



## *Wildwood Institute and Herbs*

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### Why Make Your Own Granola?

*by Michael McClennen*

Let's face it: commercial granola really stinks. Literally. Its biggest defect is that it is almost always stale before it even reaches the grocery store shelf. Stale food of any kind not only smells and tastes bad, but has lost much of its nutritional content. On top of that, the flavoring is monotonous, it is ridiculously over-sweetened, and it isn't made in a way that allows it to be easily digestible.

The original idea behind granola is to turn raw nuts and grains into a cooked product that stays fresh for a month or more without needing refrigeration, retains its nutrition during that time, tastes great, and is readily digestible. Industrial food processing is a very bad fit for this. A typical product that has been made with semi-rancid vegetable oil and then allowed to sit for months in a box on a shelf is never going to be healthy.

In order to get the full potential of granola, it needs to be made from fresh and healthy ingredients, and used within a month or two. The best way to unlock its complete range of nutrition is to let it ferment for 2-3 days, allowing naturally occurring yeast to break down the phytic acid, lectins, and other anti-nutrients in the raw grains and seeds. The ingredients are then drained and rinsed, coated with fat and sweetener which both preserves and gives flavor, and then wet cooked to finish unlocking the nutrition. Typical granola recipes direct you to put the raw ingredients directly into the oven and roast them dry, which results in a much less nutritious and much less digestible product. For more information on the benefits of fermented seeds and grains, see: Sally Fallon, *Nourishing Traditions*, revised second edition, p. 25.

The good news is that it is easy to do this at home! The purpose of this recipe is to make granola that satisfies all of the following criteria:

- 1. No rancid fat. Granola needs to be made primarily with saturated fat such as butter or coconut oil, in order to resist going rancid while it is waiting to be eaten. The fat also needs to be reasonably fresh at the time of cooking.*
- 2. Grains and seeds are soaked and allowed to stand and ferment before cooking. This helps to break down the phytic acid and other anti-nutrients contained in raw nuts and seeds, producing a more nourishing product.*
- 3. Cooked using wet heat rather than dry heat. This furthers the process of breaking down the anti-nutrients and releasing the nutrients so they can be easily digested.*
- 4. Interesting flavor. Commercial granola is usually made with either vanilla or cinnamon or both, and those particular spices tend to overpower almost everything else in the recipe. By making your own, you can experiment with the subtle and exuberant flavors of the herbs and spices we love!*

# Nourishing Fermented Granola

*by Michael McClennen*

This granola is quick and easy to make, and will stay fresh and nourishing for at least a month without requiring refrigeration. This recipe makes about 2 quarts of loose granola, or 25-30 granola bars. I have included very detailed instructions, but the recipe is actually less complicated than it looks. Once you get used to it, you can make a batch of granola with very little effort.

1. Measure out the dry ingredients. Pick whatever ingredients excite you, in whatever proportions you like. Here is what I use to make one batch, but there are lots of other options as well:

- 1 quart thick-rolled oats
- 1 pint almonds
- ½ cup raw pumpkin seeds
- add 3 T flax seeds if you want to make granola bars rather than loose granola

Pulverize the nuts and seeds, if you wish. I find whole nutmeats too large for my preference, and raw seeds do not cook well unless their outer husks have been broken. But it is important to buy and store seeds and nutmeats whole so they are less likely to have gone rancid by the time you use them. I put mine on a cutting board, cover them with a clean towel, and pound them until they are pulverized to the desired size.

2. If you are using flax seeds or similar small seeds, grind them fine before adding them in. You can use a coffee grinder, or any similar tool.
3. Put the dry ingredients in a large bowl, and cover with warm water to at least ½". You may need to add more water as the ingredients soak it up and expand. Cover with a clean towel.

**Allow the ingredients to soak for 24-72 hours. They will start to ferment, and should smell slightly yeasty. This is good!**

4. Pour the soaked grains and seeds into a colander, and rinse with cold water until it comes out mostly clear. Then let drain for about 10 minutes.
5. While the grains and seeds are draining, measure out the wet ingredients. You should experiment and adjust both of these amounts to your taste:
- ¾ cup melted butter, or equivalent amount of other fat
  - ⅔ cup maple sugar, or equivalent amount of other sweetener

If you use butter, you may (optionally) want to partially clarify it. This will help the granola to keep longer. Once the butter is melted, keep it on the lowest heat you possibly can while it bubbles for about 5-10 minutes. The bubbles are water boiling out of it. Skim off the foamy stuff on top, and when you pour out the melted butter filter out the chunks at the bottom. Both of these are protein, and we want the fat to be as pure as we can easily get it. If you use other fat such as coconut oil, this step is unnecessary. You could also use vegetable oil if you really want to, but if so then make sure that it very fresh! Most likely, granola made with vegetable oil will not taste as good nor will it keep nearly as well.

6. Preheat oven to 350°

7. Put the drained grains and nuts into a large mixing bowl. This can be the same bowl you soaked it in, if you like. This would be a good time to add raisins, coconut pieces, or other dried fruits, if you like these.
8. Pour the fat and sweetener over the contents of the bowl, and mix thoroughly. This coating is what will keep the granola fresh for many weeks.
9. Spice up the recipe using herbs that you enjoy. Listed below are some of the many herbs you could experiment with. The amount to use will vary according to your taste and which ones you choose, but will generally be in the range of ½ tsp – 1 tsp per batch. This is your chance to leave the monotony of commercial granola behind!
  - nutmeg
  - ginger
  - cardamom
  - cinnamon
  - pepper
  - anise seed
  - fennel seed
  - cocoa powder
  - vanilla
  - lavender
  - sweet basil
  - rosemary
10. If you are making bars, pour the rinsed grains and seeds onto a 11x17 flat baking pan, or two 9x11 pans, and smooth into a uniform layer with a spatula or a spoon. If you are making loose granola, you can use whatever pan you have available. Greasing the pan with butter will make it easier to remove the granola at the end.
11. Bake the granola at 350° for 60 minutes. If you have a convection oven, use the convection bake setting.
12. Remove the granola from the oven. If you are making bars, then cut the flat sheet of granola into whatever sized bars you prefer. I generally use a wooden spatula to do this, so as not to scratch my baking pans. The bottom side will not be cooked enough, so flip each bar over. If you have additional baking pans or cookie sheets, put the flipped-over bars onto a clean pan or sheet to cook on the other side. If you are making loose granola, then turn the layer of granola over with a spatula, and mix it up a bit if it looks like it needs it.
13. Reduce the heat to 300° and bake until golden brown on top. The length of time may vary depending on the ingredients you use. For me, it takes about 45 minutes. The trick is to drive off most of the moisture, but not to scorch the granola. If you smell the butter scorching, turn the oven down further or take the granola out. If part of it is cooking faster than the rest, you may need to remove the cooked part and put the rest back in to finish.
14. Let stand uncovered for several hours or even overnight. This will give it a chance to lose more of its moisture and harden. You are aiming for a product that is hard and crunchy, without any softness or mush.
15. Put the granola into an airtight container. It will keep for at least a month, with or without refrigeration. I have left bars made with this recipe on a plate in the open air, and they have still been edible after 8 weeks

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