

Best Hors D'oeuvre 2023

# Carrot Nigiri





## Concept

The Carrot Nigiri is the perfect example of when culinary inspiration, research and development and educational opportunities come together in harmony. With the continued rise of vegetarian and vegan menu items, our culinary team is always brainstorming innovative and dynamic hors d'oeuvre ideas. After attending a culinary conference, one of our chefs had been developing and trialing a salt roasted carrot wrapped in nori and cured in a brine. At the same time, another chef was experimenting with a pearling technique and flavor profiles after seeing a demonstration at The Art of Catering Food.

Finally, one team member had just returned from Shanghai, and was inspired by a local dish, and had the idea of incorporating a green rice patty as a vegan offering. The three team members connected in the kitchen, and combined their three elements, resulting in the Carrot Nigiri - a crispy rice base paired with umami carrot, topped with wasabi aioli (made with vegannaise), and garnished with cilantro pearls. This vibrant and playful one-bite hors d'oeuvre is also vegan, gluten free, and nut free.

# Originality

The Carrot Nigiri is an hors d'oeuvre that is greater than the sum of its parts – and its parts truly are spectacular! The rice base, salt-roasted carrot, and the cilantro pearls were all adapted specifically to make this recipe an overall success on our menu.

The green rice cake was a brand-new recipe that our culinary team researched and developed in the initial planning stages. It is light, crispy, flavorful, and is a sturdy base for us to build the hors d'oeuvre upon. The cured carrot element was originally designed as a vegan alternative to smoked salmon. However, for this dish we wanted it to resemble sashimi more than a smoked salmon, so instead of smoking the carrot we cured it in a gluten free soya sauce and mirin brine. The resulting carrot is salty, unctuous, and full of umami. Finally, the cilantro pearls went through a multitude of iterations before we found the right solution. The first version of the dish featured wasabi pearls, but as the pearls appeared dull and unexciting, our chefs experimented with various options before settling on cilantro, which gave a vibrant green color to the pearls, and a bright herbaceous flavor to the final product.



# Challenges and Obstacles

Successfully marrying multiple ideas together in this hors d'oeuvre was fraught with a multitude of challenges. Adapting each individual component into a unified concept was an iterative process in and of itself that required a lot of back and forth to develop a harmonious end-product.

As the green rice cake base was developed in-house from the recollection of a team member's culinary experience overseas, without the initial recipe to work from, this took a lot of research, and trial and error to refine the concept into something reminiscent of the original dish.

The cured carrot component proved difficult to scale into larger production batches. We found that in doing large batches increased room for error and had an adverse impact on the final product. We overcame this challenge by keeping batches small and vacuum sealing them to allow more preparation time for larger orders.

Finally, finding the correct gelling agent and balancing the concentration of the cilantro juice and the alginate for the pearls took several iterations to perfect. We tried three different gelling agents to see which one held up the best, then we incorporated mirin in the mix to enhance the flavor of the pearls and tie the whole dish together





## Production at the Event

It is one thing to develop a great recipe in our kitchens, but it is quite another to execute those recipes off-site at every scale. We had initially planned for the Carrot Nigiri hors d'oeuvre to be assembled in our commissary and shipped out in one piece. However, we found that the components lost some of their contrast and crispness when sent in pre-assembled, so we now pack all components separately, and our chefs assemble them on-site. Starting with the green rice cake as a base, placing the cured carrot slices atop the rice cake, followed by a dollop of wasabi aioli, and garnishing with the cilantro mirin pearls.

As the Carrot Nigiri fulfills so many allergy and dietary requirements in such an interesting, vibrant and delicious way, it has quickly become a favorite hors d'oeuvre on our menus, and we know that it will be a top selling item in no time at all.

# Recipe

## Carrot Nigiri

### Ingredients

Chlorophyll, nori sheet, water, rice wine vinegar, salt, pepper, sushi rice, carrots, veganaise, wasabi, soy sauce, olive oil, smoked paprika, garlic powder, maple syrup, lemon juice, garlic

## Crispy Rice Cake (Nigiri)

Total Yield: 4 cups

### Components

0.5 tsp Chlorophyll  
1 tbsp Nori sheet ground; powdered  
2.5 cups Water  
0.25 cup Rice wine vinegar  
Salt to taste  
Pepper to taste  
2 cups Sushi rice

### Instructions

1. Add rice, chlorophyll, nori powder and water to a hotel pan. Cook in steamer for 25-30 min.
2. Add sushi vinegar, salt, and pepper to warm cooked rice.
3. Pack rice into half insert about 1.5 inch thick. Place in fridge to set for a few hours or overnight.
4. Cut into 1.5 inch wide strips. Remove from pan - wrap and freeze for future use.
5. Cut into 1/4 inch pieces to be pan seared.

## Vegan Smoked Salmon (Carrot Lox)

Total Yield: 100 g

Shelf Life: 10 Days

### Components

110 g Carrots, orange washed; peeled  
1.5 g Nori sheet  
1 cup Salt to top

### Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350F and line a baking sheet with parchment.
2. Roll carrots in nori sheets and place them in lots of salt. Place them on the baking sheet and bake for 30 min (turning occasionally - until soft). Allow to cool.
3. Rub the salt off and use a vegetable peeler to cut carrots into ribbons.
4. Rip carrot ribbons into bite size pieces and place into smoked salmon marinade (marinade at most 8 hrs and not longer).

## Vegan Wasabi Aioli

Total Yield: 50 g

### Components

44.5 g Veganaise  
4.8 g Wasabi, freshly ground  
0.3 g Salt to taste

### Instructions

1. Mix everything together

# Recipe (continued)

## Coriander Caviar

Total Yield: 50 g

### Components

40 g Cilantro, blanched  
250 g Water  
2 tbsp Mirin  
2.6 g Alginate  
5 g Clorur - calcium chloride  
500 g Water

### Instructions

1. Blanch cilantro for 3 seconds in salted water. Immediately place into a bowl of cold water and ice.
2. Blend water, blanched cilantro and mirin to a homogeneous mixture and strain it. Weigh it, making sure it's the same weight.
3. After letting the mixture rest for at least 30 minutes, add alginate and blend.
4. Separately blend (vita) 500g water with calcium chloride.
5. Place cilantro mixture into syringe (without needle) or spherificator device. Let it drop directly into the chloride bath. Collect them with a slotted spoon or strainer and rinse it in a bowl with cold water before placing in a new container filled with fresh water.

## Carrot Lox Marinade

Total Yield: Approximately 4 7/8 tbsp

### Components

1.5 tbsp Soy sauce/Tamari  
1 tbsp Olive oil  
2 tsp Smoked paprika  
1 tsp Garlic powder  
1 tsp Maple syrup  
0.15 tsp Pepper  
1 tbsp Lemon juice

### Instructions

1. Whisk ingredients together.