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Vegan Journal

Health, Ethics & Environment since 1982

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Nutrition Hotline

Can a Vegan Diet Be Anti-Inflammatory?

by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD



QUESTION: I've been hearing a lot about anti-inflammatory diets. What is an anti-inflammatory diet, and can a vegan diet also be an anti-inflammatory diet?

A.R., via email

ANSWER: First, let's talk about inflammation. There are two main types: acute and chronic inflammation. Acute inflammation is the body's response to an injury, infection, or illness. For example, if you sprain your ankle, you will likely notice swelling, tenderness, and warmth at the site of the injury. This type of inflammation is short-lived, lasting a few hours to a few days. In contrast, chronic, systemic inflammation is inflammation that affects the whole body and persists for weeks, months, or years. Your body continues sending inflammatory cells from the immune system throughout your body, which can be harmful over time.

It's not completely clear what causes chronic inflammation. We do know that chronic inflammation is a factor in a number of diseases, including type 2 diabetes, heart disease,

some cancers, and Alzheimer's disease.¹⁻⁵

Dietary choices appear to play a role in chronic inflammation. Large-scale studies have found that certain dietary patterns are associated with higher or lower risk of having chronic inflammation.^{1,6} An anti-inflammatory diet is a way of eating that is high in those food groups which are associated with a lower risk of chronic inflammation and low in or free of food groups that are associated with a higher risk of chronic inflammation. To determine what an anti-inflammatory diet would look like, researchers have examined dietary patterns and their association with higher and lower blood levels of substances that indicate inflammation.^{6,7} A dietary pattern high in red, processed, or organ meats; sweetened beverages such as sodas; and refined carbohydrates such as white breads and pasta, refined cereals, sweets, ice cream, and commercial baked goods is associated with a higher risk of chronic inflammation. In contrast, a dietary pattern high in green leafy vegetables (spinach, kale, collards, etc.), orange vegetables (carrots, sweet

potatoes, and winter squash), whole grains, beans, nuts, seeds, fruits, and possibly tea and coffee is associated with a lower risk of chronic inflammation.^{1,6,8}

A vegan diet emphasizing whole foods and with little to no highly processed foods fits with this dietary pattern described as being associated with a lower risk of chronic inflammation. Thus, a whole foods vegan diet can be considered an anti-inflammatory diet. Studies that have found that a vegan diet is associated with lower blood concentrations of C-reactive protein, a marker of inflammation, support this conclusion.^{9,10}

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Note from the Coordinators

Vegan at the Fancy Food Show



Last summer, we attended the 69th annual Fancy Food Show in NYC. This is an exposition for businesses only, with 2,479 exhibitors. Kudos to the Prime Roots booth with vegan cold cuts for institutions. Encourage your local pizza place to offer their pepperoni and for supermarket and other delis to carry their sliced meats. There were several Japanese companies with clearly marked vegan products. They said they sold similar products in Japan containing fish sauce, but for the foreign audience, they developed vegan versions to meet the demand. Azaki Food had ready-to-eat tempeh, which is a great solution for those who find stir-frying in a pan to take too much time.

We sat in on an investment seminar with the founder of plant-based cheese manufacturer UMYUM on the panel, as well as investors from two financial companies. One presenter said you should raise the first \$500,000 yourself from your own contacts before approaching them. Also have an exit plan, so you can explain how the investors will make money when the company goes public or is sold. It's striking how different this is from the early natural foods pioneers, who had to make very different decisions. Interestingly, like a lot of plant-based companies, UMYUM got their earliest investments from people who really liked their product in addition to seeing it as a business opportunity. There was also discussion on how much to change your product to appeal to the investors rather than following your beliefs. One of our members involved in the startup world said he saw many of these companies make decisions totally based on securing the next round of funding, which is probably very different than the majority of small natural food/plant-based businesses. The investors mentioned that money was somewhat tight at the time of this presentation because companies aren't being sold or going public as fast. Thus, there is less investment money available. The two women investors didn't think you should present to women or men investors differently.

We liked the River Pavilion, as they had companies more reminiscent of the early natural foods industry, with owners pioneering their ideas. Red Fox had mail-order kits with injera and spices/legumes for creating Ethiopian dishes. Otatofu was established in 1911, but was recently purchased by new owners. During World War II, the Ota family, along with tens of thousands of Japanese-Americans on the West Coast, were forced to give up their homes and businesses to live in internment camps. Fortunately for the Ota family, a sympathetic landlord protected their original factory in Northwest Portland, and at the end of the war, they were able to resume producing tofu.

Rutgers in New Jersey and Vermont Food Venture Center exhibited. They provide services for the entrepreneur with a recipe idea to help them market and commercialize the product. Good luck to all business large and small for promoting vegan options. And thank you to our readers for supporting them!

Debra Wasserman Charles Stahler

Debra Wasserman & Charles Stahler
Coordinators of The Vegetarian Resource Group

VRG's MEMORIAL and HONORARY GIFT PROGRAM

How often have you wanted to make a gift in honor of a loved one or friend but weren't sure which charities are vegan-friendly, pro-environmental, or pro-animal rights? Please remember The Vegetarian Resource Group. You can make a gift in memory of a loved one or as a living tribute to honor someone on a special occasion, such as a wedding or birth. We'll send an acknowledgement to you and to the recipient(s) you choose. Your gift will support educational outreach programs and help promote veganism.

Memorials & Honorary Gifts

In memory of: _____

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Make checks payable to The Vegetarian Resource Group and mail to P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203, or donate at vrg.org/donate

Special thanks to the following individuals for their generous donations: Ann Berwald; Albert R. Kalter, DC; Nicholas Kyriazi; Franchesca Reece; and Cynthia Ward.

We greatly appreciate all the generous donations received throughout 2025 from VRG members!

Update from a 2025 VRG Scholarship Winner

For our last "My Tasty Table" event, where we incorporated some of The VRG materials into our lesson, we taught a group of young soccer players how to make cookie dough with almond flour, unsalted peanut butter, maple syrup, non-dairy milk, chocolate chips, and vanilla extract. Before starting, I introduced key takeaways from some materials I found through The VRG's *Nutrition for Vegan Teen Athletes* handout, which led to some very interesting discussions with the athletes.

Aarvi Goel, via email

Editor's Note: For information about Vegetarian Resource Group scholarship entry information and past winners, see vrg.org/student/scholar.htm

Note from Japan from Former VRG Intern

Thank you so much for the information about the Japanese companies that attended the Fancy Food Show in NYC. I was familiar with Kurata, the ramen producer, but the other two were

new to me. Will Curry is based in Nagoya, a city in central Japan, and they may not expand much into the Tokyo market. Still, their products are reasonably priced (and look tasty), so I might try to order them online. The vegan ramen trend is slowly catching on in Japan. Some chain restaurants like IPPUDO offer vegan ramen at several locations, but mainly for foreign tourists. Even 25 years ago, I remember seeing vegan instant ramen in regular supermarkets in the U.S., which is still hard to find in Japan today. When I visited France last year, I came across a vegan version of the popular instant ramen brand Demae Iccho. These companies are willing to produce vegan versions for overseas markets, where they can expect steady sales—but not in Japan, at least not yet.

Hiroko K., via email

VRG Internships Encourage Future Vegan Activism

It's great to see VRG giving all of these interns a chance to grow into meaningful, passionate vegan advocates. Thank you.

Hal H., via email

Letters to the Editors can be sent to: Vegan Journal, P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203. You may also e-mail letters to vrg@vrg.org or send a message to us on Facebook: facebook.com/thevegetarianresourcegroup

Coming in the next issue...

TIP-TOP TAPAS

Plus: *Travel Tips and Tricks in Japan, Vegan Sources of Vitamin K, Global Grab-and-Go Dishes, and More!*

Meatless Mainstays

by Lauren Bernick

These main dishes are more than just meals—they're edible love letters to comfort, fresh ingredients, and culinary creativity. Think tender BBQ squash dressed up like meaty pulled pork, crisp tostadas piled high with all the toppings, and enchiladas so satisfying that you'd never guess they came together in minutes. Elegant and effortless, the cauliflower steak practically cooks itself. For those days when slow-simmered depth feels just right, the Veggie Stew and King Ranch Not-Chicken Casserole invite you to linger a little longer in the kitchen. Wherever your appetite leads, there's a cozy, home-cooked reward waiting at the end.

BBQ Spaghetti Squash Sandwiches

(Serves 2-3)

1 medium (4-pound) spaghetti squash
One 12-ounce bottle BBQ sauce (*see Cook's Note*)
2-3 buns or 4-6 slices bread
Pickled jalapeños and/or onions, to taste (optional)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Cut spaghetti squash in half lengthwise. Using a sturdy spoon, scoop out the seeds and discard. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or foil, and place squash cut sides down on the baking sheet. Roast the squash for about 40 minutes or until tender. It should yield easily when pressed. Let stand until cool enough to handle. It will still be hot, so use an oven mitt. Take a fork and work the squash strands out into a bowl or colander. Blot with paper towels or a clean dish towel to remove the excess water.

Place squash and barbecue sauce in a pot on the stove over medium-low heat. Toss to coat the squash and stir periodically for 3-6 minutes, until the sauce is heated through.

Toast the buns or bread and divide the BBQ squash over the bottom buns or half of the bread slices. Top with pickled jalapeños and/or onions if desired.

Cook's Note: Reduce sodium by using homemade BBQ sauce made with no or little added salt.

Total calories per serving: 722 Fat: 7 grams
Carbohydrates: 167 grams Protein: 10 grams
Sodium: 389 milligrams Fiber: 15 grams



King Ranch Not-Chicken Casserole

(Serves 4)

3-4 ounces dry soy curls (See *Cook's Note*)

¼ teaspoon chili powder

¼ teaspoon garlic powder

¼ teaspoon ground cumin

¼ teaspoon ground turmeric

¼ teaspoon onion powder

¼ teaspoon smoked paprika

Eight 6-inch corn tortillas

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Place soy curls in a large bowl and add warm water to cover. Let stand and rehydrate for about 10 minutes. Squeeze out the excess water, sprinkle with seasonings, and set aside.

Bake the tortillas on oven racks for about 10 minutes, until crispy.

Cheesy Sauce

1 cup cooked garbanzo beans, drained and rinsed

1 cup low-sodium vegetable broth

½ cup nutritional yeast

½ cup salsa

¼ cup raw cashews

2 cloves garlic

1 Tablespoon lemon juice

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon onion powder

¾ teaspoon smoked paprika

½ teaspoon chili powder

½ teaspoon ground cumin

¼ teaspoon ground turmeric

Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

Make the cheesy sauce by blending all ingredients in a high-speed blender until very smooth.

