

VEGAN NACHO CHEESE

I'm not a vegan or vegetarian, but was amazed how closely this tasted like the real thing. You will need a pretty good food processor or blender (preferred) for this recipe and be sure to read the **TIPS** section below before you make this recipe!

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups raw, UNSALTED cashews
3 1/2 cups water (1/2 cup water, reserved, if needed)
4 Tbsp fresh lemon juice (about 2 lemons, squeezed)
3/4 tsp paprika
1 tsp garlic powder
2 tsp onion powder
3 tsp salt
1 (4 oz) jar pimentos with juice
1 small (4 oz) can jalapenos (chopped)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Add 2 1/2 cups water and all ingredients EXCEPTS jalapenos in a blender and blend until silky smooth (almost liquid consistency).
2. Pour into a large saucepan over a little less than medium (50%) heat.
3. Keep stirring CONSTANTLY until it thickens - it will burn easily. Be patient, it will eventually thicken and once it does, add the jalapenos with juice and stir for another minute or so.
4. Serve over corn tortilla chips.
5. If making ahead of time, press some plastic wrap onto the top of the cheese so a skin doesn't form and refrigerate.

TIPS:

You need to have a pretty good food processor or blender (preferred) to grind up the cashews into a smooth paste or liquify them. The water helps this process, but the thickening process at the end is a little tedious and you have to be especially careful if using a processor so the water doesn't overflow and come running out the bottom of the bowl, which is why I recommend a blender.

Here are some tips around these issues:

If your blender isn't the best or you only have a food processor, slightly chop up the cashews in the blender or food processor the night before, put them in a bowl and after measuring your water, just barely cover the cashews with water, cover and put in the refrigerator. The cashews will absorb the water, which will help soften them up and this is especially helpful if you are doing this in a food processor or if your device isn't the best.

Follow the directions by adding all the ingredients (except jalapenos) into your device and process accordingly. Depending on how much water you used to cover the cashews the night before, you may have to add a little more (or what you had left over after measuring out the water) to facilitate the mixing process if the additional liquid from the lemon and pimentos isn't enough to get things moving. You should be able to gauge the consistency and adjust the water accordingly, especially if you are using a food processor.

The first time I made this, I followed this method in a food processor and also went through the thickening process at the end, which didn't really thicken it up since I didn't use as much water as the recipe called for.

The second time I made it, I followed the recipe exactly and used a blender. All the ingredients almost filled my blender, so I had to start off at slow speed pulsing/blending it and then increasing the speed - be sure you have the lid on tight and hold the top when blending! The finished mixture was almost the consistency of water, so I had to go through the thickening process at the end. I poured the mixture in into a 3 1/2 quart, wide sauce pan and stirred consistently for about 20-30 minutes and it finally thickened up. Again, this is a tedious process and you can't walk away from the pan or it will overheat and burn. Once the mixture is brought up to temperature, you will see steam rising off the top and at that point, keep stirring, watch it very carefully and you will probably have to turn the heat down at that point and continue stirring.

Great dish for Lent/Pascha.

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