cordillera Neo-Volcanica, Gulf Coastal Plain, the Southern Highlands, Yucatán Peninsula	Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize	Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Minor Caribbean Islands	Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil

Common Spices and seasonings:

Achiote, aji, cayenne, jalapeño pepper, guajillo, habanero pepper, pasilla, poblano pepper, scotch bonnet, serrano pepper, cilantro, cinnamon, epazote, garlic, oregano, parsley, sofrito, adobo

Common beverages:

Fresh waters (infused fruit water), atole, tejuino, teas, coconut water, chocolate, pina colada