1 medium red onion, diced

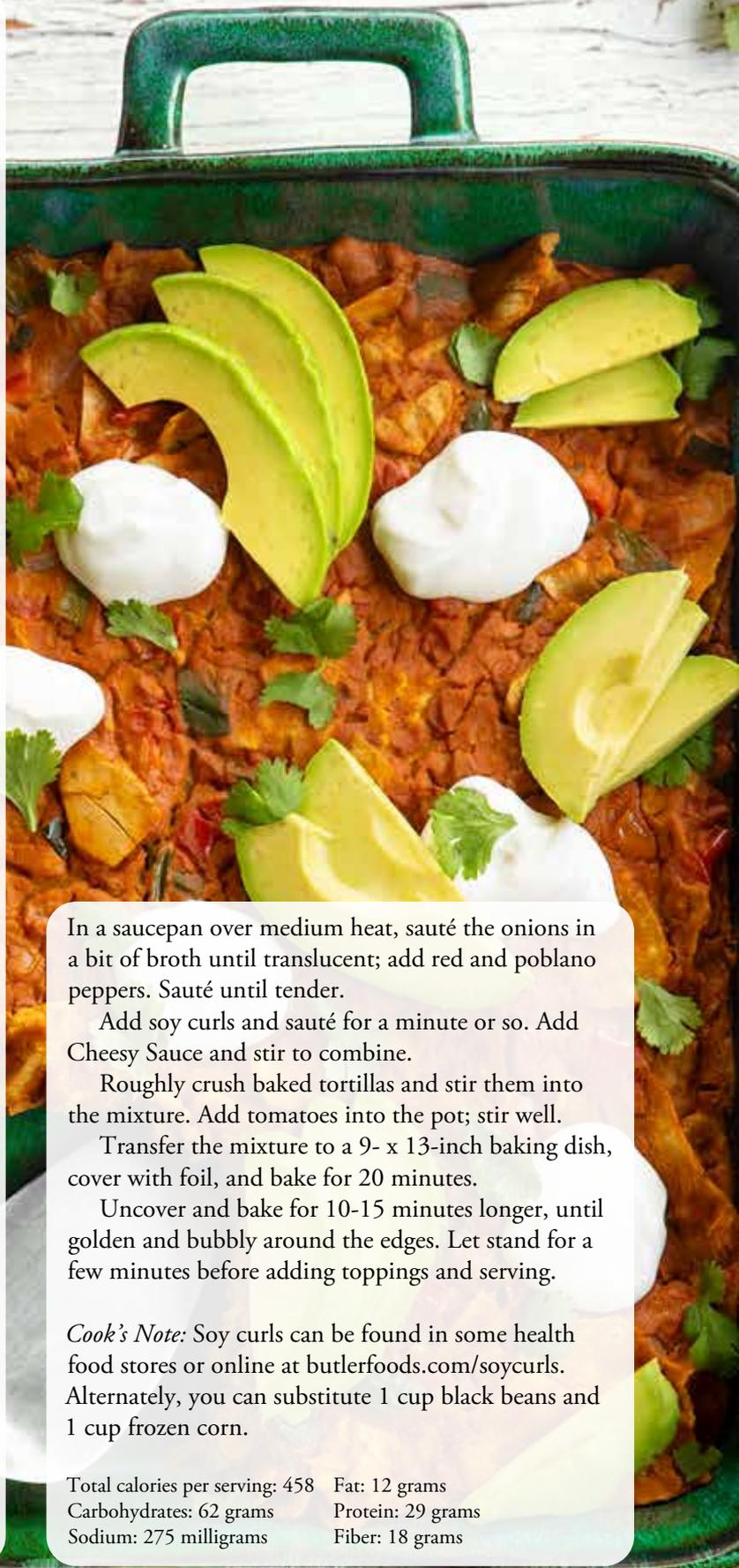
Low-sodium vegetable broth or stock, as needed

1 medium red pepper, deseeded and diced

1 medium poblano pepper, deseeded and diced

One 10-ounce can diced tomatoes with chilies

Sliced avocado, diced red onions, chopped tomatoes, pickled jalapeños, cilantro, and/or vegan sour cream, for topping (optional)



In a saucepan over medium heat, sauté the onions in a bit of broth until translucent; add red and poblano peppers. Sauté until tender.

Add soy curls and sauté for a minute or so. Add Cheesy Sauce and stir to combine.

Roughly crush baked tortillas and stir them into the mixture. Add tomatoes into the pot; stir well.

Transfer the mixture to a 9- x 13-inch baking dish, cover with foil, and bake for 20 minutes.

Uncover and bake for 10-15 minutes longer, until golden and bubbly around the edges. Let stand for a few minutes before adding toppings and serving.

Cook's Note: Soy curls can be found in some health food stores or online at butlerfoods.com/soycurls. Alternately, you can substitute 1 cup black beans and 1 cup frozen corn.

Total calories per serving: 458 Fat: 12 grams
Carbohydrates: 62 grams Protein: 29 grams
Sodium: 275 milligrams Fiber: 18 grams

The Whole Easy Enchilada

(Serves 3-4)

Six 6-inch corn tortillas

One 16-ounce jar low-sodium red or green salsa

½ cup diced cremini mushrooms

½ cup diced yellow onions

½ cup diced zucchini

One 15-ounce can reduced-sodium vegan refried beans

Sliced jalapeños, scallions, pico de gallo, vegan sour cream, or vegan queso, to taste (optional)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Steam tortillas in a lightly dampened paper towel or a clean dish towel for about 15 seconds in the microwave. This makes them easy to roll without cracking.

Pour enough salsa in the bottom of a small casserole dish to lightly coat. In a medium bowl, toss together the diced vegetables.

Pour a little bit of salsa onto a plate. Coat a tortilla in salsa on the plate, front and back, then add beans and veggies. Roll it up and put it seam side-down in the casserole dish. Repeat until all tortillas are filled. Pour the remaining salsa on top of the enchiladas. Cover the casserole dish in foil.

Bake for 25 minutes, uncover, and bake for 5 more minutes. Remove from oven, let stand for a few minutes, then add optional toppings.

Total calories per serving: 346 Fat: 5 grams
Carbohydrates: 66 grams Protein: 13 grams
Sodium: 254 milligrams Fiber: 11 grams



Veggie Stew and Mashed Potatoes

(Serves 4)

Veggie Stew

- 1 medium yellow onion, diced
- 2 cups low-sodium vegetable broth, divided
- 5 large carrots, scrubbed and roughly chopped
- 4 stalks celery, roughly chopped
- 3 portobello mushroom caps, roughly chopped
- 2 Tablespoons arrowroot or cornstarch
- 2 cups apple cider or unfiltered apple juice
- ¼ cup vegan Worcestershire sauce (See *Cook's Note*)
- 1 Tablespoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1½ cups frozen green beans
- ¾ cup frozen peas
- ½ cup frozen corn

In a large stew pot or Dutch oven with lid, add onions and sauté over medium heat with enough vegetable broth to prevent them from sticking. Add carrots and celery, cooking for 4-5 minutes to soften. Add more broth if needed to prevent sticking. Add mushrooms and stir to incorporate.

Sprinkle vegetables with arrowroot or cornstarch and stir until well coated. Pour in apple cider, Worcestershire, and seasonings and bring to a boil.

Add frozen vegetables and stir. Bring to a boil then reduce heat to medium-low. Cook for 40-45 minutes, stirring periodically, until meltingly tender.

Mashed Potatoes

- 4 medium (about 2 pounds) Yukon gold potatoes, diced
- ½-¾ cup unflavored vegan milk
- ¼ cup vegan sour cream (optional)
- Salt, to taste
- Fresh thyme, to taste (optional)

In a pot of boiling water, simmer potatoes over medium heat 10-15 minutes until tender. Drain thoroughly and transfer to a large bowl. Mash with ½ cup milk, sour cream (if using), and salt to taste. Add more milk as needed to reach desired consistency.

Divide mashed potatoes among four bowls and top with stew. Garnish with thyme if desired.

Cook's Note: If vegan Worcestershire sauce is unavailable, you can substitute low-sodium soy sauce.

Total calories per serving: 390 Fat: 2 grams
Carbohydrates: 94 grams Protein: 11 grams
Sodium: 590 milligrams Fiber: 11 grams

Cauliflower Steak with Whipped Sweet Potatoes and Greens

(Serves 3-4)

Cauliflower Steaks

1 large head (about 2 pounds) cauliflower
1 cup reduced-sodium hummus

Preheat oven to 375 degrees and line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Slice cauliflower into 1-inch thick “steaks,” leaving the core intact. Spread a thin layer of hummus onto each steak. Place cauliflower onto baking sheet and cook for about 35 minutes, until tender and a little brown on top.

Whipped Sweet Potatoes

2 large (about 1 pound each) sweet potatoes
¼-½ cup unsweetened vegan milk
1 Tablespoon maple syrup

At the same time, bake sweet potatoes in oven for 45 minutes or until tender. When sweet potatoes are cooked, remove skins and place flesh in a bowl. Add milk and maple syrup and mash with a potato masher.

Steamed Greens and Garnish

3 cups chopped greens such as kale, bok choy, collard greens, spinach, and/or Swiss chard
1½ Tablespoons coconut aminos or teriyaki sauce
Pomegranate arils (optional)

Microwave greens with a splash of water for 1-2 minutes. Toss with coconut aminos or teriyaki sauce.

Assemble it all onto a plate of sweet potatoes on the bottom, greens, and then the cauliflower steak. Garnish with a light sprinkle of pomegranates arils, if desired.

Total calories per serving: 463 Fat: 1.5 grams
Carbohydrates: 97 grams Protein: 17 grams
Sodium: 258 milligrams Fiber: 18 grams



Tostadas

(Serves 4)

Eight 4-inch corn tortillas

One 15-ounce can reduced-sodium vegan refried beans

One 15-ounce can black beans, rinsed and drained

One 12-ounce bag frozen grilled corn, thawed

One 12-ounce bag frozen peppers and onions, thawed

One 12-ounce bag shredded cabbage or slaw mix

Low-sodium salsa or pico de gallo

Guacamole or diced avocado

Pickled jalapeños

Low-sodium vegan queso sauce

Hot sauce (optional)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Bake tortillas right on oven racks for 9-12 minutes, until golden brown and crispy. Keep an eye on them as cook times can vary depending on the thickness of the tortillas.

Place baked tortillas on plates and assemble tostadas by layering everything, starting with refried beans, then whole beans, veggies, salsa or pico de gallo, guacamole or avocado, jalapeños, queso, and hot sauce.

