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## To dip or not to dip: Hummus brands compared

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Hummus seems to have universal appeal: vegetarians and omnivores alike flock to it, and both kids and adults love to gobble it up. In case you've never tried this superfood, hummus is a blend of chickpeas (garbanzo beans), garlic, tahini (sesame paste), and various other flavorings depending on the variety. Companies such as Athenos and Wild Garden produce flavors ranging from traditional to sun-dried tomato to cucumber dill. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of hummus in the supermarket; it seems like everyone is dying to get us to try their "special blend." Hummus is no longer a restaurant-only item — there are several brands that produce tasty hummus dips these days.

But how is one to choose amidst this vast sea of chickpea goodness? There are several factors to consider. Taste is tops on my list of aspects to take into account, and nutrition is a close second. Price and shelf life impact the decision as well.

With these things in mind, I have sampled several brands. Below are the good and the bad, the garlicky and the goopy. Choose wisely and dip away.

### Athenos

You're probably familiar with this brand, because it is widely available in supermarkets today. [Athenos](#) produces a whopping eleven varieties of hummus. If you're not into the traditional garlicky flavor, opt for a mellow flavor like Roasted Eggplant. Perhaps, you're looking for something with a little kick. No problem — try the Spicy Three Pepper flavor. Clearly, there is something to please every palate in the Athenos line of hummus dips. Despite such variety, all flavors share a common texture and general taste. Athenos hummus tends to get dry easily, so it can often feel a bit grainy on the tongue. The taste is always pleasantly salty and flavorful, however.



Nutritionally, Athenos hummus is adequate. Each 2 tablespoon serving provides 3 grams of fat and 50 calories; there is a measly 1 gram of protein and less than one gram of fiber. These are not exactly impressive stats considering other brands deliver more nutrition for fewer calories. Also important to note is that many of the Athenos flavors contain high fructose corn syrup — not exactly a welcome ingredient to the health-conscious.

At about \$3.00 per 7-ounce tub, this hummus is relatively affordable. If you're eating the recommended serving size, it should take a while to finish the tub, and fortunately, there is a generous expiration date to facilitate sporadic dipping.

## Wild Garden

This brand may be a little unfamiliar to you — that's because you won't find it in the deli section with all the other brands. [Wild Garden](#) hummus is a jarred hummus found where you might find bean dip, salsa, or other shelf stable condiments; it requires no refrigeration until opened. There are eight varieties, including Red Hot Chili Pepper, Sun-Dried Tomato, Roasted Red Pepper, and Traditional. Yet again, this is a company aiming to please all taste buds and to prevent hummus boredom.



Wild Garden's taste and texture is top notch. It has the consistency of creamy peanut butter, without the stickiness — no dryness or icky coarse texture here. Some flavors are better than others, however. Traditional, Roasted Garlic, and Roasted Red Pepper are all tasty choices, but Sun-Dried Tomato lacks a distinct tomato flavor. The Red Hot Chili Pepper is hot enough to make you guzzle a Diet Coke in one gulp.

Perhaps the best part of this hummus is its nutrition. Each 2 tablespoon (32 grams) serving has a mere 35 calories and 2 grams of fat, along with 2 grams of protein and 1 gram of fiber. I'd say stats like those qualify this hummus as a nutrition all star!

Wild Garden also takes convenience into account. Not only are their products safe for the pantry until opened, but they also come in individual "To Go" tubes. This makes them perfect for throwing in a backpack or lunch box, no chill pack required.

If you'd like to sample some their chickpea deliciousness, Wild Garden hummus sells for around \$3.00 for a 13-ounce jar; the To Go tubes are usually \$1.29 each. Quite a deal — for the same price as the Athenos tubs, you can get almost twice as much hummus.

## Guiltless Gourmet

[Guiltless Gourmet](#) is perhaps best known for its line of baked chips and snacks, but did you know that they also produce a variety of dips? In addition to salsa and black bean dip, their chip accompaniments include two varieties of hummus: Traditional and Roasted Garlic. These two varieties contain almost identical ingredients; there is just a crucial difference in the amount of garlic flavor.



Unfortunately, neither the Traditional nor the Roasted Garlic is a standout. I first sampled the Roasted Garlic flavor, and its prominent garlic flavor made it almost unbearable — I had to check that the expiration date to make sure that the flavor was not due to spoilage. After a few tries, I simply couldn't torture myself with this dip anymore. In addition, a peculiar pink mold had begun to develop on the surface of the hummus, despite the fact that it had been stored in the refrigerator with the lid screwed on tightly. This hummus went into the trash can several months before the expiration date on the jar. I sampled the Original flavor, and its garlic flavor was more subtle. However, both varieties paled in comparison to the other brands I had tried, both in taste and shelf life.

For 2 tablespoons of hummus, you'll get 35 calories, 1.5 grams of fat, along with 1 gram of fiber and a mere 1 gram of protein. Although it's low in fat and calories, but this hummus is a little lacking in nutrition.

Each jar of Guiltless Gourmet hummus contains 10.5 servings and sells for about \$3.75. Compare this to Wild Garden, whose jars contain more than 12 servings and sell for \$3.00.

### Cedar's

Here's a fun fact: [Cedar's Hommus](#) was the first to appear in American supermarkets. It's no surprise that this hummus is still around today — Cedar's makes a blend that boasts a smooth texture with a distinct Mediterranean flavor. Cedar's makes several varieties; they have both an organic line and a non-organic line of hummus dips. Some of my favorites are the Tomato-Basil and the Garden Vegetable. Cedar's hummus is never dry — it has a tuna salad-like texture. Perhaps the best part of this hummus is its chunkiness; there are often large vegetable pieces mixed into the dip, making it hearty and flavorful.



Cedar's Hommus is all natural, with no preservatives. While a natural hummus is good for your body, it also means that you have to eat it quickly before it spoils. However, Cedar's Hommus is so tasty (and addictive) that it won't be too difficult to polish it off before the expiration date rolls around.

Each 2 tablespoon serving contains 45-50 calories and 2 grams of fat. Also in that small dollop are 3 grams of fiber and an impressive 3 grams of protein. Cedar's clearly wins the award for most nutritious hummus.

All of Cedar's varieties come in an 8-ounce tub that you can purchase for \$2.99. If you have a party coming up, or you just love this stuff, you can order Cedar's Hommus in bulk for a discounted price at <http://www.goestores.com/home.aspx?storename=cedarsmediterraneanfoodsinc>.

(By Caroline Yoder for CalorieLab Calorie Counter News)

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