

# Vegan Journal

Health, Ethics & Environment since 1982

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# Nutrition Hotline

## Fermented Soy Versus Unfermented Soy

by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD



**QUESTION:** What's the difference between fermented soy and unfermented soy? Should I eat only fermented soy products?

**T.L., via email**

**ANSWER:** Fermented soyfoods are produced using fermentation, a process by which bacteria, yeasts, or other microorganisms chemically break down substances. For example, tempeh production involves soybeans and a fungus in the fermentation process. Other fermented soyfoods include miso and *natto* (traditional Japanese foods). Unfermented soyfoods include tofu, soymilk, edamame, and soy nuts, as well as products based on isolated soy protein. A group of scientists developed a guide for clinicians about soy that addressed common questions, including the use of fermented versus unfermented soy.<sup>1</sup> Here's what they concluded.

Globally, soyfoods are more frequently consumed unfermented. Studies from Japan, Korea, and China report that unfermented foods are consumed in larger quantities than fermented foods.<sup>1</sup> Observational studies of soyfoods typically focus on use of tofu, soymilk, and other products based on unfermented soy.<sup>2,3</sup>

Some have speculated that fermentation makes it easier to

digest soy protein, but studies find that the protein from unfermented soyfoods and processed soy protein are well digested.<sup>1</sup> Soy contains substances called phytates that can interfere with the absorption of iron, zinc, calcium, and other minerals. Fermentation reduces the phytate content, but it's unclear whether this has an effect on mineral absorption.<sup>1</sup>

Isoflavones are naturally occurring substances, classified as phytoestrogens, that are especially high in soybeans. Phytoestrogens are also called plant estrogens; they are not identical to the estrogen hormone that is made by the human body but can offer health benefits. Fermentation may affect the phytoestrogen content of soyfoods. Some studies found a decrease in isoflavone content with fermentation, while others did not see an effect.<sup>1</sup> Fermentation affects the form of isoflavones found in soyfoods, but it's uncertain what this means for health or for isoflavone absorption.<sup>1</sup>

Fermented soyfoods may have probiotic effects such as boosting immune function, but this depends on the timing of pasteurization of the product.<sup>1</sup> Fermentation creates antioxidants not present in unfermented soyfoods, but the effects of this on health are not known.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, there is little evidence of a health benefit of fermented soyfoods compared to unfermented soyfoods, but this is clearly an area where more research is needed. There's no obvious benefit to eating only fermented soy. For now, it makes sense to choose an assortment of soyfoods, including both fermented and unfermented products. Using tempeh, tofu, soymilk, and miso will provide a variety of tastes, textures, and nutritional benefits.

### REFERENCES:

- <sup>1</sup> Messina M, Duncan A, Messina V, et al. The health effects of soy: A reference guide for health professionals. *Front Nutr.* 2022;9:970364.
- <sup>2</sup> Bradbury KE, Tong TYN, Key TJ. Dietary intake of high-protein foods and other major foods in meat-eaters, poultry-eaters, fish-eaters, vegetarians, and vegans in UK Biobank. *Nutrients.* 2017;9:1317.
- <sup>3</sup> Papier K, Tong TY, Appleby PN, et al. Comparison of major protein-source foods and other food groups in meat-eaters and non-meat-eaters in the EPIC-Oxford cohort. *Nutrients.* 2019;11:824.

# Vegan Journal

MANAGING EDITOR: Debra Wasserman

SENIOR EDITOR: Hannah Kaminsky

EDITORS: Keryl Cryer,

Carole Hamlin, JD; Charles Stahler

NUTRITION EDITOR: Reed Mangels, PhD, RD

NUTRITIONAL ANALYSES: Reed Mangels, PhD, RD

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: Hannah Kaminsky

WEB DEVELOPMENT: Jason Goretzki

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR: Whitney McVerry

RESEARCH DIRECTOR: Jeanne Yacoubou, MS

VEGETARIAN RESOURCE GROUP ADVISORS:

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Reed Mangels, PhD, RD; Jerome Marcus, MD;