Total calories per serving: 584	Fat: 18 grams
Carbohydrates: 93 grams	Protein: 20 grams
Sodium: 534 milligrams	Fiber: 19 grams

Lauren Bernick, host of the popular podcast *Age Like a Badass Mother*, became a health advocate after reversing her heart disease through a whole-food, plant-based, oil-free diet. She now helps others do the same as a speaker, educator, and founder of wellelephant.com



Study Examines the Use of a Whole-Food, Plant-Based Diet in Type 2 Diabetes

By Reed Mangels, PhD, RD

More than 11% of the population of the United States has type 2 diabetes,¹ previously known as adult-onset diabetes. In the United States in 2022, the most recent year for which information is available, the total cost of diabetes was \$412.9 billion.¹ This includes both direct medical costs and indirect costs such as reduced employment due to diabetes. People with diabetes in the United States had average medical expenditures that were 2.6 times higher than those without.¹ Worldwide, about 12.5% of adults are estimated to have diabetes.²

Diet is an important part of the treatment of diabetes. Research supports the use of vegetarian or vegan diets in treatment of diabetes³ and several organizations, including the European Association for the Study of Diabetes⁴ and Diabetes Canada,⁵ back the use of vegetarian/vegan diets to manage type 2 diabetes.

A recent study conducted in the Republic of the Marshall Islands examined the use of a whole-foods, plant-based diet in people with type 2 diabetes.⁶ Although a whole-foods, plant-based diet is often identified as a vegan diet, the diet used in this study could include animal products.

What is the Study?

The study was the longest and largest trial so far of a whole-foods, plant-based diet compared to standard medical care in people with type 2 diabetes. Study participants, 149 of whom completed the study, were assigned either to follow a whole-food, plant-based diet along with moderate exercise or to receive their standard medical care for 24 weeks. At the start of the study, most participants were taking medications to control their blood glucose levels.

The whole-foods, plant-based diet, as prescribed, was high fiber and low in fat and saturated fat. It featured foods that are commonly eaten in the Marshall Islands. For the first two weeks of the

study, participants were told to completely avoid animal products. Later they could consume small amounts of animal foods, oils, and processed foods. Records were not kept of what study subjects actually ate, so we don't know how well they complied. This group was instructed to exercise for one hour each day for the first two weeks and then 30 minutes to an hour daily for the rest of the study.

Subjects in the standard care group were told to maintain their current diet and exercise habits.

What Did This Study Find?

On average, participants in the whole-foods, plant-based diet group had a greater decrease in their hemoglobin A1C compared to those in the standard care group. Hemoglobin A1C indicates average blood sugar levels. More than 60% of the diet group reduced their glucose-lowering medications compared to 24% of the standard care group. Researchers noted that some of those in the standard care group attempted to change their diet to be more like that of the plant-based diet group. None of the standard care group achieved remission of their diabetes, compared to 8% of those in the whole-foods, plant-based group. Remission was defined as having satisfactory hemoglobin A1C levels after not using diabetes medications for at least three months. About 67% of those in the whole-foods, plant-based diet group were able to reduce their dose of medications for heart disease, compared to 15% of the standard care group.

Are There Practical Implications?

This study suggests that health care providers can recommend a whole-food, plant-based diet with moderate exercise for people with type 2 diabetes.

References: vrg.org/blog/2025/04/21/study-examines-the-use-of-a-whole-food-plant-based-diet-in-type-2-diabetes

Ten Ways Vegans Can Boost Their Iron Intake

By Reed Mangels, PhD, RD

Vegans looking to boost their iron intake have lots of options. Here are some higher-iron foods, all with more than 3 milligrams per serving, some of which may be surprising sources of iron. When product names are mentioned, it's because a brand I happened to look at had the specified amount of iron. To put this in perspective, the Recommended Daily Allowance for iron is 8 milligrams for adult males and postmenopausal women, and 18 milligrams for premenopausal women prior to menopause.

1. Look for an iron-fortified breakfast cereal.

While many fortified cereals contain vitamin D from lanolin, Quaker Instant Oatmeal (8 milligrams of iron per packet), Trader Joe's O's (8.1 milligrams of iron per 1¾-cup serving), and Grape Nuts (16.2 milligrams of iron per ½-cup serving) are some of the cereals that are fortified with iron and not with vitamin D.

2. Eat more beans, a powerhouse food when it comes to iron. Lentils (6 milligrams per cup), kidney beans (5.3 milligrams per cup), chickpeas (5.2 milligrams per cup), and black beans (5 milligrams per cup) are among the beans highest in iron.

3. Drink a cup of hot cocoa. If you combine 2 Tablespoons of cocoa powder with a cup of plant milk and 2 Tablespoons of sugar, you'll get 4 milligrams of iron from the cocoa alone.

4. Add spinach to soups, pasta sauces, and stir-fries. One cup of cooked spinach has 4.2 milligrams of iron.

5. Choose an iron-rich canned soup. For example, Amy's Lentil Soup has 3.8 milligrams of iron per can, Amy's Black Bean Vegetable Soup has 3.9 milligrams of iron per can, Amy's Lentil

Vegetable Soup has 4.3 milligrams of iron per can, and Amy's Indian Golden Lentil Soup has 4.7 milligrams of iron per can.

6. Toast a bagel for breakfast or a snack. A medium bagel made with iron-enriched flour has 3.75 milligrams of iron.

7. Snack on pumpkin seeds. A quarter cup of pepitas supplies 4 milligrams of iron.

8. Heat up a bowl of vegetarian chili. Use a canned product like Amy's 3 Bean Vegetable Chili with 5 milligrams of iron in a cup.

9. Add shelled edamame to salads, soups, stir-fries, and other dishes. 1 cup of shelled edamame has about 4 milligrams of iron.

10. Mix cubed tempeh with barbecue sauce or peanut sauce and bake until heated through. 1 cup of tempeh has 4.5 milligrams of iron.

You can promote iron absorption from plant foods by including a source of vitamin C at the meal or snack with high iron foods. Citrus fruit and juices, tomatoes and tomato products, cantaloupe, guava, mangos, strawberries, broccoli, cabbage, and bell peppers are all good sources of vitamin C.

To read more about iron in the vegan diet see:

- vrg.org/nutrition/iron.php
- vrg.org/blog/2024/08/20/vegan-iron-sources-in-the-grocery-store
- vrg.org/nutrition/latin-american-foods-High-in-Iron.pdf

Sources for the iron content of foods were package labels and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, Beltsville Human Nutrition Research Center. fdc.nal.usda.gov

SCIENTIFIC UPDATE by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, FADA

A REVIEW OF RECENT SCIENTIFIC PAPERS RELATED TO VEGETARIANISM

Components of the Portfolio Diet Associated with Reduced Risk of Death from Heart Disease

The Portfolio Diet is a vegan or near-vegan diet that contains foods and nutrients known to lower blood cholesterol levels. It includes plant protein from legumes, particularly from soy; a type of fiber called viscous fiber, which is found in foods such as oats, barley, eggplant, okra, apples, berries, and psyllium; plant sterols from fortified foods or supplements; nuts; and plant sources of monounsaturated fats, such as avocado and canola, olive, and soy oils. This diet has been used successfully in research studies to reduce risk factors for heart disease. Recently, researchers set out to see if adults who more frequently chose food components of the Portfolio Diet had a lower risk of dying from heart disease and related conditions. They looked back at the diets of almost 18,000 U.S. adults who had participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES). Note that these adults were not told to follow the Portfolio Diet; they simply reported what they ate, and their reported diets were scored for the amount of plant protein (legumes), nuts and seeds, viscous fiber sources, phytosterols, and plant monounsaturated fat sources. The more of these foods that were eaten, the higher the Portfolio Diet Score was. Diets got negative points for foods high in saturated fat and cholesterol.

After 22 years of follow-up, participants with the highest Portfolio Diet Score had an 18% lower risk of dying from heart disease and a 14% lower risk of all-cause mortality compared to those with the lowest scores. It's important to note that these results were seen in people who were eating more of the foods that are included in a Portfolio Diet but were not, strictly speaking, following a Portfolio Diet, nor were they vegan. The researchers noted that only small amounts of some foods recommended in the Portfolio Diet were eaten, even in the group with the highest

Portfolio Diet Score. This suggests that even partially adopting the Portfolio Diet pattern is beneficial. As an example, the study's authors say that, to eat similarly to those in the group with the highest Portfolio Diet Scores, one would need to eat a mixture of five of the following foods daily: 1 ounce of nuts or 2 Tablespoons of peanut butter, ½ cup of cooked beans, 1 apple or ½ cup of oatmeal, 1 Tablespoon of avocado oil or ½ Tablespoon of canola oil or olive oil. It's likely that even greater benefits would be seen in those who adhere more closely to the Portfolio Diet.

Kavanagh ME, Zurbau A, Glenn AJ, et al. The portfolio dietary pattern and risk of cardiovascular disease mortality during 1988-2019 in US adults: a prospective cohort study. *BMC Med.* 2025;23:287.

What Can Be Done to Add More Vegan Dishes to Hospital Menus?

The food system accounts for fully one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions, so actions that result in large-scale use of more plant-based foods can provide significant environmental benefits. Hospitals and other large institutions can have a marked influence on the food supply due to their purchasing power. Additionally, these institutions may be concerned with health, social responsibility, and cost savings. Researchers conducted interviews with 35 experts on hospital food service in New Zealand. Close to three-quarters of the experts supported increasing the amount of plant-based foods offered to hospitalized patients. About 20% did not believe that the hospital was the right place to increase use of plant-based foods due to their concerns with nutrient adequacy.

Participants were asked what tactics were needed for hospital patient menus to promote more plant-based protein sources (legumes, nuts, plant-based meat alternatives) and fewer animal-based protein sources (meat, poultry, fish, dairy products, and eggs).

One idea suggested by study participants was to offer vegan menu items to all patients instead of only having them appear on a vegan menu. Plant-based menu items could appear on the printed menu ahead of animal-based items. The default menu item, which is served to those unable to pre-order a meal, could be vegan. Climate-friendly labeling was suggested. To improve acceptance of plant-based menu items, the experts recommended using familiar recipes and replacing meat or dairy products with vegan alternatives. They recommended that menu changes be promoted to staff, especially those with direct patient contact. The survey participants' concerns about including more plant-based menu items included costs, patient and staff acceptance, increased labor, and accommodation of special diets such as low-fiber diets. They identified benefits including healthier choices, lower costs, better for the environment, more options for certain cultural groups, and decreased food safety risks. This study provides useful information for vegan activists who are interested in working to change institutional food systems.

