

# Exceptional Endings

## Really Good Raw Desserts

Over indulging in sweets during the winter festivities can produce unwanted weight gain and a general feeling of sluggishness—a not-so-wonderful gift for anyone. But adding a raw food dessert to our holiday repertoire could introduce a new, healthier tradition to holiday occasions that's welcomed by everyone.

by Judith Fertig

A raw dessert no longer means only a simple piece of fruit or a handful of nuts. While a traditional holiday story conjures sleeping children with “visions of sugar-plums” dancing in their heads, the dreams of raw dessert chefs more likely spring from Medjool dates, cacao nibs and exotic fruits. That's because raw desserts are made from uncooked, minimally processed and generally plant-based foods.

Raw foods aficionados say they are usually first attracted to this type of food preparation because the recipes do not contain wheat, refined sugar, eggs or dairy products, which eliminates the need to work around food sensitivities. Plus, they feel better after they've eaten a raw foods dessert, which might feature nuts, fresh and dried fruits, agave nectar and/or chocolate.

When these raw foods are ground or puréed in a food processor or blender, they contribute mightily to dessert crusts, fillings, sauces and frostings to grace tarts, cakes, cookies, puddings and ice creams—all of which can be made without cooking.

Sometimes, dessert recipes call for using a dehydrator, a simple appliance that dries foods slowly at around 112° to 118° F, to avoid the enzyme changes that occur when foods are cooked at higher temperatures. The dehydrator yields a charac-

teristic that raw foods enthusiast Nathalie Lussier describes as “...a warm, chewy, comfort food feeling, so that you can make cookies that come out slightly warm from the dehydrator.”

With raw desserts, “You really can have your cake and eat it too, because the recipes are packed with nutrients and fiber,” advises raw desserts chef Heather Pace, the author of four raw dessert e-books, including *Just Desserts* and *Raw Party Parfait*.

Most raw foods desserts, like most exceptional sweets, involve several steps to make each part. “While at first glance, a raw dessert might appear to be complicated and time-consuming,” notes Pace, “it's really very simple. Each component can be thrown together quickly and easily and can be made ahead.”

The benefits of raw desserts extend beyond the simply nutritional, affirm devoted adherents. Rose Lee Calabro, author of *Living in the Raw* and *Living in the Raw Desserts*, had experienced a host of personal health issues that virtually disappeared when she began to eat a mainly raw foods diet a decade ago. But more than that, she says, “Eating raw foods has contributed to a career change and a dramatic shift in my life.”

According to eco-lifestylist and raw foods author Ani Phyo, “Eating more organic, fresh, whole foods helps us maintain an ideal weight, lowers cholesterol, boosts the immune system and helps us look and feel our best.” But for her, as well, raw foods are more than a diet. She remarks, “It affects the way I live and interact with planet Earth and all other living beings.” Phyo is the author of *Ani's Raw Food Essentials*, *Ani's Raw Food Desserts* and *Ani's Raw Food Kitchen*.

Lussier agrees all the way around. “I believe raw foods can heal you on a physical, emotional and spiritual level,” she comments, because like many others, “I've personally experienced it myself.”

Judith Fertig is a freelance writer in Overland Park, KS; for more information visit [AlfrescoFoodAndLifestyle.blogspot.com](http://AlfrescoFoodAndLifestyle.blogspot.com).

### Raw Food Desserts Kitchen

Although no oven is used in making raw desserts, other electronic equipment is necessary.

<b>Blender</b>	Makes sauces, puddings, smoothies and fillings
<b>Dehydrator</b>	Removes moisture from raw foods at 112° to 118° F; “bakes” cookies
<b>Food Processor</b>	Makes nut crusts and fruit purées
<b>Electric Juicer</b>	Presses and juices fruits and vegetables

## Three Raw Cookbook Authors Share their Best Holiday Recipes



### Chocolate Pecan Brownie with Maca Ice Cream and Spiced Apple Compote

“Picture a dense chocolate nut brownie, smooth, cold ice cream and warm fruit compote that has just the right touch of spice, with a velvety chocolate sauce to round it all out. If that weren’t enough, I garnish it with a drizzle of pure maple syrup,” says raw foods dessert chef Heather Pace. She explains that Maca (*Lepidium meyenii*) is a Peruvian root with a strong flavor and recommends using only a little, until one is acclimated to the taste.

Serves 6 to 8

#### For the brownie:

4 cups raw pecans  
1/2 cup pitted, packed Medjool dates  
1/4 cup maple or palm sugar  
2/3 cup cacao powder  
2 tsp pure vanilla extract  
Pinch of Himalayan or sea salt

#### For the ice cream:

2 cups raw cashews  
2 cups water  
Seeds from 1/2 vanilla bean  
1/3 cup maple syrup  
1 tbsp Maca root powder or to taste

#### For the compote:

4 medium apples, peeled and cored  
1/2 cup maple syrup  
1/4 cup raisins  
2 tbsp goji berries  
2 pitted Medjool dates, chopped  
1 tsp lemon zest  
1/2 tsp cinnamon  
1/4 tsp nutmeg  
2 pinches ground cardamom

#### For the chocolate sauce:

1/3 cup cacao powder  
1/4 cup pure maple syrup  
2 to 3 tbsp water  
2 tsp melted coconut oil

