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Vegan XO Sauce

MAKES 2 CUPS

Dried shiitake mushrooms, caramelized shallots, and a bit of cumin are the keys to getting the meaty taste of the seafood and bacon XO sauce. The yield for this recipe is less than in the recipe for traditional XO sauce because it keeps for only 1 week in the fridge, but you can always double the portions for a bigger batch. Like with the regular XO sauce, the texture will be more of a coarse paste.

- 3 ounces dried shiitake mushrooms (about 2 cups)**
- 2 large shallots, chopped**
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed**
- 40 dried red cayenne, Japonese, or Tien Tsin chilies, coarsely chopped**
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- 1 tablespoon brown sugar**
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin**
- 1 tablespoon sea salt**

- 1.** Soak the shiitake mushrooms in warm water until softened, 10 to 15 minutes. Reserving 1/4 cup of the mushroom soaking liquid, drain the mushrooms. Squeeze out the excess water, discard the stems, and thinly slice the caps (this will make it easier to chop in the food processor).
- 2.** In a food processor, pulse the shallots and garlic until minced. Scrape out and transfer to a bowl. Pulse the shiitake mushrooms until minced and transfer to another bowl. Pulse the dried chilies until they resemble coarse flakes, then transfer to a third bowl.
- 3.** In a large wok or skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the shallot/garlic mixture and stir-fry until both are just golden and crispy, 3 to 4 minutes. Increase the heat to medium-high and stir-fry the mushrooms for 2 minutes. Add the chilies and stir-fry for another 2 minutes. Add the reserved mushroom soaking liquid and cook until the liquid is almost gone, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the brown sugar, cumin, and sea salt. Stir well for another 1 minute, then remove from the heat. Allow to cool before transferring to glass containers for storage. The vegan XO sauce will keep in a fridge for up to 1 week.