Stiles G, Collins J, Beck K. 'A necessary idea given our current climate': A qualitative study of stakeholder perspectives and actions required to increase the proportion of plant to animal protein in hospital patient menus. *J Hum Nutr Diet.* 2025;38:e70059.

Nutrition/Environmental Impact/ Cost: Vegan Versus Meat Dishes

A recent study from the United Kingdom took an evidence-based look at a practical question, namely, "Which menu items offer the greatest benefit in terms of nutrition, environmental effects, and cost?" The study examined vegan, vegetarian, and meat-based versions of the top-selling items (lasagna, chili, teriyaki, and curry) at lunch at a university cafeteria in London. A meat-based recipe for each dish was compared with a vegetarian version made using a vegetarian meat substitute, and with a vegan version where meat and dairy were replaced with vegan ground beef, vegan cheese, and other alternatives. Comparable whole-food vegan recipes were also developed using legumes, vegetables, and tempeh to replace animal products.

The nutritional quality of each recipe was evaluated by comparing its nutrient content to requirements for 17 essential nutrients. Environmental impacts were estimated based on the dish's projected effects on global warming, water quality, acid rain, and water usage.

The whole-food vegan lasagna recipe was the most nutrient-dense lasagna. This recipe also had the highest fiber and the lowest saturated fat content. The whole-food vegan chili, teriyaki, and curry were all the most nutrient-dense recipes compared to vegan with commercial meat and dairy alternatives, vegetarian, or meat-based versions of these dishes. The vegan variations of recipes, whether based on whole foods or vegan meat and dairy alternatives, had a markedly lower environmental impact than the meat-based or vegetarian recipes. On average, meat-based dishes had a 14-times higher environmental impact than did vegan dishes. The global warming potential of one serving of beef lasagna was equivalent to that of 15 servings of vegan lasagna. The global warming potential of one serving of beef chili was equivalent to that of 28 servings of vegan chili. The average cost of vegan and whole-food vegan recipes was the lowest and was about 60% of the cost of the meat-based recipes, which had the highest average cost.

When all of the results were combined, the vegan versions of the recipes consistently had the highest sustainability score based on their low environmental impact and high nutrient density. They also had the lowest cost. Vegan recipes using whole and minimally processed ingredients had the highest nutritional quality. This study's results demonstrate the value of increased use of vegan foods for reducing the environmental effect of food consumption while providing nutritious, economical meals. Food service settings such as restaurants, schools, and workplaces should make vegan foods more available and promote the benefits of eating more vegan meals.

Takacs B, Kalea AZ, Borrion A. Menu dilemmas: An integrated assessment of the nutritional quality, environmental impact, and cost of vegan, vegetarian, and meat-based versions of meals. *Nutrients.* 2025;17:1569.

Vegano Italiano

by Donna Spencer

Italian cuisine is all too often unfairly associated with cheese-laden pizzas and meat-heavy pastas. In truth, you'll find a vibrant, plant-forward culinary heritage inspired by seasonal produce, bold herbs, and humble pantry staples. Many recipes need no translation to resonate for cooks who crave healthy, whole foods. Universally appealing flavors transcend all boundaries, like caramelized cauliflower with capers and lemon, a brothy Tuscan bread soup that's as thrifty as it is indulgent, and a velvety pasta sauce bolstered with the subtle sweetness of pumpkin. From tender braised lentils and garlicky kale to a rustic blueberry crostata that begs to be shared, these dishes celebrate simplicity, integrity, and joy, served up with a distinctly Italian sense of warmth and abundance.

Italian Roasted Cauliflower

(Serves 6)

- 1 head cauliflower, cut into florets (6 cups florets)
- 1 cup grape tomatoes, halved
- 1 Tablespoon capers, rinsed and drained
- 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- 2 Tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

In a large bowl, toss cauliflower, tomatoes, capers, garlic, balsamic vinegar, and lemon juice together. Transfer to a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Roast 30 minutes, stirring about halfway through, until the cauliflower is browned and tender. Season to taste and serve warm.

Total calories per serving: 60 Fat: <1 gram
Carbohydrates: 8 grams Protein: 2 grams
Sodium: 55 milligrams Fiber: 2 grams





Tuscan Bread Soup

(Serves 6)

1 medium Yukon gold potato, diced
2 medium carrots, diced
2 stalks celery, diced
1 small yellow onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
4 cups low-sodium vegetable broth
2 cups stale vegan sourdough or country-style bread, torn into pieces
1 teaspoon fresh rosemary, minced
1 teaspoon fresh thyme
One 14.5-ounce can no-salt-added diced tomatoes
One 14-ounce can chickpeas, rinsed and drained
3 cups fresh baby spinach
Salt and pepper, to taste
Vegan Parmesan cheese, to taste

In a large nonstick pot over medium heat, dry sauté potato, carrots, celery, onion, and garlic until the vegetables are softened, 5-8 minutes.

Add vegetable broth, bread, rosemary, and thyme. Cook over medium-low heat for about 5 minutes, until the bread dissolves into a chunky paste.

Add tomatoes and chickpeas. Cook for a few minutes until tomatoes start to break down.

Simmer for about 15-20 minutes, allowing the flavors to meld. Stir occasionally.

Stir in spinach and cook 3-5 minutes longer, until greens are wilted. Season to taste.

Ladle into bowls and top with vegan Parmesan.

Cook's Note: This soup tastes even better the next day, after the flavors have had time to meld. Simply reheat it on the stove or in the microwave, adding more broth or water to desired consistency.

Total calories per serving: 176 Fat: 2 grams
Carbohydrates: 34 grams Protein: 8 grams
Sodium: 268 milligrams Fiber: 5 grams

Pasta with Tomato-Pumpkin Sauce

(Serves 4)

Pasta

4 cups water

½ pound (8 ounces) pasta

In a medium saucepan, bring water to a boil over medium heat. Add pasta and cook al dente. Drain, reserving 1 cup of the pasta water for later use.

Sauce

One 14.5-ounce can no-salt-added fire-roasted tomatoes

One 14-ounce can pumpkin purée

¼ cup nutritional yeast

1 teaspoon agave (optional)

1 teaspoon garlic powder

1 teaspoon onion powder

½ teaspoon salt (optional)

½ teaspoon ground pepper

2 Tablespoons chopped parsley or basil

In a medium bowl, whisk together tomatoes, pumpkin purée, nutritional yeast, agave, garlic powder, onion powder, salt, pepper, and ½ cup reserved pasta water until smooth. If needed, add more pasta water 2 Tablespoons at a time to reach your desired consistency.

In a large pot, add the sauce to the cooked pasta. Stir often over medium heat until warmed through, 4-5 minutes. Add enough pasta water to make the sauce creamy.

Serve immediately with a sprinkling of chopped parsley or basil on top.

Total calories per serving: 320 Fat: 2 grams
Carbohydrates: 52 grams Protein: 14 grams
Sodium: 30 milligrams Fiber: 8 grams





Braised Lentils and Kale

(Serves 4)

- ½ small yellow onion, diced
- 1 stalk celery, diced
- 1 small carrot, diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- One 14.5-ounce can no-salt-added fire-roasted tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon dried sage
- 1¼ cups dry black lentils
- 5 cups (about 8 ounces) lacinato kale, destemmed and sliced into wide ribbons
- 2½ cups water or more, as needed
- 2 Tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 2 Tablespoons liquid aminos or tamari
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, add onions, celery, carrots, and garlic. Cook over medium heat until garlic is aromatic, but not browned, 2-3 minutes. Add a splash of water if needed to prevent vegetables from sticking and burning.

Stir in tomatoes with their juices, paprika, and sage. Cook for 10 minutes until vegetables have softened.

Add lentils, kale, and 2½ cups of water. Bring to a simmer over medium heat, stirring every few minutes, then reduce heat to medium-low and simmer gently.

Cover and cook until lentils are tender but still retain their shape, about 40-45 minutes. You may need to add more water, ¼ cup at a time, if too much evaporates before they're done.

Five minutes before serving, stir in balsamic vinegar and liquid aminos. Season to taste.

Total calories per serving: 277 Fat: 1 gram
Carbohydrates: 51 grams Protein: 15 grams
Sodium: 263 milligrams Fiber: 9 grams

Rustic Blueberry Crostata

(Serves 6)

Blueberry Filling

3 cups fresh blueberries, divided

3 Tablespoons maple syrup

1 teaspoon cornstarch

¼ teaspoon cinnamon

Zest and juice of 1 lemon

¼ teaspoon salt

In a small saucepan, combine 2½ cups blueberries, maple syrup, cornstarch, cinnamon, lemon zest and juice, and salt. Bring to a boil over medium heat, and cook stirring for approximately 2 minutes until thickened. Remove from heat and stir in remaining blueberries. Let cool.

Gluten-Free Crust and Assembly

2½ cups fine almond flour

¾ cup white or brown rice flour

⅓ cup coconut sugar (See Cook's Note)

⅓ cup tapioca starch

¼ teaspoon salt

5-7 Tablespoons water

¾ cup no-sugar or low-sugar blueberry jam

In a large bowl, sift dry ingredients together. Add water, 2 Tablespoons at a time, mixing well until it forms a cohesive, slightly sticky dough.

Place dough between two sheets of parchment paper and roll into an ⅛-inch thick circle. Transfer to a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread jam on the dough, leaving a 1-inch border around the edge. Spoon blueberry filling on top. Fold the pastry over to enclose the filling. Press lightly to secure.

Bake 30-35 minutes until golden brown. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Cook's Note: Coconut sugar can be found in the baking aisle in most grocery stores. Organic dark brown sugar can be substituted if desired.

Total calories per serving: 533 Fat: 24 grams
Carbohydrates: 73 grams Protein: 11 grams
Sodium: 196 milligrams Fiber: 10 grams



Garlic Beans and Greens

(Serves 4-6)

- 3 bunches (about 10 cups) escarole, chopped
- 2 large cloves garlic, minced
- 1 medium shallot, diced
- 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar or balsamic vinegar
- 1 Tablespoon liquid aminos or tamari
- Salt, to taste
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
- One 14-ounce can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 Tablespoon nutritional yeast

Place chopped escarole in a bowl of water to rinse. Let sit for 5 minutes, allowing the grit to sink to the bottom of bowl. Remove and dry the cleaned leaves.

In a large skillet over medium heat, add garlic and shallots. Sauté for 30 seconds, stirring constantly to make sure they don't burn.

Add escarole and cook until leaves start to wilt, about 5 minutes. Add vinegar and liquid aminos. Season with salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes.

