

Vegan Soul Food Plate

Collard Greens • Mac & "Cheese" • Skillet Cornbread

A complete plant-based Southern comfort plate: smoky braised collards, creamy baked mac & "cheese," and buttery skillet cornbread — everything you need for a full soul food spread.

Building the Plate

This spread comes together as three components, each simmering or baking on its own timeline.

Suggested order:

- Start the collard greens first — they need the longest, slowest simmer (about 1.5 hours total).
- While the greens braise, prep and bake the mac & "cheese" (about 45 minutes start to finish).
- Mix and bake the cornbread last, since it bakes quickly and is best served warm (about 30 minutes).
- Plate with a scoop of collards (spoon over some of the pot likker), a generous helping of mac & "cheese," and a wedge of cornbread on the side.

Braised Collard Greens

Smoky, tender braised collard greens simmered low and slow with a vegan "smoky ham" broth base.

Servings	Active Time	Total Time
4	20 minutes	1 hour 50 minutes

Ingredients

- 2 bunches collard greens, stemmed and chopped
- 2 tbsp neutral oil or vegan butter
- 1 yellow onion, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 tbsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp liquid smoke
- 1/2 tsp red pepper flakes
- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 2 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tbsp brown sugar or maple syrup
- 1 tsp salt, plus more to taste
- 1/2 tsp black pepper
- 1 vegan bouillon cube (smoked or 'no-beef' flavor, optional)

Instructions

- Prep the greens**
Wash the collard greens thoroughly in cold water to remove grit, then stem and roughly chop into bite-sized pieces.
- Sauté the onion**
Heat the oil in a large, heavy pot over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until softened and translucent, about 5 minutes.
- Bloom the spices**
Stir in the garlic, smoked paprika, and red pepper flakes. Cook for 1 minute until fragrant, being careful not to burn the garlic.
- Add greens and broth**
Add the collard greens in batches, stirring to wilt them down as you go. Pour in the vegetable broth, liquid smoke, and bouillon cube if using. Stir well.
- Braise low and slow**
Bring to a gentle boil, then reduce heat to low. Cover and simmer, stirring occasionally, for about 1.5 hours, until the greens are very tender and deeply flavored.
- Season and finish**
Stir in the apple cider vinegar, brown sugar, salt, and pepper. Simmer uncovered for another 10 minutes to let the liquid reduce slightly. Taste and adjust salt, vinegar, or sweetness as needed.

Notes

Save some pot likker (the braising liquid) to serve alongside — it's traditional for dipping cornbread.

For deeper smokiness, add a piece of vegan smoked sausage while it simmers.

Vegan Mac & "Cheese"

Creamy, baked vegan mac and "cheese" with a cashew-and-nutritional-yeast sauce and a golden, crispy breadcrumb top.

Servings	Active Time	Total Time
6	35 minutes	1 hour

Ingredients

- 16 oz elbow macaroni (or preferred pasta shape)
- 1 cup raw cashews, soaked in hot water 15 minutes and drained
- 1 1/2 cups unsweetened plain plant milk
- 1/2 cup nutritional yeast
- 2 russet potatoes, peeled and diced (about 1 cup)
- 1 carrot, peeled and sliced
- 3 garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 1 1/2 tsp salt, plus more to taste
- 3 tbsp vegan butter, melted, divided
- 3/4 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 cup shredded vegan cheddar-style shreds (optional, for extra gooeyness)

Instructions

7. **Boil the pasta**
Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C). Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the macaroni until just al dente (it will finish cooking in the oven). Drain and set aside.
8. **Boil the potato and carrot**
While the pasta cooks, add the potato and carrot to a small pot of water and boil until fork-tender, about 10 minutes.
9. **Blend the cheese sauce**
Drain the potato and carrot and add them to a blender along with the soaked cashews, plant milk, nutritional yeast, garlic, lemon juice, Dijon mustard, smoked paprika, onion powder, and salt. Blend until completely smooth and creamy, scraping down the sides as needed.
10. **Combine pasta and sauce**
In a large bowl, toss the cooked pasta with the cheese sauce and half of the melted vegan butter until every piece is coated. Fold in the vegan cheddar shreds if using.
11. **Top with breadcrumbs**

Transfer the mixture to a greased baking dish. In a small bowl, toss the panko with the remaining melted butter and sprinkle evenly over the top.

12. **Bake**

Bake uncovered for 20-25 minutes, until bubbling around the edges and the topping is golden and crisp.

13. **Rest and serve**

Let rest for 5 minutes before serving so the sauce can set slightly.

Notes

For an extra-sharp flavor, add 1/2 tsp turmeric for color and a splash more lemon juice.

This also works great unbaked and stovetop-only if you're short on time — just skip straight to serving after tossing the sauce with the pasta.

Skillet Cornbread

Classic Southern-style skillet cornbread with crispy, buttery edges, made fully vegan with plant milk and a flax egg.

Servings	Active Time	Total Time
8	15 minutes	40 minutes

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp ground flaxseed mixed with 3 tbsp water (flax egg), rested 5 minutes
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 1 tbsp sugar (optional, for a slightly sweet cornbread)
- 1 tbsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 cup unsweetened plain plant milk
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar (mixed into the plant milk to make vegan buttermilk)
- 1/3 cup neutral oil
- 3 tbsp vegan butter, divided (for the skillet and topping)

Instructions

14. **Preheat and make the flax egg**
Preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C) with a 10-inch cast iron skillet inside to heat up. Stir together the flaxseed and water and let it rest until thickened, about 5 minutes.
15. **Mix dry ingredients**
In a large bowl, whisk together the cornmeal, flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt.
16. **Make the vegan buttermilk**
In a separate bowl or measuring cup, combine the plant milk and apple cider vinegar and let sit for 2 minutes until slightly curdled. Whisk in the flax egg and oil.
17. **Combine batter**
Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and stir just until combined — a few lumps are fine. Do not overmix.
18. **Heat the skillet with butter**
Carefully remove the hot skillet from the oven and add 2 tbsp of the vegan butter to melt and coat the bottom and sides. Pour in the batter — it should sizzle.
19. **Bake**
Bake for 18-20 minutes, until the top is golden and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
20. **Butter and cool**

Remove from the oven and brush the top with the remaining vegan butter while still hot. Let cool for 5-10 minutes before slicing into wedges.

Notes

A well-seasoned cast iron skillet is key for those crispy edges — make sure it's hot before the batter goes in.

For a savory kick, fold in 1/4 cup chopped jalapeño or vegan corn kernels before baking.