

Raw Maple Pecan Ice Cream

Jessica Su, Su Good Eats - Chocolate is my undoing year round, but ice cream is my undoing during the summer. I love nudging it with my tongue and letting it gracefully melt away. But every so often, a little voice nags me: "You shouldn't eat so much ice cream because it's bad";

for the environment. I bet you thought I was going to say it was bad for you. True, but did you know that one cup of milk yields 116 pounds of cow manure? Not only is manure trash, but its stinky gases contribute to global warming. It also takes 14 trillion gallons of irrigation water and 22 billion pounds of fertilizer to produce feed for U.S. livestock each year. The amount of energy it takes to produce that fertilizer could provide power to 1 million Americans a year.

Most people realize the tenets of eating humanely raised animals or cutting back on meat. However, the amount of food and water it takes to keep those animals alive could feed thousands, if not millions, of starving people. That's why I limit dairy and eggs in my diet too.

I like the idea of dairy-free ice cream, but brands like So Delicious, Double Rainbow and Temptation are chalky and hard. You have to eat a lot to feel satisfied, giving you the Snackwell's effect (remember when people thought it was okay to eat 10 cookies at a time because they were low-fat?). Homemade soy ice cream doesn't fare much better.

I just about gave up on vegan ice cream, until I picked up Raw, by acclaimed chefs Charlie Trotter and Roxanne Klein. Raw foodists believe that heating anything above 118 degrees destroys its natural enzymes. The cuisine is full of fresh produce, nuts and sprouts.

It sounds great in theory, but evidently they never heard of lycopene, an antioxidant that tomatoes release only when cooked. Also, shipping coconuts from Thailand year round negates eating locally and in season. Hmm, what polutes the air more: jet fuel for coconuts or fertilizer for cows?

Raw "cooking" is also labor intensive. Sure, you could spend several days sprouting grains and dehydrating "bread," if that was your only job. Before Roxanne's restaurant closed in 2004 (they couldn't keep up with the \$10 million in costs), they had one guy devoted to cracking coconuts for the pad thai noodles and ice cream.

Luckily, Raw's recipe for maple-pecan ice cream is doable. There's only two ingredients. Hint: I just told you what they were. In typical raw fashion, you soak nuts overnight and combine them with maple syrup. Nuts normally have 75% fat and 25% protein, but once they're soaked and sprouted, the ratio reverses, according to Klein. In raw food theory, nuts and seeds don't grow into trees because the enzymes are dormant. You have to soak them for optimal nutrition. That sounds nice, but with that analogy, soaked nuts and seeds should grow into trees inside you.

I have a habit of toasting nuts to bring out their flavors, so I couldn't resist here. The roasted pecan ice cream had a slightly richer flavor, but it was also a little greasier. Raw nuts work fine here, because the soaking enhances their flavor.

It's creamy, relatively good for you (with minerals and heart-healthy fats), and you won't care that it's vegan! Like the plain frozen yogurt, this ice cream is best eaten the same day it's made. Even with the addition of vodka (to lower the freezing point), it gets hard the next day, and the nutty bits become more pronounced.

Maple-Pecan Ice Cream
from Raw, by Charlie Trotter and Roxanne Klein

2 cups raw or toasted pecans, soaked for eight to 10 hours in filtered water
1/2 cup maple syrup
1 1/2 tablespoons vodka (optional)

Drain the pecans, reserving 1 cup of the water. In a high-speed blender, combine the pecans, the 1 cup of water, maple syrup and vodka (if using), and process until smooth. Pass the purée through a fine-mesh sieve, and freeze in an ice cream maker according to the manufacturer's directions.