

Hemp Bliss (Vegan, Gluten-Free, Nut-Free, Soy-Free)

Hemp "milk" is the latest to hit the dairy-free alternative market, and needless to say, it has been met with great enthusiasm. This new beverage invention jumps ahead of the competition with a host of health benefits and is well suited for just about any special diet imaginable. By mere weeks, Hemp Bliss has emerged as the second brand of its kind to hit mainstream, but it most certainly isn't second in quality.

What seems to already be "standard" with hemp milk is its suitability for vegans, food allergies, and lactose intolerance. Produced with special dedication, the hemp milk manufacturers are able to make the claim of dairy-free, gluten-free, soy-free, nut-free, peanut-free, and vegan. The only other dairy alternative that attempts to compete with these standards is rice milk. Yet rice milk can't hold a candle to the nutritional profile of hemp milk. It boasts those wonderful EFAs (Omega 3's and Omega 6's) in top proportion, and a good dose of protein.

Nonetheless, Manitoba Harvest, the makers of Hemp Bliss, couldn't settle for these already impressive features alone. They wanted their product to be the purest, most natural and beneficial hemp milk on the market. With this, I think they have succeeded. Hemp Bliss features the highest level of Omega 3's and GLA's (sounds impressive doesn't it?), is certified 100% organic, and has a lower sugar profile. Some may be deterred by the lack of vitamin/mineral fortification. However, synthetic vitamins have no place in 100% organic "milk";

Of all of these wonderful properties, there was one that really stood out to me as the best. The fat. Something we as a society had learned to avoid like the plague is now enjoying resurgence. Though beyond the "good" fats it possesses, I was most pleased with the amount of fat—seven grams per serving to be precise. As anyone who shuns dairy knows, at times milk alternatives can be too low in fat. They lack that rich creamy texture, they offer no thickening power, and for those who need the fat (such as little ones in their growth spurts) they just don't foot the bill.

Of course, nutrition seems to always fall secondary to taste. So it was time to crack these packages open and get pouring. To establish a base, I went for the Original Hemp Bliss first—Original

Now, when we are speaking of a seed, completely all natural may not meet with all Americanized expectations of image. Hemp Bliss is pure in every way, color, scent, texture, and flavor. Hemp Bliss does not claim a whitened image, but rather it has a deep oat color. On first pour, I was a bit startled, but then relieved to realize there had been no chemical intervention. The scent was my only complaint with Hemp Bliss. The smell was a bit off-putting and strong. Luckily, as I took my first sip, the unpleasant odor was cast aside by its incredibly rich and creamy texture—truly a thick, milky experience. As for the taste, I may venture the "nutty" description that Manitoba Harvest uses. Yet somehow, it is a bit different, likely the true essence of the hemp seeds, something my taste buds were still unfamiliar with.

Overall, I found the flavor quite mellow, with just a hint of sweetness. Yet, when combined with the scent, some may find this unique blend a touch overpowering. For myself, sipping it plain wasn't bad, but the smell was distracting. Yet, in smoothies, I found sheer perfection. The thick and creamy nature lent itself beautifully to my morning concoctions of blender fruit. My husband also adored the Hemp Bliss smoothies, and made no note of anything offbeat.

As a side note, I also felt the Hemp Bliss flavors melded well with my hearty bowl of oatmeal. If I hadn't run out so quickly, I would have been pleased to trial this variety in savory applications. Though it has a touch of sugar, it is only faintly sweet. I think it would perform well. Also, with its higher fat per serving, this may be that soy-free, dairy-free coffee creamer so many people have been seeking. Vanilla

Wow! This Hemp Bliss bursts with vanilla scent and flavor. The additional sugar and extract do in fact mask the not-so-pleasant odor of the original, however, the vanilla was far too overpowering for my liking.

When sipped from the glass, I did enjoy the flavor of this notably sweeter selection. It still exuded the rich creamy indulgence of the original, with just a faint chalky aftertaste. I had no problem in drinking this one plain, however, I actually wasn't partial to it when paired with other foods. When blended into my morning smoothie without the strength of a banana, both the hemp and vanilla scents seemed to emerge in full force. Likewise, it was a bit too potent for my morning oatmeal.

Since it is intended as a sweeter selection, and the sugars are not over the top on this one (13g per serving, respectable for a vanilla version), I am content with the overall sweetness. However, I will be sticking with the original until they tone down the vanilla. Perhaps in low heat baking applications the Vanilla Hemp Bliss may be well suited … no added vanilla extract required!

Chocolate

We have a winner! With the added goodness of organic fair trade cocoa (I told you they thought of everything) this one is delicious. As my nose hovered above the glass, I detected the familiar scent of cool chocolate milk. There was a single note that was a tad off, but ever so slightly that I couldn't identify it, nor did I find it unpleasant.

Without hesitation I took my first sip. It was richer than the chocolate milk I remembered. Though very similar in flavor, it had the essence of “heartiness.” Yet, the entire experience was so familiar, so comforting, but I couldn't quite put my finger on it. Ah yes! My memory took a stroll back to the chocolate instant breakfast I enjoyed in my so-called “dairy days.” It had that same substantial feel and sweet chocolate flavor that just crosses over the chocolate milk line towards nutritional shake. My husband (the former chocolate milk fanatic) conceded that it was a bit different from true chocolate milk, but he liked it. We both had no problem in polishing off a glass.

In line with the other Hemp Bliss flavors, the chocolate variety is rich and creamy. It possesses a slight chalkiness, I am guessing from the cocoa, as it seemed all too familiar, and not really distracting. The flavor is delightfully sweet though not sugary. I was pleasantly surprised by the relatively low sugar content, just 16g per serving. This may seem high, but when compared to other sweetened chocolate “milks,” this is a big savings.

Like my former Instant Breakfast, Chocolate Hemp Bliss is ideally suited to my post-workout cravings. The cool chocolate taste is incredibly refreshing. Also, it possesses a great protein, fat, and sugar profile for recovery. I wouldn't hesitate to serve this to my active little nieces either. As soon as it reaches my local grocer, I anticipate a few packages of Chocolate Hemp Bliss will be stocked in our fridge with regularity.

My Extra Notes & Tips:

- Unfortunately, I ran out of Bliss before I could venture any recipe trials beyond my beloved smoothies, and my local store does not yet carry this brand new product. The manufacturers recommend not heating Hemp Bliss above 350° in order to ensure the integrity of the oils. This does limit some of the options. Though with its higher fat content, I am curious to trial it in a “cream” sauce (over low heat of course!), ice cream, and homemade yogurt.
 - My next planned smoothie concoction: chocolate hemp bliss with almond (or peanut) butter and banana.
 - Ingredients: Filtered Water, Organic Hemp Seeds, Organic Evaporated Cane Juice, Sea Salt, Xanthan Gum.
- That's it! Well, the vanilla flavor contains none other than organic vanilla flavor, and the chocolate contains the above mentioned organic fair trade cocoa.

Where to Purchase: Distribution of Hemp Bliss is taking off throughout the U.S. and Canada. Go direct to the Manitoba Harvest website for a store locator or to order some Hemp Bliss direct!