Add beans and nutritional yeast. Gently mix and continue to cook for 5-10 minutes, until the beans are hot and liquid has reduced. Turn off heat, let stand for 2-3 minutes, and serve.

Total calories per serving: 144	Fat: <1 gram
Carbohydrates: 25 grams	Protein: 9 grams
Sodium: 197 milligrams	Fiber: 8 grams

Photos by Hannah Kaminsky

Donna Spencer is an educator and cookbook author who reversed chronic illness through a whole-food, plant-based diet. She now inspires others through cooking classes, public speaking, and leading the PLANTifull Fare Pod online community. Find more of her work at plantifullfare.com



VRG's Testimony for the FDA on Labeling of Plant-Based Alternatives to Animal Derived Foods

April 1, 2025

The Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG) welcomes the opportunity to comment on *Labeling of Plant-Based Alternatives to Animal-Derived Foods: Guidance for Industry*. We appreciate FDA's overall commitment to having food labels that provide truthful information that helps consumers make informed purchasing decisions.

The market for plant-based alternatives to animal-derived foods is expanding. In the United States, in 2022, the most recent year for which information is available, the total plant-based market value was \$8 billion. Sales of plant-based yogurt and plant-based cheese had a 20% and 42% increase respectively in retail sales. Although sales of plant-based meat decreased slightly (1%), the market value of these products was more than \$1 billion.¹ As of now, there is no specific guidance for the wording that should be used on product labels of "plant-based alternatives."

We agree with FDA's recommendations that:

- When looking at the name of the food on the label, the consumer should be able to easily see that it is plant-based and what the main plant ingredient is.
- The food label should include the specific plant source(s) that the food contains.
- If wording is used on the label that suggests that a product is not derived from animals, it would be necessary to indicate what the product is and the specific plant sources used in the food.

Consumers who are looking for alternatives to animal-derived products need to be able to easily identify these products and to be confident that the products do not contain animal-derived ingredients. Consumers with food allergies or intolerances need to be alerted to the presence of common allergens.

In the Questions and Answers section of this document, in response to Question 8 (What are important considerations when labeling plant-based alternative foods as "vegan" or "meat-free?"), FDA says, "The use of truthful and non-misleading label statements (e.g., "vegan," "meat-free," "animal-free," etc.) that helps inform consumers that the products are derived from plants, and are not derived from animals, is appropriate." We agree with this but believe that the guidance should be expanded so that products that include any animal-derived ingredients could not be labeled "plant-based" in order to reduce consumer confusion and avoid misleading consumers.

We are hopeful that guidance will be provided to industry for labeling products that are produced through the use of genetic engineering and that contain animal protein or are similar to animal protein in structure. Clear labeling is needed to help protect people with food allergies who may be misled by product labels containing statements not clearly informing consumers that the products are based on animal DNA. Examples of this type of misleading label statement include "animal-free" or "vegan." We propose that food allergen information on these products should be in readable type and on a readable background, not only in the ingredient listing but also along with any other declarations on the labels which may be confusing

to the consumer related to the presence of the allergen. These could be when terms are used such as “animal-free” or “vegan.” We do not think that these terms (“animal-free” or “vegan”) should be used on labels of foods that were produced through genetic engineering based on the DNA of animals (whether based on actual DNA, cell lines, or virtual DNA), due to concern for consumer confusion. Additionally, when a product is based on animal DNA, there should be a statement on the label so people know that the product is based on animal DNA.

We recently commissioned a national YouGov poll of adults in the United States. We asked, “There are types of meat and dairy alternatives that are made using NO animals (or animal products) but are based on animal cells or DNA extracted years ago from a live animal. In your opinion, should (they) include a statement on the package that informs consumers that the product uses animal cell DNA or is animal gene-derived?” 72% said yes, 10% said no, and 18% didn’t know.

We also asked, “Which of the following, if any, do you expect from a food labeled as a veggie burger? Please select all that apply.” We found:

- 41% of respondents expected that the front of the burger package would identify the main ingredient (such as soy or beans) and say something like “black bean-based veggie burger.”
- 94% did not expect a product labeled as a veggie burger to contain meat from a cow
- 94% did not expect a product labeled as a veggie burger would have similar amounts of cholesterol and saturated fat as a similar animal-derived product

Our results suggest that some, but not all, consumers expect to have the main ingredient of plant-based alternatives included on the label.

VRG is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public on vegetarianism and the interrelated issues of health, nutrition, environment, ethics, and world hunger. Our health professionals, activists, and educators work with businesses and individuals to bring about healthy changes in schools, workplaces, and the community. Registered dietitians and physicians aid in the development of nutrition-related publications and answer questions about the vegetarian and vegan diet. For the past 31 years, we have commissioned polls exploring vegetarian-related issues, results of which are often used by researchers, the food industry, and the media. Financial support comes primarily from memberships, contributions, and book sales.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed guidelines.

Sincerely,

Reed Mangels, PhD, RD
Nutrition Advisor, The Vegetarian Resource Group

Charles Stahler
Co-Director, The Vegetarian Resource Group

Debra Wasserman
Co-Director, The Vegetarian Resource Group

Reference

¹Plant Based Foods Association. *The Story of Plant-Based Foods in 2022: Resilience, Growth Trends, and Engaged Consumers*. <https://plantbasedfoods.org/latest/plant-based-foods-state-of-the-marketplace-2022-report>. 2023.

PLANTREACT Natural Flavors Are Not Made from Animal DNA

by Jeanne Yacoubou, MS

Flavor company T. Hasegawa USA manufactures PLANTREACT, vegan natural flavors made **without** animal-derived genetic material from a virtual DNA library, according to Mark Webster, VP of Sales & Marketing. Intended to impart meat or dairy taste profiles to foods or beverages, PLANTREACT flavors are used in a wide variety of vegan products.

PLANTREACT flavors originate from plant-derived compounds that undergo various chemical processes, such as Maillard reactions, enzymolysis, or fermentation. It is important to note that precision fermentation (PF), in which animal DNA may be used to produce proteins and fats that could function as flavors, is **not** used.

Several companies marketing PF macronutrients as “animal-free” also label them as vegan on food packages. However, readers should be aware that “natural flavors” as written on food or beverage labels could also refer to meat or dairy (animal-based) ingredients, according to the legal definition established by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

Vegan Foods Made with PLANTREACT

The VRG requested a list of vegan products made with PLANTREACT. Webster told us, “Unfortunately, we do not disclose this information as part of our company policy.”

In their promotional materials, T. Hasegawa USA lists generic vegan food product categories that PlantReact natural flavors could be in. Webster confirmed that only the term “natural flavors” would appear on package labels. These include:

- Vegan burger patties
- Pizza toppings
- Vegan beef crumbles, burritos, ready meals/entrées, soups, chili
- Vegan steak, chicken filets and tenders, and sausages
- Plant-based milks and creamers
- Ramen meals
- Vegan cheese and cream cheese
- Vegan creamy soups
- Vegan sauces

The VRG Recommendations on Natural Flavors

In the past few decades, we have noticed an increasing number of food and beverage companies that specify the source(s) of the natural flavors on their product labels. They are not legally required to do so.

We must caution, however, that with the rise of precision fermentation, so-called “animal-free” or “plant-based” natural flavors could have been developed from animal genes. The only way to be sure is to ask the company and trust that you are receiving accurate information.

While we applaud T. Hasegawa USA for creating authentically vegan natural flavors, there is no way to tell from a label if their PLANTREACT is actually in a product. When in doubt, always inquire about the source(s) of the natural flavors in food and beverage products directly from the manufacturers.

For more information, see:
vrg.org/ingredients/index.php

Book Reviews

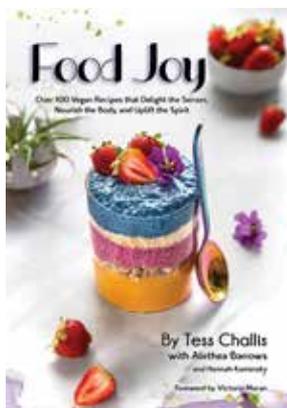
Food Joy by Tess Challis

Food Joy is written by Tess Challis, with contributions from her daughter, Alethea Barrows. The book showcases stunning photography by *Vegan Journal* Senior Editor Hannah Kaminsky. Together, they've created a vibrant and inviting cookbook filled with inspiring plant-based recipes for the whole family.

Tess has been vegan since 1991 and raised Alethea on a vegan diet since birth. She is the author of several books and has a passion for holistic, healthy living. In *Food Joy*, you'll find over 100 delicious vegan recipes, beginning with a chapter called "Blissful Beverages." Highlights include Raspberry Lime Sparkling Soda, The Kombucha, Smashed Strawberry Matcha Latte, and others.

Another enticing section is "Bountiful Breakfasts," which features Pumpkin Spiced Waffles, Mango Passion Pudding, Scrambled Tofu, a variety of Oatmeal Bowls, and more satisfying morning options. "Enlightened Entrées" offers wholesome main dishes like Rainbow Sushi Rolls, Whole Grain Personal Pizza, Two-Fu Noodles, Light and Lazy Lasagna, and Silky Ginger Tofu. And of course, who could skip dessert? "Divine Desserts" includes Chocolate Velvet Mousse, Oatmeal Raisin Cookies, Peanut Butter Protein Bars, Pistachio Date Jewels, Superstar Chocolate Chip Cookies, and a wide range of additional sweet treats.

Food Joy (ISBN 979-8-3191-5288-6) is a 243-page hardcover book. It is published by Quintessential Health Publishing and retails for \$45.99. *Debra Wasserman/VRG Co-Coordinator*



or Sweet Jalapeño Cornbread Waffles. Sides and appetizers include Sweet Potato and Lentil Harissa Dip and Easy Go-To Flatbread. If you're searching for some quick lunch dishes, try Taco Lentil and Chickpea Lettuce Wraps or Lemony White Bean Basil Toasts.

There's no shortage of main dishes. Feast on Vegan "Tuna" Casserole, Teriyaki Orzo Casserole, Swedish Meatballs, BBQ Jackfruit Cheese Pizzas, or Cajun Spinach Artichoke Pasta. On those colder days, perhaps a hearty bowl of soup will do the job! Sip on Zucchini Lasagna Soup or Miso Sweet Potato Kale Soup.

Looking for snacks? Apple Pie Spice Balls or Pizza Chickpea Balls might do the trick. If your sweet tooth comes calling, consider making Dark Chocolate Orange Glazed Scones, 4-Ingredient Peanut Butter Cookies, or Chocolate Tahini Cookies.

