

EATING & DRINKING

TASTE DRIVE

Got Oat?

These plant-based stand-ins for cow's milk satisfy udderly

By GABRIELLA GERSHENSON

ONCE UPON A TIME, in the plant-based milk section of your local grocery store, soy reigned supreme. Then, just like that, it fell out of favor, and almond milk became all the rage. Now, with Oatly's recent IPO and nationwide presence at Starbucks across the land, the faux milk of the moment is undoubtedly oat.

According to data commissioned by the Good Food Institute and the Plant-Based Foods Association from data-technology company SPINS, in the last year alone, sales of plant-based foods that replace animal products have grown 27% to \$7 billion, a rate twice as fast as that of overall food sales. Milk alternatives represent the lion's share of this swiftly expanding category at 35%.

Along with the aforementioned usual suspects, options include milks made from rice, coconut, hemp, flax seeds, sesame

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seeds, peas and all manner of nuts. Still, whether you're an omnivore or a vegan, lactose intolerant or quitting dairy for environmental reasons, you want an alternative that performs on par with good old cow's milk in a variety of scenarios. We sampled a slew of options, evaluating how they fare when standing in for dairy in hot beverages, smoothies and cereal, as well as how they hold up on their own, with nothing to mask off flavors. The following were the most versatile and delicious.



The Best-Tasting and Most User-Friendly Plant-Based Milks

For the Gourmand

The non-dairy milks from Dubai-based Koita, which debuted in the U.S. in 2020, stand out for tasting really good. Produced in Italy from grains, nuts and legumes—most of them Italian-grown—the milks have an agreeably silky texture and distinct flavors true to the label on the carton. The best of them are made from just a few ingredients, contain no added sugar and have a natural sweetness.

The organic almond milk tastes uncannily like marzipan, while the rice milk—a favorite at bubble tea cafés, according to founder Mustafa Koita—is like liquid rice pudding. *\$.34 for a 6-pack, koita.com.*

For the Purist

For most of its existence, the New York-based Elmhurst 1925 was known as Elmhurst Dairy. It was the largest dairy plant in New York City until 2016, when an environmentally motivated interest in milk alternatives led owner Harry Schwartz to switch to “milking” grains, seeds and nuts instead of cattle. Elmhurst 1925's plant milks are the best choice for people seeking straightforward ingredients without sacrificing taste. The unsweetened cashew milk contains only water and nuts, and has a subtle sweetness. For a milk with more character, the walnut variety, made from just water and walnuts, tastes like the nut itself. *\$.14 for a 2-pack, elmhurst1925.com*

For the Coffee Lover

Oatly, the Swedish oat-based “dairy” company, conquered the U.S. market by selling its first cartons of oat milk to select third-wave coffee shops, winning over baristas and patrons with the creamy yet neutral Barista Edition. The product lightens an espresso without masking the flavor of the beans and holds nice, soft microbubbles when steamed into a foam. At 3% fat, it's pretty luscious. If you like something less rich, try Oatly Original, the oat equivalent of 2% milk. Due to the well-documented Oatly shortage, your best bet is to seek it out at Amazon's Oatly store, where it's periodically in stock, or at your local supermarket. *\$.13 for a single-serve 4-pack, amazon.com.*

For the Mission-Driven

In a nutshell, Milkadamia, maker of macadamia-nut products including milk, aims to restore health to the planet. CEO Jim Richards, who sources macadamia nuts from farms in Australia and South Africa, has made a commitment to regenerative agriculture, a practice that enriches depleted soil and draws carbon from the atmosphere back into the earth. These milks have a pleasant flavor that borders on tropical but goes with the flow in coffee or tea. The Latte da Barista has a velvety texture and foams well, while the Unsweetened Milkadamia is a solid sugar-free option. *\$.27 for a 6-pack, shopmilkadamia.com.*

BITE-SIZED DIATRIBE

Sweet Nostalgia

Marshmallow Fluff deserves another look. Exhibit A: this splendid sundae

JUST WHAT IS the problem with Marshmallow Fluff? It gets zero respect these days. I suppose that brand name doesn't help. “Fluff” is, after all, the word we use for anything not to be taken seriously. So I'll begin here by shifting to the generic term for this foodstuff that food snobs scorn: marshmallow creme. There. Does that sound French enough?

People seem to be OK with the marshmallow in its solid form. Maybe it's the symbiotic relationship it has with the chocolate bar and the Graham cracker, transformed via campfire into the ever-popular s'more.

But I am here to praise the marshmallow in its primordial, formless form. Marshmallow creme has a marvelous capacity to adapt to the shape of our shifting desires. Swirl it into a milkshake for a lush consistency and intense vanilla flavor. Short on time to produce a show-stopper dinner-party des-



The Jersey Mud, a worthy vehicle for Marshmallow Fluff.

sert? Artfully dollop some marshmallow creme atop a scoop of ice cream, blast it with a kitchen torch and call it baked Alaska.

This ingredient is as classic as Ivory soap—and, like that product, possessed of a pristine snowy-white visual appeal and a buoyancy both literal and poetical. Returning for a moment to my brand of

choice, Marshmallow Fluff, the retro label is pretty great, too.

Marshmallow creme does have its die-hard devotees. One can attend the What the Fluff? festival each September in Somerville, Mass., and Oct. 8 has been designated National Fluffernutter Day in honor of the sandwich that pairs the sumptuous stuff with peanut butter.

My own passion for marshmallow creme dates from—where else?—childhood. I first encountered the Jersey Mud, a sundae endowed with a billowy marshmallow layer, at the late, great Bon-Air soda fountain in Cedarville, Mich., and you can still order one at the Ice Cream Shoppe on the town's waterfront. If you can't get there, the recipe here produces a pretty faithful rendition. Go ahead. Enjoy it.

—Forest Evashevski

The Jersey Mud
Total Time 5 minutes
Serves 1
Vanilla ice cream
Chocolate sauce
Chocolate ice cream
Marshmallow creme
Malt powder
Maraschino cherry

1. Fill a sundae glass half-way with vanilla ice cream, lightly packed so the chocolate sauce can snake its way through. Add choco-

late sauce. Add chocolate ice cream, lightly packed. 2. Add marshmallow creme surrounding chocolate ice cream, leaving just the rounded top of the scoop visible above. 3. Sprinkle on malt powder. Place a cherry on top. If you want to be strictly classical, stir the layers into a delicious mud.

—Adapted from the Ice Cream Shoppe, Cedarville, Mich.



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