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Photo by Stephen Blancett

# SWEETLY VEGAN

## No-Bake Holiday Treats Worth Celebrating

by Judith Fertig

“Visions of sugar plums” have been part of holiday mindsets since the advent of Clement Moore’s classic 19th-century poem commonly known as *’Twas the Night Before Christmas*.

We love to give and receive special treats and our tastes are evolving. Instead of yesteryear’s sugary bonbons loaded with calories that we’ve come to regret, today’s preferred confections focus more on naturally sweet dried fruits, best-quality chocolate, healthful coconut and crunchy nuts. Vegan, gluten-free delicacies from chefs and culinary experts the world over help us celebrate the season in a deliciously healthy way, including those we highlight this month.

“Christmas isn’t Christmas without a traditional pudding,” says Chef Teresa Cutter, author of *Purely Delicious*. Cutter is founder and director of The Healthy Chef company, in Sydney, Australia, which creates functional foods for taste and optimal health. Her no-bake desserts such as miniature Christmas puddings and carrot cake take only minutes to make.

Emily Holmes, a Queensland, Australia, wellness coach who blogs at *Conscious-Foodie.com*, says her favorite is Holmes’ Chocolate Cherry Mini-Cupcakes. She serves them with a pot of peppermint tea.

Houston-based Joshua Weissman is the author of *The Slim Palate Paleo Cookbook* and blogs at *SlimPalate.com*. He shares his philosophy on holiday treats: “My first thought is that I don’t want to feel guilty after eating it. My second is that I still want it to taste and look good.” His Almond Butter Pumpkin Pie Truffles fit the festive bill.

In New York City, noted vegan cookbook author and Pastry Chef Fran Costigan is an expert in all things chocolate, including her Chocolate Orange Sesame Truffles. “When you make something really delicious with real ingredients, your mouth knows it, your brain knows it, your body knows it. You feel satisfied,” she says.

Judith Fertig blogs at *AlfrescoFoodAndLifestyle.blogspot.com* from Overland Park, KS.

Natural Awakenings recommends using organic and non-GMO (genetically modified) ingredients whenever possible.

# No-Bake Festive Vegan Desserts



## Teresa Cutter's Healthy Christmas Puddings

Yields: 6 to 8 small puddings

8 oz fresh pitted dates—approximately 10 to 15 dates, depending on their size  
Zest from 1 orange  
9 oz dried apricots, chopped  
1½ cups almond meal/ground almonds  
1 tsp vanilla bean paste or extract  
1 tsp ground cinnamon  
¼ tsp ground nutmeg  
¼ tsp ground ginger  
1 to 2 Tbsp orange juice  
3 oz white chocolate, melted, for decoration (optional)

Combine dates, orange zest, apricots, vanilla, ground almonds, cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger in a food processor. Process until mixture is combined and looks like fine crumbs.

Spoon the mixture into a large bowl. Add the orange juice, and then mix again. Pudding mix should come together when lightly hand-squeezed.

Divide into 6 small puddings. Line the base of 6 small decorative molds with plastic wrap and firmly press the puddings into them.

Once firmly packed in the mold, invert the pudding and remove the plastic wrap.

Melt white chocolate in a small bowl set over a simmering pot of water.

Spoon a little white chocolate over the tops of the puddings if desired and garnish with goji berries, fresh cherries or another fanciful topper.

Store in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. Serve puddings with chilled mango coconut custard.

### Mango Coconut Custard

1 mango, chopped  
½ cup coconut milk  
Juice from ½ orange

Combine all ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth. Serve chilled with the puddings.



## Teresa Cutter's No-Bake Carrot Cake

Yields: 16 servings

2½ cups (9½ oz) shelled walnuts  
1 Tbsp ground flaxseed or whole chia seeds  
½ cup (2 oz) rolled oats (or gluten-free almond meal)  
1 tsp ground cinnamon  
¼ tsp ground ginger  
¼ tsp ground nutmeg  
¼ tsp sea salt  
1 cup (6½ oz) of 12 large fresh dates, pitted  
½ cup (3 oz) dried chopped apricots or pineapple (sulfur-free)  
2 large raw carrots, grated  
Zest from 1 orange  
2 tsp vanilla bean paste

Combine walnuts, flaxseed, cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, orange zest and sea salt into a food processor and run it until mixed and finely chopped. Add dates and apricots. Process again until thoroughly mixed.

Add grated raw carrot and vanilla and then process again until combined. The mix should now form a nice dough.

Spoon into a bowl. Add and kneed oats through the raw carrot cake mixture.

Press cake firmly into a 6-inch round baking dish lined with parchment paper.

Refrigerate until ready to serve, allowing at least 2 hours for the cake to rest. It will keep in the refrigerator for about a week.

Enjoy as is or garnish with macadamia nut cream, a drizzle of honey and walnuts.

Note: Other raw nuts can substitute for walnuts—try pecans, almonds or macadamia nuts.

### Macadamia Nut Cream

Combine 1 cup of raw cashew nuts or macadamia nuts with ½ cup of orange juice or coconut water and a little vanilla. Blend in a high-speed blender like a Vitamix until smooth and creamy.