The final chapter is very useful for establishing a well-stocked kitchen and pantry. Here you can find foundational recipes for sauces, spices, and staples including Nacho Cheese Sauce, Easy Teriyaki Sauce, Poultry Seasoning, Cajun Seasoning, Greek-Inspired Feta Cheese, Healthy Ketchup, and much more.

The photos throughout this book are so enticing, they'll propel you into the kitchen right away.

Vegan Wholesome (ISBN 978-0-5937-9743-3) is a 288-page hardcover book. It is published by Rodale Books and retails for \$30. *Debra Wasserman/VRG Co-Coordinator*

The Taco Tuesday Cookbook: Plant-Based by Kate Kasbee

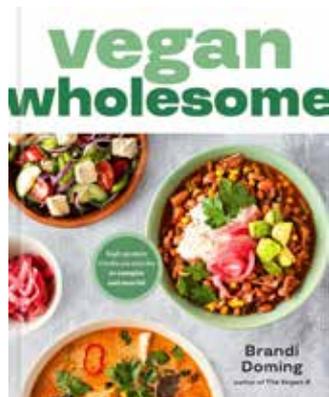


This cookbook is filled with 52 creative vegan taco recipes, one for every week of the year. Some standout taco variations include Cheesy Potato Tacos, BBQ Lentil Tacos, Sticky Sesame Ginger Cauliflower Tacos, Maple Miso Tempeh Tacos, and Jerk Plantain Tacos with Mango Salsa. Instructions for making corn or flour tortillas and various salsas and sauces, such as Cashew Queso, Chipotle Aioli, and Jalapeño Ranch are also included. Most recipes are easy to prepare and come with eye-catching photos that will make you hungry!

The Taco Tuesday Cookbook: Plant-Based (ISBN 978-0-7603-9705-3) is a 160-page book. It is published by Harvard Common Press and retails for \$21.99. *Debra Wasserman/VRG Co-Coordinator*

Vegan Wholesome by Brandi Doming

Brandi is the creator of *The Vegan 8* blog. Her latest printed work exemplifies her creativity while leveraging a short list of unprocessed, accessible ingredients. Start your day with Chocolate Chip Sheet Pan Pancakes



Magnesium Chloride and Nigari Are Vegan

By Jeanne Yacoubou, MS

Recently, a reader asked if magnesium chloride ($MgCl_2$) "...is always vegan." Based on previous knowledge of this ingredient and recent confirmations by several independent manufacturers, we can affirm that magnesium chloride and a related ingredient, nigari, are both vegan.

What Is Magnesium Chloride?

Magnesium chloride is a naturally occurring mineral salt commonly extracted from sea water or harvested from underground mineral deposits in seabeds. Inexpensive, with a low freezing point, $MgCl_2$ is commonly used for winter road deicing. It is also antibacterial, odor-inhibiting, and hygroscopic (water-loving), making it ideal for use in household cleaning, personal care products, and cosmetics. It is also used in fertilizers and animal feed. It is sold in powder, flakes, or liquid formats.

A common food use for $MgCl_2$ is as a coagulant in tofu production. It serves this function by thickening soymilk into curds so they can be more easily pressed into a solid block. Gypsum (calcium sulfate) is the most common coagulant for tofu production and results in a soft and silky texture.

Magnesium chloride is used as the coagulant when firmer tofu is desired. Some eaters report that $MgCl_2$ confers a bitter taste to tofu while gypsum lends sweet notes to it. Magnesium chloride acts more quickly in soymilk coagulation than gypsum, and so it is preferred when production time is limited.

What Is Nigari?

Nigari is a substance most commonly derived from seawater evaporation and used as a tofu coagulant. Nigari is sold as a liquid, coarse granules, or fine crystals.

Nigari is formed after the extraction of sodium chloride ($NaCl$) and calcium sulfate from seawater. The remaining liquid, called bittern, primarily contains magnesium chloride and other trace substances such as potassium chloride and magnesium sulfate. Nigari

is the Japanese word for bittern. The bitter notes in tofu made using nigari are due to the presence of magnesium sulfate.

According to Japanese nigari producers, authentic nigari contains five parts magnesium chloride to one part sodium chloride, with small quantities of other trace mineral salts. To obtain this, seawater is kettle-boiled, leaving sodium crystals on the bottom, while nigari is the remaining liquid on top. Solutions consisting solely of seawater or made from magnesium chloride dissolved in water may be sold as nigari but are not authentic nigari.

Nigari produced through sun-drying seawater contains large amounts of magnesium sulfate, making the resulting product bitter. Reverse osmosis or ion exchange methods are modern techniques to produce nigari. The former yields both pure water and concentrated seawater with high amounts of sodium chloride. The latter is added back to the water, yielding very salty-tasting nigari water. Nigari made by ion exchange lacks both the bitter sulfate ions and toxic contaminants such as PCBs, dioxins, arsenic, mercury, and lead. It is the safest, most pleasant-tasting form of nigari available.

Manufacturer Confirmations on the Vegan Status of Magnesium Chloride and Nigari

The VRG asked eight manufacturers of magnesium chloride and nigari about these ingredients' origin and processing. Here are the responses we received:

Q: Is your food-grade magnesium chloride derived from or processed with animal ingredients?

From Adnan Heikal of Alliance Chemical:

A: "This product does not contain any declared animal-origin materials [or processing aids] in its composition."

From Owen Donald of Celtic Chemicals:

A: "None of our products are derived from animal ingredients [or have] animal-derived processing aids involved in their manufacture."

Q: Is your food-grade nigari derived from or processed with animal ingredients?

From Sandra Gibson of Sea Salts of Hawaii:

A: "No, it is only deep ocean magnesium solar evaporated, not other ingredients."

From Newfoundland Salt Company:

A: "No."

From Ema Sogabe of Mitoku Co.:

A: "Our nigari does not contain any animal/animal-derived ingredients/processing aids. As matter of fact, we can confirm that there are no animal-derived ingredients/processing aids at the processing site at all."

More ingredient listings are at
vrg.org/ingredients/index.php

Support VRG research at
vrg.org/donate

NOTES FROM THE VRG SCIENTIFIC DEPARTMENT VEGAN EDUCATION

VRG submitted testimony to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) related to their request for information to help develop a uniform definition of ultra-processed foods for human consumption. Our main concern is that definitions generally suffer from an inability to differentiate between foods where processing can be beneficial or have a neutral effect, and those that can have negative health effects. Consumption of other foods currently categorized as "ultra-processed" that are of better quality, such as fortified plant milks, some plant-based meat alternatives, bean spreads, and whole-grain breads, should not be discouraged, and these foods should be included as part of a healthy dietary pattern.

Thanks to Elsa Spencer, PhD, who coordinated a VRG booth in Virginia at Charlottesville VegFest. She said, "It was a hot one but had a lot of good conversations. Several people were wanting to become pregnant soon, and one had one on the way. They asked about baby food and pregnancy books. I referred them to the books that I used, too. Saw lots of members and vegan families and actually a couple of teens who had recently gone veggie. Gave out a ton of literature!"

BEQUESTS

The VRG depends on the generous contributions of our members and supporters to continue our educational projects. Though the world may not become vegan in our lifetimes, we realize that we are planning and working for future generations.

- Your will and life insurance policies enable you to protect your family and also to provide a way to give long-lasting support to causes in which you believe. Naming The Vegetarian Resource Group in your will or life insurance policy will enable us to increase our work for veganism.
- One suggested form of bequest is: I give and bequeath to The Vegetarian Resource Group, Baltimore, Maryland, the sum of _____ dollars (or if stock, property, or insurance policy, please describe).
- To be sure your wishes are carried out, please speak with your attorney specifically about writing the correct information in your will.

Vegan Beauty Products

By Alexandria Wolfe

In casual and professional settings alike, first impressions are inevitably formed by the way you look. Hair care, skin care, and sometimes makeup are key to enhancing your looks and boosting your confidence. However, many people are unaware that some beauty brands test their products on animals (such as rabbits, mice, and guinea pigs) or use animal-derived ingredients. Recently, increased awareness around animal welfare has encouraged many companies to adopt more ethical practices, with some becoming “cruelty-free” and “vegan.” These brands do not test on animals or use animal-based ingredients, reflecting their commitment to ethics and overall sustainability.

To clarify, “cruelty-free” means a brand does not test on animals at any stage of production, including through suppliers or third parties. “Vegan” refers to products that contain no animal-derived ingredients. A brand can be vegan but still test on animals, while a brand that avoids animal testing but uses animal-based ingredients is considered cruelty-free but not vegan. Only brands that avoid both are eligible for both labels.

Many companies also choose to get certified through organizations like PETA’s Global Beauty Without Bunnies program. To qualify as “cruelty-free” under PETA’s standards, companies must not only avoid animal testing but also refrain from using animal-derived ingredients. The certification process requires a signed statement from the CEO, detailed documentation on product testing methods and ingredients, and a review by PETA. Once approved, brands can display the Beauty Without Bunnies logo on their products for a one-time fee.

With so many brands now embracing cruelty-free and vegan standards, I’ve found several makeup products that align with these values and deliver impressive results. As someone with over 10 years of

experience in pageantry, modeling, and work on a traveling hair and makeup team, I know a thing or two about both high-glam and natural makeup looks.

When it comes to affordability and sustainability, *e.l.f.* is a standout. Their products are vegan and cruelty-free and also offer budget-friendly dupes of viral high-end items. Some of my favorites include their Instant Lift Brow Pencil, Power Grip Primer, Total Face Sponge, and Wow Brow Gel.

For full coverage, I always recommend *Tarte Cosmetics*. Their Shape Tape Concealer and Face Tape Foundation are my go-tos. While *Tarte* is cruelty-free,

not all of their products are vegan, so be sure to check the labels. Another great brand is *r.e.m. beauty* by Ariana Grande, which offers a wide range of cruelty-free and vegan makeup and skin care. Her liquid eyeshadows and collaborations with *Wicked* are iconic. Selena Gomez’s *Rare Beauty* is also cruelty-free and vegan, with viral products

like her ‘Soft Pinch Liquid Blush’ and ‘Kind Words Matte Lip Liner.’ When it comes to makeup tools, *Real Techniques* is the ultimate choice for cruelty-free and vegan brushes, blenders, and other essentials.

No matter how great your makeup is, flawless skin is essential, and I can recommend some amazing skin care brands that are just as environmentally and ethically conscious. *Curology* offers personalized skin care treatments delivered right to your door, with ongoing support from licensed dermatology providers. *Mad Hippie* is a cruelty-free and vegan skin care line with clean ingredients and customizable routines for various skin concerns. For example, their Hydrating Routine for Dry Skin or Skin Brightening Routine are perfect for different needs. Lastly, *Fenty Beauty* by Rihanna offers skin care for all skin types, and I highly recommend the Total Cleans’r Remove-It-All Cleanser and Hydra Vizor SPF 30 Sunscreen Moisturizer.



