

Juicers, Blenders and Dehydrators

A local vegetarian food connoisseur offers some tasty tips.

What kind of machinery do you want to make it easier to eat healthy veg food? We review three machines that you might want to consider: juicers, blenders and dehydrators.

Let's get down to basics and start with juicers and blenders. What is the difference between a juicer and a blender, and what is best for you? Juicers produce juice, as their name suggests (no prizes for that). Blenders produce juice and flesh (and ice if you like) all mixed up together.

Oh dear, now you've also got to know this – there are two types of juicers, both quite different.

Juicers



Slow speed juicers are heavy, expensive, and versatile. They squeeze every single bit of juice out of vegetables, fruit and hard-to-juice wheatgrass. They are recommended by many health authorities, cancer patients and those who understand and enjoy the true value of pure juice. They can even make pasta, noodles and nut butter. Put a frozen banana in one and you get heavenly-tasting 'ice cream'.

Their slow speed (80-100 revolutions per minute) promotes high nutrient retention, as the food is squeezed under pressure by an auger, something that looks like a big screw. Out of one outlet comes pure juice, out of the other come absolutely dry, tasteless pulp, like toothpaste. Are they easy to clean? It takes about 15 seconds to disassemble a slow speed juicer and less than 2 minutes to thoroughly clean one.

Slow speed juicers are normally not available in the big stores (in Jan07); you will need to go to a shop selling health food or to a direct importer. Top of the range juicers like Green Star cost up to \$1,000, in the middle range; Champion at about \$680 is popular. If you are budget conscious, you can go for the Samson at \$480. For a lifetime of good health, slow speed juicers are a good way to go.

If you want to pay less than this, you may consider a new one called the Compact Juicer I saw advertised at A\$264 in the recent (Summer 2006/2007) issue of the Australian journal, *Natural Health and Vegetarian Life*. I don't suppose it is likely to be imported here. Personally, I would hesitate to buy a new brand.

You may have seen **high speed juicers** promoted on TV. Their beauty lies in the high speed at which they work; that's why they are popular in cut-fruit stalls. The downside is that some of the nutrients are destroyed by high speed processing and the big funnel-shaped micro-mesh filters can be a nightmare to clean.

Most juicers in this category are light and fairly easy to move around, and they produce their output very quickly. Jack LaLanne's power juicers are good at less than \$300. At \$228, Philips' new aluminium juicer with a 1.5 litre jug looks good. Philips admit: "Cleaning a juicer is usually the part that puts you off juicing. The good news is that all parts here are dishwasher safe, so throw them in there for a quick and easy clean." For high speed juicers in the budget range, look at the shelves in the domestic appliance stores.

In my experience a lot of people buy juicers on impulse to feel good, they go crazy juicing, then the cleaning gets them down and they give up. Think carefully before you make your investment; then be sure to use it and make it part of your life.

Blenders



Blenders work by slicing fruit and vegetables at very high speed. They don't make juice. What you are left with is a mush consisting of pulp and juice, nothing is wasted.

Blenders are versatile – you can make those enticingly good, nutrient-rich smoothies with them, you can make thick refreshing fruit drinks with crushed ice, hot soups (but blend the ingredients before you heat them in a saucepan, otherwise there will be an explosion), and you can grind chillies and whatever else. Often you need water to start the process going.

Choose a blender with a glass container, as plastic containers get scratched over time, and expect to pay about \$120. I bought a German brand on the basis of what I saw fruit and smoothie bars using – learn from the professionals.

If your budget is limited and you cannot afford to own both a juicer and a blender, I would start with a blender and make up those meal-in-a-glass smoothies, such as the one on p. 88 of the VSS Cookbook: *New Asian Traditions Vegetarian Cookbook*.

Dehydrators



Dehydrators, often called Home Food Dryers, simply extract the moisture from fruits and vegetables, leaving you with slightly leathery, dried and shrunken form of the original. Remember those packets of rather expensive dried apple slices you've seen in the shops? That's dehydration, often with chemical preservatives.

The advantage of dehydrated fruit and vegetables is their longer shelf life compared to the fresh stuff, and their lighter weight, up to eighty percent lighter. This makes them ideal for picnickers and campers.

Pop a piece of dehydrated pineapple, apple or orange into your mouth and there is no immediate taste sensation. Then it hits you between the eyes: the concentrated essence of the fruit mixes with the saliva in your mouth and you know it's the real thing. But be careful, it is easy to over-eat dried fruit; remember there is lots of sugar and calories there, for it is only the water that is missing.

There is no fruit or vegetable you cannot dry. Some will please you no end; others you may find not to your personal taste. Experiment and enjoy. The best thing you can do is to go down to Tang's kitchen basement and have a taste of dehydrated fruit and vegetables processed on the Ezidri snackmaker. I have told you where to go; the rest is up to you.

Blenders

We now in smoothie, and crushed ice and fruit juice land.