## Emily Holmes' Chocolate Cherry Mini-Cupcakes

Yields: 2 dozen mini-cupcakes

### Cake

1 cup raw, shelled, skinned nuts (such as almonds)  
⅓ cup cacao powder  
4 fresh dates, pitted

### Filling

2 cup shredded coconut  
1 cup dried cherries  
6 fresh dates, pitted  
¼ cup coconut cream  
¼ tsp vanilla powder  
Pinch of sea salt





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### Topping

*3 1/2 oz melted dark chocolate*

Process nuts and cacao powder in a food processor until the nuts are finely ground and the mixture is fully combined. Slowly add the dates until the mixture sticks together.

Press the mixture into the bottom parts of a 24-cup mini muffin pan. Refrigerate while preparing the filling.

Process filling ingredients in a food processor until well combined. Spoon the filling onto the cupcake base in the muffin cups and then top with melted dark chocolate.

Place into the refrigerator to set, where it also stores well until served.



## Joshua Weissman's Almond Butter Pumpkin Pie Truffles

Yields: About 12 to 16 (1 1/2-inch) truffles

Warm winter spices mix with fragrant pumpkin and almond butter to make seasonal truffles hand dipped in fresh vanilla bean-infused white chocolate.

### Filling

*1/4 cup canned pumpkin purée (not pie filling)  
1/4 cup almond butter  
1/4 cup vegan cream cheese  
1/4 tsp cinnamon  
1/4-1/2 tsp nutmeg  
1/2 tsp fresh grated ginger  
1 Tbsp coconut flour  
2 packets stevia (like Sweetleaf packets)*

### Coating (vanilla bean white chocolate)

*2 oz food grade (not for skin care) cacao butter broken up into small pieces for melting  
1/4-1/2 vanilla bean pod, cut in half lengthwise to scrape out the interior, or 1 tsp vanilla bean paste  
20 drops stevia (like Sweetleaf Steviaclear drops)*

In a medium-sized bowl, combine everything for the filling, including pumpkin purée, almond butter, cream cheese, cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, coconut flour and stevia. Mix thoroughly until smoothly incorporated and no cream cheese chunks are left.

Chill by refrigerating the mixture for 10 to 20 minutes or freezing it for 2 to 5 minutes.

Roll chilled filling mixture into medium-to-small-sized balls a little less than an inch in diameter and place them on a small baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Place balls back into the refrigerator for 10 minutes or the freezer for 5 minutes so the balls harden enough to allow dipping.

Heat a double boiler or small pot that fits into a medium pot of gently boiling water over medium-to-low heat.

Scrape out the vanilla bean pod, conserving vanilla beans for adding once the cacao butter is melted.

Place cacao butter in the top of a double boiler and melt and add stevia. Then add vanilla beans and mix well.

Turn the heat to low to keep warm and melted. Pull out the hardened filling shaped into balls and one at a time drop them into the white chocolate

mixture and roll them around until they're fully covered with mixture using fingers or a small spoon.

Carefully spoon out each truffle using a spoon, gently tapping the spoon on the inside of the saucepan to slough off excess cacao butter that may pool on it. Take special care not to drop the truffle.

Gently place each treat back onto the tray. Repeat the whole process until all the coated balls are on the tray.

Let them cool at room temperature and serve immediately or place them in the refrigerator to harden and serve later. Chilled, truffles will keep for 3 to 5 days.

## Fran Costigan's Chocolate Orange Sesame Truffles

Yields: 20 to 24 (1-inch) truffles

This creamy chocolate truffle has a slightly chewy texture with a coating for color and crunch. Raw tahini is sweeter than when its roasted and either kind is good.

### Truffle Ganache

4 oz dark fair trade chocolate  
(70 to 72 percent), finely chopped  
Finely minced zest of half a  
medium orange  
3 Tbsp orange juice  
¼ cup agave syrup  
1 Tbsp raw or roasted tahini, stirred  
1½ Tbsp white sesame seeds,  
lightly toasted  
1½ Tbsp black sesame seeds,  
lightly toasted

Place the chocolate in a small heat-proof bowl.

Mix the orange zest and juice and agave in a small saucepan. Cook over medium heat just to a boil.

Reduce the heat to low and add the tahini, whisking vigorously. The mixture will thicken immediately. Don't be concerned if it looks broken or curdled; it'll smooth out with whisking.



Photo by Steve Legato

Spoon into a small shallow container and refrigerate uncovered about 2 hours until the ganache is firm. The ganache can be covered and refrigerated at this point for up to 1 week.

### Shape Truffle Centers

Remove the ganache from the refrigerator. Use one spoon to scoop out 1-inch pieces of ganache and another to push it off the spoon into the container. When half the ganache has been used, roll into logs about 1-inch long, washing and drying hands as needed. (If at any time the ganache becomes too soft to shape, refrigerate until cold before proceeding.)

Cover and refrigerate the truffle centers 15 to 25 minutes to set, before final shaping and finishing with the sesame seed coating.

### Truffle Coating

Mix the sesame seeds in a small bowl. Sprinkle about 2 tablespoons on the bottom of a shallow container.

Put a few logs at a time into the bowl of sesame seeds and roll until lightly coated. Pinch the ends to form the oval quenelle (football) shape.

Place the finished truffles in the refrigerator to set for 35 to 45 minutes.

*Adapted from Vegan Chocolate, by Fran Costigan, used with permission.*

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