We've covered the basics for makeup and skin care, but what about your hair? A flawless hairstyle can elevate your entire look, turning heads and taking your beauty game from a 10/10 to a 100/10. Thinking about switching up your hair color? It might feel intimidating, but with the eco-conscious hair dye brand Arctic Fox, at-home color transformations are easier (and more fun) than ever. Their bold, vibrant shades range from classics to exclusive hues created in partnership with the Netflix original series *Arcane*. On the other hand, if your strands need a little extra love, *Function of Beauty* has your back. With just a quick 5-minute quiz, you'll get personalized hair care products tailored to your unique hair type and goals. From custom shampoos and conditioners to targeted masks and serums, every formula is crafted just for you. And if your hair needs serious help, their 'SOS Custom Repair' line helps restore it to a healthier, stronger state.

At the end of the day, choosing cruelty-free and vegan beauty products is about more than just looking good—it's about feeling good, too. With so many amazing brands out there that are affordable, effective, and ethically made, it's never been easier to build a beauty routine that aligns with your values. Whether you're going for high fashion or keeping things more natural, there are plenty of options to help you look and feel your best without sacrificing on quality or compromising on compassion. There's something for everyone who wants to look and feel their best while staying true to their values.

Here's a list of some additional vegan brands I use: *Billie Eilish Fragrances*, *Florence by Mills*, *Haus Labs by Lady Gaga*, *K18 Hair*, *KVD Vegan Beauty*, *Kylie Skin*, *Love Sun Body*, *Olaplex*, *Pureology*, *Rhode*, *Tanologist*, and *Truly*.

For links to cruelty-free mail order companies, see: www.vrg.org/links/CosmeticsPersonalCareProducts.htm and www.vrg.org/links/products.htm#retailer

Best Cruelty-Free and Vegan Beauty Brands

MAKEUP

e.l.f.

- Instant Lift Brow Pencil
- Wow Brow Gel
- Power Grip Primer

KVD Vegan Beauty

- Love Sun Body

Rare Beauty

- Soft Pinch Liquid Blush
- Kind Words Matte Lip Liner

Tarte

- Shape Tape Concealer
- Face Tape Foundation

Love Sun Body

Tanologist

SKIN CARE

Curology

Personalized Skincare

Fenty Skin

Pre-Show Glow

Total Cleans'r SPF 30

Sunscreen Moisturizer

Mad Hippie

Hydrating Routine for Dry Skin

HAIR CARE

Arctic Fox

Vibrant Hair Dye Shades (including Arcane)

Olaplex

K18 Hair

Alexandria Wolfe is a 2025 VRG Scholarship Winner. In 2024 she was selected as the national winner of the Teen Miss Earth USA Pageant. One of her long-term goals is in the field of marine sciences to engage in large-scale coral reef restoration projects and to explore deep-sea ecosystems.



Veggie Bits

Wilderness Poets Miso Nooch

More commonplace than salt and pepper in some vegan households, nutritional yeast is an indispensable staple that finds its way into all things savory. Miso Nooch, despite the name, isn't made from deactivated yeast at all, but 100% chickpea miso flakes. As such, it is not a good source of B12, as some brands of nutritional yeast are. That single ingredient label sets it apart, not just in simplicity, but surprisingly complex flavors. It delivers the same crave-worthy umami punch, with a slightly salty, funky, cheesy, buttery edge that deepens sauces, spreads, and soups just as effectively as the conventional alternative. It's equally successful as a standalone topping or condiment, perfect for showering over popcorn, pasta, roasted vegetables, or even avocado toast, much like you would with a dusting of Parmesan. Its naturally fermented tang and mellow meatiness make it feel both novel and nostalgic, like a shortcut to slow-cooked flavor. Certified organic, gluten-free, and soy-free. Available in Whole Foods and through Amazon, iHerb, and wildernesspoets.com
Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Yoléle Fonio Pilafs

Though little known in the Western world, fonio is a nutritious ancient grain that has been celebrated across Africa for more than 5,000 years. While often compared to quinoa for its high protein content and ability to cook quickly, it's more like couscous in texture; these tiny granules become a fluffy side dish or supportive base for any meal. Inspired by the most beloved traditional dishes of West Africa, these distinctive seasonings are at turns bright, earthy, spicy, and savory. For those new to fonio, Yoléle offers five different pilaf mixes to kick-start your next flavorful adventure. Afro-Funk, Dakar Curry, Greens, Jollof, and Yassa Fonio Pilafs need only water and five minutes of your time to come to life. You can even prepare them in the microwave for instant gratification. It's never been easier, or tastier, to eat your whole grains. Certified GMO-free, gluten-free, and kosher. Available at Central Market, Meijer, Whole Foods, and yolele.com
Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Seven Sundays Oat Granola

Seven Sundays proves that granola doesn't have to be a sugar bomb to be delicious. Their new Oat Granola delivers a resounding crunch and real flavor from whole-food ingredients. Crafted with upcycled oat protein, rolled oats, and sorghum flakes, it's sweetened with dates and maple syrup and only has 2-3 grams of added sugars per serving. The lineup includes two options to suit your cravings, whether you're feeling nutty or fruity. Good Day Granola features peanut butter and chocolate chips with crisp banana bits. Bright Side Granola packs a punch with freeze-dried blueberries, strawberries, and raspberries for a fresh, fruity boost in every spoonful. Certified gluten-free, kosher, and non-GMO. Available from Amazon, Thrive Market, and sevensundays.com
Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Dave's Killer Bread Sandwich Rolls

While fillings typically get all the attention, it's really the bread that can make or break a sandwich. Dave's Killer Bread has consistently supported the underdog, and their new sandwich rolls champion a new platform for exactly that. The two varieties are new shapes for old flavors, already beloved as sliced loaves and burger buns. These long rolls fall somewhere between hot dog and hoagie buns, soft yet sturdy, holding up to more substantial builds. 21 Whole Grains and Seeds had volumes of texture and flavor to offer, folding sunflower seeds, oats, millet, and flax seeds into each bite. Sandwich Rolls Done Right are a more thoughtful, wholesome approach to plain white bread, with a hint of sweetness for balance. Certified organic. Available at Giant, Kroger, Publix, Walmart, and more. Find more information at daveskillerbread.com
Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Veggie Bits

Three Farmers Roasted Chickpeas & Fava Beans



When cravings strike, most people wouldn't naturally reach for a handful of beans to snack, but Three Farmers makes a compelling argument for exactly that. Their crunchy roasted fava beans and garbanzo beans are generously seasoned with a diverse range of flavors, from the basic Sea Salt treatment to trendy Dill Pickle, and even a deceptively cheesy Zesty Cheddar. Barbecue, Jalapeño Lime, and Sweet Chili provide more opportunities to spice things up, with a seemingly new variety added every time you return to stock up. Dry roasted rather than deep-fried, they have a robust yet airy crunch, hearty enough to satisfy. They would be right at home on top of salads as a high-protein, high-fiber substitute for standard croutons, though there's also a whole line of crunchy lentil toppers designed exactly for that task, too. Certified gluten-free and nut-free. Available at Albertsons, Amazon, Safeway, and threefarmers.com

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor

Lightlife Chickpea Tempeh

Soybeans have long reigned supreme as the essential foundation for tempeh, the original Indonesian meatless protein. However, any bean can be made into tempeh, as evidenced by Lightlife Tempeh Chickpea. Employing everyone's favorite legume creates a uniquely nutty, tender, and highly nutritious ferment. This rendition has none of the bitterness typical of traditional tempeh, making it an ideal entrée for skeptics, picky eaters, and children especially. It cooks up exactly the same, fitting into all of your favorite recipes seamlessly—ready to slice, dice, crumble, marinate, bake, air fry, and more. Made from only chickpeas and brown rice, it offers a simple, versatile option that's easy to love. Certified kosher and organic. Free of all top allergens. Available at Fresh Thyme, Randalls, and Wegmans. Read more at lightlife.com

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Hodo Lightly Fried Tofu



When Hodo labels their new Lightly Fried Tofu “ready to cook,” they’re selling it short, because it’s perfectly tasty right out of the package, even still cold from the fridge. Consider them as tofu with training wheels, for all the bean curd skeptics or new vegans uncertain of how to handle this traditional plant protein. You don’t even need a knife since they come pre-scored in neat little cubes. Chili Crisp, Gochujang, and Golden Turmeric will instantly spice up your next meal, no cooking skills required. These new proteins have the edge over packaged baked tofu because the hot oil treatment gives them a much chewier outer edge, with a softer yet still dense and meaty interior. This approach also adds richness, making them more satisfying without needing to add any extra cooking oil, and without leaving a greasy aftertaste. Certified gluten-free and organic. Available at select Whole Foods and more stores coming soon. Read more at hodofoods.com

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor

Love Beets Marinated Baby Beets



Beets can be polarizing; you either love them or hate them. If the Marinated Baby Beets from Love Beets don't live up to their namesake and win over haters, I don't know what will. Cooked to the ideal tenderness, there's none of the usual fussy peeling and messy splatter to contend with. Ready to eat right out of the package, their natural earthiness is milder than most, since they're harvested young at peak sweetness. Classic Original Vinegar or White Wine Balsamic add a lightly tangy flavor, ideal for tossing into vinaigrette-dressed salads or simply enjoying as a standalone side. Their vibrant red color and delicate texture make them a beautiful addition to charcuterie boards or an elegant beet carpaccio, too. Certified gluten-free, kosher, and non-GMO. Available in the produce aisle with the cut and prepared vegetables in most grocery stores, including Albertsons, Costco, Giant, Wegmans, and Whole Foods. More at lovebeets.com

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor

Support VRG Outreach

My Summer Internship with The VRG

By Chaltu Watkins

Creating a Vegan World



I'm grateful to have interned with The Vegetarian Resource Group, an organization that promotes vegan advocacy, as this is something I'm deeply passionate about.

I had the opportunity to work with Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, to deepen my understanding of vegan nutrition. Through our conversations, I learned practical strategies for meeting my nutritional needs on a plant-based diet. For example, we discussed the best practices for maintaining strong bones, such as the value of proper calcium intake, in addition to physical activity, including weight training and running. Since bones naturally weaken with age, it's important to establish strong habits early in life.

I assisted Dr. Mangels with a budget project where the goal was to create a healthy, affordable vegan meal plan for a family of four relying on SNAP benefits. This required me to visit local grocery stores to collect pricing for ingredients and better understand how to shop smart. These are skills that have helped me as a college student trying to eat well without overspending.

