

Nutritional Yeast

by *Delisa Renideo*

How do vegans satisfy their taste for cheese? With nutritional yeast flakes, of course! But what is this stuff that looks yellow and flakey and tastes sort of nutty and cheesy?

Yeasts are single-celled microscopic organisms that are members of the fungus family, as are mushrooms. There are over 1000 species of yeast. Yeasts are commonly used in making wine, bread, and beer.

Red Star Vegetarian Support Formula Nutritional Yeast, (nutritional yeast, for short) is a primary grown yeast from a pure strain of *Saccharomyces cerevisiae*, which is grown on mixtures of beet and cane molasses. “Primary grown” means it is cultivated specifically for its nutritional value, rather than its ability to ferment wine or beer or make bread rise. In other words, they grow it specifically as a food.

Nutritional yeast is an inactive yeast, so you need not fear it will contribute to *Candida albicans*, or yeast infection. (You also can't use it to make bread rise or to make wine or beer.) After it is fermented on the molasses, the yeast is harvested, washed, pasteurized, and dried on roller drums.. Growing it on

molasses and drying it in a special way are what give it the wonderful flavor we have come to love and appreciate so much.

Not only does nutritional yeast taste great, it's also extremely nutritious.

It is a great source of vitamins and minerals and is a particularly good source of the B vitamins, and is fortified with vitamin B12. It is also a good source of protein and is low in fat and high in fiber.

Don't confuse nutritional yeast with brewer's yeast or torula yeast. Brewer's yeast is a byproduct of the beer-brewing industry and torula yeast is grown on waste products, such as from the wood pulp industry. These both have a very bitter flavor, so even though they still provide good nutrition, you'll want to choose nutritional yeast over brewer's or torula yeast. (Just to confuse us, some sellers call nutritional

yeast brewer's yeast. Azure Standard, in Oregon, is an example of this. So if you order brewer's yeast from Azure Standard, rest assured you will be receiving the cheesy tasting nutritional yeast.)

You can purchase nutritional yeast in the bulk bins at Fred Meyer, Carr's, Natural Pantry, and other large grocery stores. It is available in both flake form and powder form. I prefer the large flake,



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but if you cannot find the large flake and need to purchase the powder, that's okay too. Just use half as much in a recipe as it is more compact.

So what can you do with nutritional yeast? Try sprinkling it on salads, into soups and sauces, mixing it into mashed potatoes and tofu dishes. It not only adds a cheesy flavor; it also imparts a richness to your

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food. It's delicious sprinkled on popcorn and can be used in recipes for vegan cheesy sauces and vegan Parmesan substitute. (For recipes, visit www.alaskaveg.org/AVSRecipe.html.)

(Sources: *The Nutritional Yeast Cookbook*, by Joanne Stepaniak; and www.bulkfoods.com/yeast.htm)