

# Condiment Alternatives

With Hannah Nicholls, wholefoods Chef

Store bought condiments can add not only poor-quality fats, but sugar, too much salt and all kinds of nasty chemical preservatives.

*Why?* It's all about the bottom line. Blended genetically-modified vegetable oils are cheap. Sugar is cheap, and addictive, and it preserves sauce so they can last months (years?) on the shelf. Salt is tasty, and they have to balance out all the sweetness from the sugar... Learn what to look for, and even how to whip up a few yourself.

## VINEGAR

We're huge fans of all things fermented, and vinegar is no exception. Just make sure you check that vinegar is the only thing in the bottle- and avoid malt vinegar which can contain traces of gluten from the barley. The other one that's not so good is distilled vinegar, which is fermented from alcohol: they legally don't have to state the source of the alcohol, and given the cheapness of this product... it's likely to be something cheap and nasty like GM corn.

The best option has to be organic apple cider vinegar (ACV), which is easy to make yourself, and has a range of uses and benefits, like helping your body alkalise in the morning. As part of balancing the body's pH, ACV creates an overall detoxification of the body. Research shows that it can help stimulate cardiovascular circulation and help detoxify the liver. It also helps to break up mucus throughout the body and cleanse the lymph nodes. Believe it or not, research suggests that ACV can help with allergies because of its ability to reduce mucus and sinus congestion. Equal parts acv and water has many uses, from chemical free-cleaning in your home to flea-control on your pets.



## How to make:

### Apple Cider Vinegar From Scraps

This method uses scraps, like the peels and cores. I like this method because I get to eat my apples and make vinegar too. It's also faster, taking around two months to complete the process.

**You'll need:**

- a large bowl or wide-mouth jar
- apple scraps, the cores and peels from organic apples
- a piece of cheesecloth (or a clean cotton tea towel) for covering the jar to keep out flies and dust.

Leave the scraps to air. They'll turn brown, which is exactly what you want. Add the apple scraps to the jar and top it up with water. You can continue to add scraps for a few more days if you want. If you're going to do this though, be sure don't top the jar right up, leave some room for the new scraps.

Cover with the cheesecloth and put it in a warm, dark place. I put mine in a box on top of the fridge.

You'll notice the contents of the jar starts to thicken after a few days and a grayish scum forms on top. When this happens, stop adding scraps and leave the jar for a month or so to ferment.

After about a month you can start taste-testing it. When it's just strong enough for you, strain out the apple scraps and bottle the vinegar.

It's ok if your vinegar is cloudy, there will be some sediment from the apples and what's known as "the mother". It's all good. If you don't like the cloudiness though, straining it through a paper coffee filter will remove most of the sediment.

Boom! Your own homemade apple cider vinegar.

### Tomato sauce (Ketchup)

It seems like all kids go through an awkward eating phase of only consuming items drenched in tomato sauce (this can last decades for some men). The problem with this is it's usually a quarter to one-third sugar, with a boat-load on salt on top. No worries, whip up your own in 5 minutes:

- 1 cup passata (tomato puree with nothing else added, near the pasta sauce in the supermarket)
- ¼ cup vinegar (any kind except malt, as long as there's no sugar)
- ¼ tsp cloves
- ¼ tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp black pepper
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- 1 bay leaf

Heat a medium sauce pan and add the vinegar so it reduces quickly by half. Tip in the rest of the ingredients, stir and boil for a minute or two until thick, add salt to taste, cool and enjoy! It won't last as long as the bottled stuff, but a week in the fridge is fine.

Have fun with it! At my house we often add a pinch of chilli flakes, or half a teaspoon of smoked paprika for a subtle smokiness.

## How to make:

### Mayonnaise

If you can make mayonnaise you can make any of condiments you desire. The easiest way is with a hand-held stick blender, but any food processor will do it, and you can do it the hard way with a whisk if you're keen. Just start off slow! Room temperature eggs are a lot easier to work with.

- 3 fresh organic egg yolks (or even whole eggs, if you can't be bothered separating them)**
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar**
- Juice of ½ a lemon**
- 2 cups olive oil (not extra-virgin! It will taste bitter) or any other neutral-flavoured oil**

Put everything except the oil into a jug, if using a stick blender, or into the bowl of your blender. Start blending and drizzle in the oil, at first a teaspoon at a time, then in a thin, steady stream with the motor going. If you can see oil collecting in a pool on the mix, you're going to fast, stop drizzling and blend until the mix looks homogenous again. As you add oil the mix will get thicker and thicker, if it's too thick for your taste, blend in a tablespoon or two of hot water. This will also make the mixture paler.

When it's the right consistency, taste and adjust the seasoning, and flavouring away to your heart's content. I usually add garlic to make aioli, and also cracked black pepper and often fresh herbs. Add chilli, tomato paste and a whiff of Worcestershire and you've got cocktail sauce. Add ginger or wasabi and a hint of tamari for an Asian style sauce. Experiment with different vinegars and oils, and have fun!

### Soy sauce

Soy sauce can be made from genetically-modified soy, so choose organic, or non-GMO labelled products. Most soy sauce is fermented with wheat, which contains gluten, so you can go for gluten-free soy, but check they haven't snuck in sugar to replace the wheat! A great alternative is tamari, which is a Japanese fermented soy sauce, or you can try coconut amino sauce for an even healthier option.

### Yogurt

Fermented dairy products are much better for you than their fresh counterparts as the lactose in them is pre-digested by the fermentation process, plus they're repopulating your gut with healthy bacteria. Commercial yoghurt can be laden with sugar however, especially the flavoured and "low-fat" kinds. Choose plain and pot-set yoghurts or kefir, preferably from hormone-free or organic milk. Goat's and sheep's milk are even easier to digest.

Don't enjoy it plain? Add your own fresh dried or sugarless stewed or roasted fruit, or a little raw honey.

If you're ready to dispense with the dairy altogether, go for coconut-milk yogurt, its allergen free and full of probiotics. Next level? Make your own! It's so much easier than you think... go you good thing!