Another memorable activity was when I had the chance to sit in on a class taught by Crystal Forman, MPH, MHA, at Christopher Place, a transitional housing program in Baltimore City for men that had been experiencing homelessness. That event gave me a new perspective on how food can be used as an educational tool, and the importance of making veganism accessible to all communities.

A highlight of my internship was writing reviews of vegan restaurants. I discovered a vegan restaurant in my area and dined there with another VRG intern. This gave me firsthand insight into the importance of supporting local businesses that align with my values.

One of the most significant lessons I learned was the importance of clear labeling and definitions, and the need for accurate ingredient disclosure. This knowledge has helped me see how advocacy work intersects with policy, health, and consumer rights.

This internship helped me grow in so many ways. My time at The Vegetarian Resource Group has strengthened my skills in research, writing, and critical thinking, while allowing me to contribute to a cause I care deeply about. I walk away from this experience with a greater appreciation for the thoughtful work behind vegan outreach and a stronger commitment to advocating for ethical and sustainable living.

For information about VRG internships, see vrg.org/student/index.php

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Vegan Cooking Tips

Quick and Easy

Stews

by Chef Nancy Berkoff, EdD, RD



Transform simple soups into satisfying stews in no time. Start with your favorite soup, set some aside to enjoy later, and thicken the rest into a rich, hearty main course that's perfect for a quick and cozy meal.

Pasta Fagioli is an Italian winter staple. It can be made from just about any kind of broken or leftover pasta, beans, and winter vegetables. Chop onions, celery, and carrots and sauté in olive oil until soft. Add minced garlic and red pepper flakes and simmer for a minute or two. Add low-sodium vegetable broth, a can of diced tomatoes (with the juice), and a small amount of sage, followed by cooked beans (drained, if canned) and uncooked pasta. Stir well and simmer until the pasta is al dente and the mixture has thickened.

To give you an idea of proportions, for about 10 servings, use roughly one cup of chopped vegetables in total, or 1/3 cup each of the celery, carrots, and onions; about 4 cups of tomatoes (chopped fresh or canned; use the juice); 4-6 cups of stock; 3 cups of beans; and 2 cups of uncooked pasta. To thicken, simmer until the excess liquid has evaporated and your desired texture is reached. Alternatively, you can add about 2 cups of diced, peeled potatoes. To make the mixture more toothsome, you can add about 2 cups of sliced, fresh mushrooms or cubed seitan.

To continue cooking in a Mediterranean mood, put together a **Pasta alla Norma**. The base is made of stewed or fried eggplant and tomatoes, which is then tossed with pasta. Nutritional yeast can be used to impart the traditional flavor that hard cheese previously provided. If you are not in the mood to prepare eggplant, you might look for canned eggplant, which is often found in Middle Eastern, Central European, and Asian markets, and use canned tomatoes. This unique blend becomes even richer when stored in the refrigerator for a day or two, allowing the flavors to meld and harmonize.

For a change of pace from chili, create **bean medley stew**. Combine two to five types of canned, drained beans with leftover or canned vegetable soup or minestrone. Simmer until thoroughly heated and flavors have blended. Season with oregano, sage, thyme, or basil, to taste. To make the mixture heartier, consider adding roasted diced potatoes, corn kernels, or diced baked tofu.

Vegan meatballs or diced meatless loaves, deli meats (think "Tofurky"), or crumbled veggie burgers can instantly transform plain soup into a full meal. Add meatballs, either cooked separately or simmered in the soup, to canned vegetable soup, bean soup, or lentil soup for a fast **meatball stew**. Serve with steamed or grilled vegetable blends and garlic bread.

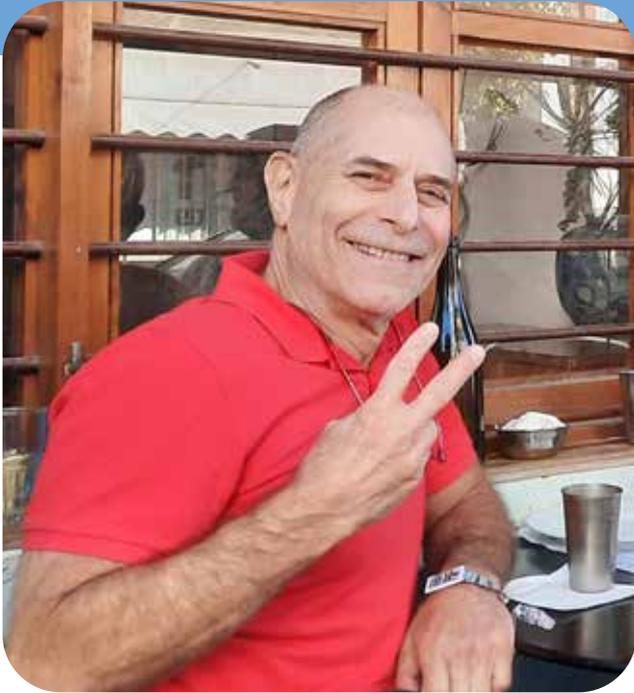
You can mix and match ready-to-eat items or prepared foods from the store to create unique stews. For example, combine canned tomato soup with canned corn chowder to make a **tomato and corn stew**; blend with soft or silken tofu to make it creamier. Add canned, diced tomatoes (drained); shelled edamame; diced onions; and frozen or canned corn kernels for extra texture. To make it a bit thicker, crumble a slice or two of fresh bread into the mixture and stir well. The bread will "dissolve" into the mixture and create a rich stew with more body.

Create a **cabbage-vegetable stew** using ready-cut coleslaw, which is a mixture of raw shredded cabbage and carrots, often found in the produce section. Steam or sauté the mix with a small amount of low-sodium vegetable stock until tender. Add canned vegetable or lentil soup and cook until thoroughly heated. If you prefer a heartier meal, stir in leftover mashed potatoes or instant potato flakes and simmer gently until thickened. If you would like a blend with more bite, add canned and drained or cooked black-eyed peas, cooked carrots, or diced, cooked winter squash.

Mark Perlmutter

Vegan Activist and Entrepreneur

by Amy Burger



Mark Perlmutter, activist and entrepreneur, has two goals: to make vegan food more accessible and to drive investment in vegan businesses. Perlmutter's entrepreneurial advocacy began with a documentary that followed a doctor reversing diabetes in patients through a vegan diet. The film reached over 3 million viewers, sparking significant discussion about the power of plant-based nutrition. However, the most common reaction surprised him: "Thanks for showing me how to eat, in case I get sick."

This response helped Perlmutter realize that, while people acknowledged the benefits of a vegan diet, they struggled to make lasting dietary changes. That's why he launched VegReady, a company designed to provide convenient, ready-to-eat vegan meals for busy individuals. By 2020, VegReady had sold 30,000 meals and was on the brink of greater expansion when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted supply chains, forcing the company to pause operations.

Amid this disruption, Perlmutter saw a new opportunity to address another pressing need—funding for vegan startups. With a team of vegan professionals, he turned his focus toward a second passion: investing in vegan business. Perlmutter founded the Vegan Investing Club, a platform designed to connect ethical investors with vegan startups seeking funding.

Though currently focused on investment, Perlmutter has plans to return to VegReady. His vision for the next iteration of the company involves personalized nutrition, where plant-based meals are designed to match individuals' unique microbiomes and DNA, providing convenient, optimized meals that enhance long-term wellness. Perlmutter sees this approach as the next development in veganism, by not only focusing on making meals appealing, but also emphasizing their role in preventive healthcare.

Perlmutter's work shows how entrepreneurship and activism can come together to create meaningful change. His adaptability—whether by shifting from food production to investment or by envisioning a future where nutrition is personalized—illustrates his lasting commitment to veganism. As he continues to develop innovative solutions, Perlmutter's efforts contribute to a more sustainable, health-conscious future, where vegan living is not just an ethical choice, but also a practical and accessible one.

To learn more about Perlmutter's work in supporting vegan startups, visit [Vegan Investing Club:
veganinvestingclub.org](http://Vegan Investing Club: veganinvestingclub.org)

Amy Burger is a former VRG intern who writes for *Vegan Journal* as a volunteer. Amy lives in Georgia, where she works as a college librarian and part-time teacher. Her hobbies include cooking and traveling.





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FROM THE VRG BLOG

Iodine and Cruciferous Vegetables

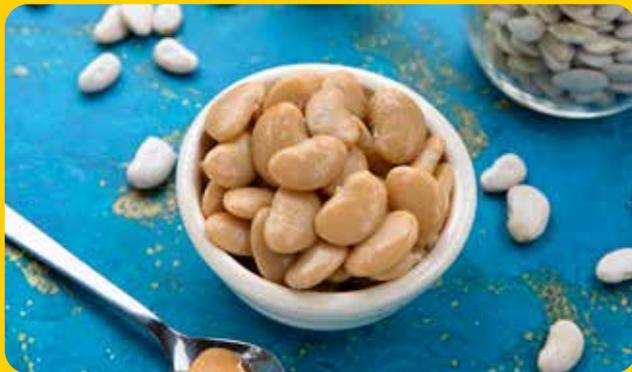
vrg.org/blog/2025/08/04/iodine-and-cruciferous-vegetables

Folgers Coffee Beans Are Not Coated with Shellac

vrg.org/blog/2025/08/14/folgers-coffee-beans-are-not-coated-with-shellac

Lower Cancer Risk Seen in Vegans and Vegetarians

vrg.org/blog/2025/08/29/lower-cancer-risk-seen-in-vegans-and-vegetarians



Food Economics: Canned Beans Versus Cooked Dried Beans

vrg.org/blog/2025/08/12/food-economics-canned-beans-versus-cooked-dried-beans

QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTIONS (QCD)

The Internal Revenue Service states that individual retirement arrangement (IRA) owners age 70½ or over can transfer up to \$115,000 to charity (such as The Vegetarian Resource Group) tax-free each year. These transfers, known as qualified charitable distributions or QCDs, offer eligible older Americans a way to give to charity. For those who are at least 73 years old, QCDs count toward the IRA owner's required minimum distribution (RMD) for the year.

Your IRA trustee must send the money to the charity directly, and not to you first. You do not need to itemize your taxes for this benefit. For more information, see irs.gov/newsroom/give-more-tax-free-eligible-ira-owners-can-donate-up-to-105000-to-charity-in-2024

This is not legal or tax advice, for which you should speak to your financial and legal advisors. To make direct donations to VRG and support vegan education and research, visit vrg.org/donate

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