1. For the brownie, grind the pecans into crumbs in a food processor. Add the remaining ingredients and process into a moist, crumbly dough. Press the mixture into an 8-by-8-inch pan. Chill.
2. For the ice cream, blend all ingredients until smooth and creamy. Chill for a few hours. Process through an ice cream maker according to the manufacturer’s instructions; or fill ice cube trays and freeze.
3. For the compote, soak the raisins and goji berries in water for 2 to 4 hours. Drain. In a food processor, chop the apples into small pieces. Add remaining ingredients to the apples, including the drained fruit, and stir together. Process half the mixture until smooth. Fold into the other half. Dehydrate for a few hours at 115° F, until the apples take on a warm, “cooked” feel.
4. For the sauce, blend all ingredients together until smooth.
5. To assemble the dessert, cut the brownies into portions and place a brownie on each plate. Top with ice cream. Swirl compote around the brownie and drizzle with chocolate sauce.

### Pineapple Icebox Dessert

The pineapple, a renowned symbol of hospitality for centuries, can make a refreshingly welcome holiday dessert. “Pineapple is full of the enzyme bromelain, which helps decrease inflammation and swelling—and that can translate to increased circulation and clear skin,” says Ani Phyo, of *Ani’s Raw Food Desserts*. “I always choose fresh when available, but frozen pineapple will also work for this recipe.”

Makes 6 to 8 servings

#### For the crust:

2 cups cashews  
Seeds from 1 vanilla bean, or 1 tbsp alcohol-free vanilla extract  
2 tbsp agave syrup

## The Raw Food Dessert Pantry

by Judith Fertig

A basic raw food dessert pantry includes plant-based foods that are in the purest state possible. It differs from a conventional pantry in that items have undergone very little or no processing; plus, many familiar foods find new uses. Nuts become flours or milks for sauces. Natural sweeteners replace highly processed sugar. Chocolate assumes its most natural state. Fresh, ripe fruits provide flavor and smooth texture. Dried fruits amplify taste and sweetness. Psyllium powder thickens sauces and fillings in place of flour, eggs, cornstarch or tapioca. Here’s a taste of the possibilities...

**Nuts:** Raw almonds, pecans, pine nuts, cashews

**Sweeteners:** Medjool dates, date sugar, maple sugar, palm sugar, agave nectar, maple syrup

**Chocolate:** Cacao nibs, cacao powder, carob

**Fats:** Coconut oil, nut butters, cocoa butter, cold-pressed oils

**Flavorings:** Whole vanilla bean, pure vanilla extract, spices, fresh citrus zest

**Fresh fruits:** Ripe bananas, avocado, pineapple, strawberries, apples and pears

**Dried fruits:** Raisins, goji berries, figs, desiccated coconut

**Thickeners:** Psyllium powder

# Incredibly Decadent Chocolate Cake

This recipe from Rose Lee Calabro's *Living in the Raw Desserts* gets its body from almonds, its sweetness from dates and agave nectar, and its scrumptious chocolateyness from cacao nibs—all available at better grocery or health food stores. Plan ahead several days to allow time to soak and then dehydrate the almonds.

Makes 8 to 10 servings

## For the cake:

2 cups almonds; soak for 12 to 48 hours, then dehydrate for 18 hours  
2 cups pitted Medjool dates  
1/3 cup raw almond butter  
1/4 cup raw cacao nibs, ground super fine; or cacao powder  
1/4 cup agave nectar  
2 tsp vanilla extract

## For the filling:

2 large ripe bananas, thinly sliced

## For the frosting:

1 ripe avocado  
1 ripe banana  
5 pitted Medjool dates  
1/2 cup water  
1/3 cup pine nuts; soak in water 1 hour, then drain  
2 tbsp raw cacao nibs, ground super fine; or cacao powder  
1 tsp vanilla extract

1. For the cake, place the almonds in a food processor fitted with a steel blade and process into a fine meal. Gradually add the dates, almond butter, cacao, agave nectar and vanilla extract, then continue processing until the mixture is well blended and forms a ball. If the mixture isn't blending, add a small amount of water, as needed, to achieve the desired consistency. Divide the mixture into two equal parts (for two layers), and form each part into a round cake layer about 8 inches in diameter. Place each layer on a plate.
2. For the filling, arrange the sliced bananas on top of the bottom layer and place the second layer on top of the bananas.
3. For the frosting, combine all of the ingredients in a blender and process until smooth, thick and creamy. Frost the top and sides of the cake. Decorate with fresh strawberries or other seasonal fruit. Refrigerate for 2 to 3 hours before serving.



## For the filling:

1 1/2 cups cashews  
1/3 cup agave syrup  
1/4 cup liquid coconut oil  
1/4 cup filtered water, as needed  
2 1/2 cups chopped, cored pineapple

1. To make the crust, combine the cashews and vanilla in the food processor and chop to a crushed wafer texture (like a cookie crumb crust for cheesecake). Add the agave syrup and process to mix well. Sprinkle half of the crust onto the bottom of a loaf pan.
2. To make the filling, combine the cashews, agave syrup and coconut oil in a high-speed blender and blend until smooth, adding water as needed to create a creamy texture. Spoon the mixture into a mixing bowl; add the pineapple and stir to mix well. Spoon the filling into the loaf pan and sprinkle the remaining crust on top. Pat lightly. Freeze for 2 hours or until chilled. Will keep for 4 to 6 days refrigerated or for several weeks in the freezer.