

Goodness Bowls

I first encountered the *Goddess* bowl, a satisfying, scrumptious bowl of goodness at GoodLife Cafe and Bakery in Mendocino. Their version consists of bowl of short-grain brown rice topped with sautéed veggies and a choice of tofu or chicken, then topped an avocado half and toasted seeds, and drizzled with creamy tahini sauce. It was one of those greater-than-the-sum-of-the-parts bowls of goodness and I couldn't wait to get home and make my own version. For tender, evenly cooked rice, soak the brown rice in water for an hour before cooking—and be sure to let it steam for 5 minutes, after its cook time. Don't be daunted by the length of this 5-part recipe—the pumpkin seeds and tahini sauce may be made days ahead—both keep well. The rice may be soaked for an hour and then steamed, the veggies roasted, and the tofu marinated and sautéed hours ahead, and then reheated just before serving.

Serves 4

Steamed Brown Rice

1 cup **short-grain brown rice**, soaked in cool water to cover for 1 hour, then rinsed and drained
1-3/4 cups **water**
1/2 teaspoon **kosher salt**

Tamari Pumpkin Seeds

Olive oil for the pan
2 teaspoons **tamari or light soy sauce**
1/4 teaspoon **sugar**
2/3 cup **raw pumpkin seeds**

Roasted Veggies

1 medium **red bell pepper**, cut lengthwise into 1/2-inch-wide strips, then cut in half crosswise
1 medium **red or yellow onion**, ends cut off, cut lengthwise into 1/2-inch pieces
1 bunch (about 9 ounces) **broccolini**, cut into 2" pieces
2 tablespoons **extra-virgin olive oil**
1 teaspoon **kosher salt**
1/4 teaspoon **garlic powder** (I like Trader Joe's)
Freshly ground **black pepper**
8 ounces small **brown mushrooms**, trimmed, cut in half

Creamy Tahini Sauce

1 clove **garlic**, minced
1/4 cup **extra-virgin olive oil**
1/4 cup **tahini**, stirred well
2 to 3 tablespoons fresh **lemon juice**
2 teaspoons **Dijon mustard**
2 teaspoons **maple syrup or honey**
1 teaspoon **kosher salt**
2 to 3 tablespoons **ice water**

Glazed Tofu

14-oz carton **firm tofu** packed in water, drained
2 tablespoons **tamari or soy sauce**
2 teaspoons **toasted sesame oil**
2 teaspoons **light sesame oil or flavorless vegetable oil**
Kosher salt

Assembly

2 medium **ripe avocados**, cut in half and pitted just before serving

Goodness Bowls

Make the rice: In a rice cooker, combine the soaked and drained rice, water, and salt and follow the manufacturer's instructions for cooking **brown** rice. When done, let stand for 5 minutes for rice to steam, then press the “keep warm” button. *Alternatively, place the ingredients in a heavy saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to the lowest setting, cover, and simmer gently until the water is absorbed and the rice is tender, about 45 minutes.*

Fluff the rice with a fork, place a kitchen towel between the pot and the lid, cover, and set aside until ready to serve.

2. In the meantime, make the Tamari Pumpkin Seeds: Heat the oven to 350° with a rack in the middle. Lightly oil a small rimmed baking sheet with olive oil. In a small bowl, whisk the tamari and sugar until the sugar is dissolved. Add the seeds and toss. Transfer to the prepared pan and spread in an even layer. Bake for 5 minutes. Stir the seeds and return to the oven until well browned, about 3 more minutes. Place the pan on a wire rack and cool, stirring occasionally. The seeds will become crunchy as they cool. *These may be made up to 2 weeks ahead, transferred (when completely cool) to a tightly covered jar, and stored in a cool, dry place.*

3. Make the Roasted Veggies: Increase the oven temperature to 425°. In a large bowl, toss together the bell pepper, onion, and broccolini. Drizzle with the olive oil and toss to coat evenly. Sprinkle with the salt, garlic powder, and a few twists of the pepper mill; toss well. Transfer to a large parchment-lined rimmed baking sheet and spread in an even layer. Roast for 20 minutes. Add the mushrooms, stir to combine, and continue roasting until the vegetables are tender and browned in spots, about 10 more minutes; set aside.

4. In the meantime, make the Creamy Tahini Sauce: Add the garlic to a 1-cup liquid measure and whisk in the olive oil and tahini. Add the lemon juice, mustard, maple syrup, and salt and then whisk to combine. Whisk in the ice water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until the sauce is loose enough to drizzle from a spoon. Taste and add more lemon juice, if desired. Transfer to a serving bowl and refrigerate. *Alternatively, pour into a covered jar and store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.*

5a. Make the Sautéed Tofu: Line a rimmed plate with a double layer of paper towels. Place the drained block of tofu on the towels, cover with another double-thick layer of paper towels, and top with a cutting board. Place a 28-ounce can of tomatoes or other heavy weight on the board. Let stand for 10 minutes.

5b. In the meantime, in a small bowl, combine the tamari and toasted sesame oil; set aside this marinade.

5c. Once the tofu has rested, cut into 3/4” cubes and place in a glass pie plate in a single layer. Drizzle the reserved marinade over the tofu cubes. It’s okay if all sides aren’t coated with marinade.

5d. Place a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the light sesame oil and brush with a silicone brush to distribute—it will puddle. When hot enough to sizzle a piece of tofu, use tongs to transfer the tofu cubes to the pan, one by one, reserving the marinade that remains in the dish. Sauté, without stirring, until beginning to brown on the bottom, 2 to 3 minutes. Continue to cook the tofu, turning to brown on at least 3 sides. Reduce the heat to low and add the reserved marinade, swirling the pan to glaze the tofu. When there’s no marinade remaining in the pan, turn off the heat, season lightly with salt, and transfer to a plate if not serving right away.

6. Assemble the bowls: At serving time, assemble in 4 pasta bowls, accordingly:

- a. Spread 1/2 to 3/4 cup warm rice in the bottom of each bowl,
- b. Top each with 1/4 of the roasted veggies,

Goodness Bowls

- c. Top each with 1/4 of the glazed tofu,
- d. Top each with an avocado half scooped from its shell (a wooden spoon helps here),
 - e. Drizzle about 2 tablespoons tahini sauce in a random pattern over each,
- f. Sprinkle each with about 2 tablespoons tamari pumpkin seeds, and
- g. Serve, passing extra sauce and pumpkin seeds at the table.

—Linda Carucci; 2024

—Adapted from “Vegetarian Suppers” by Deborah Madison; cookieandkate.com;
and “Cooking School Secrets for Real World Cooks” by Linda Carucci.

—This recipe may not be posted or shared electronically for public consumption,
but with the appropriate attribution, it may be shared individually with a friend or family member.