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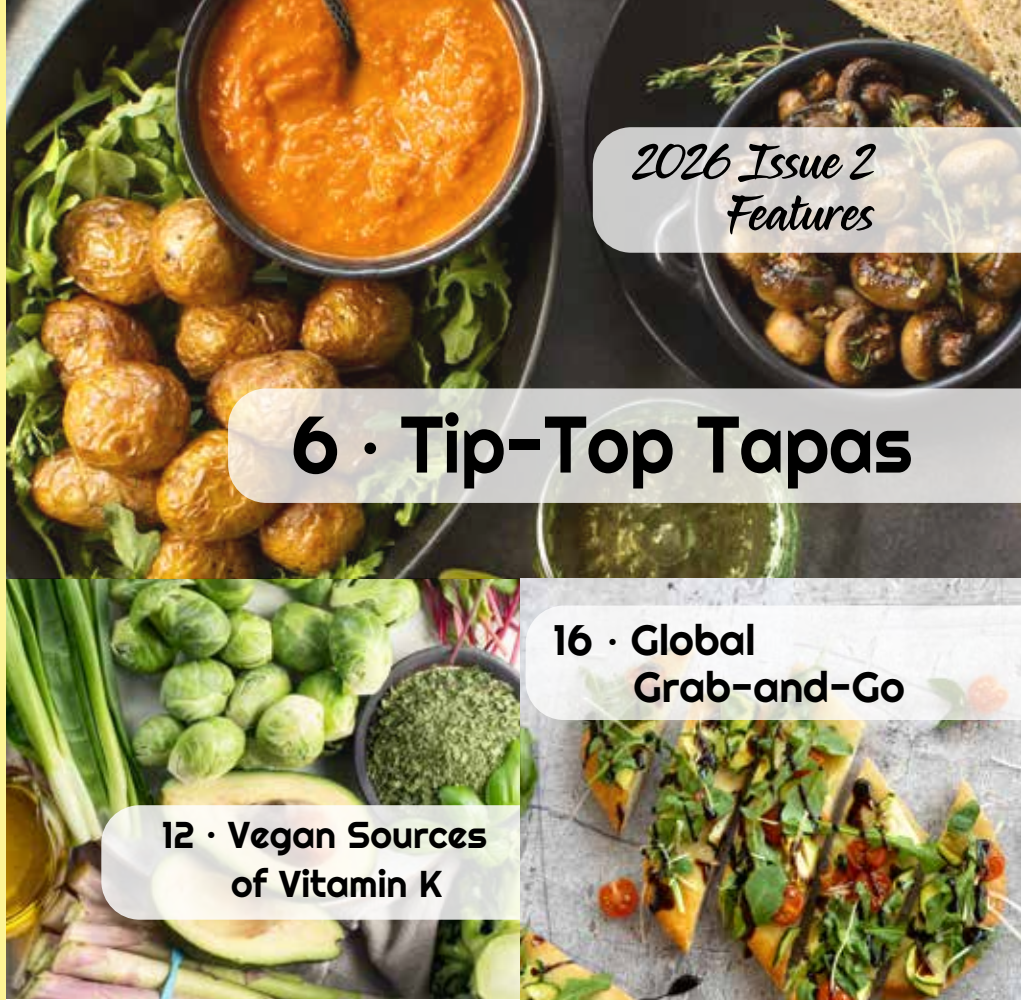
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# Note from the Senior Editor

## Embracing Imperfection



Countless parallels can be drawn between cooking and living, like the importance of adjusting to suit your tastes, going slowly for the best results, and most importantly, not just accepting failures, but embracing them. You **will** mess up; you **will** inevitably fail; there **will** be dishes beyond salvaging. That isn't a design flaw nor an indictment of your skills in the kitchen. Professional chefs could regale you for hours with stories about all the misplaced pans they've set on fire, forgotten ingredients that rendered laughably inedible meals, and ingredient swaps that simply should not have been exchanged.

Perfection is a fallacy. Anyone who tells you otherwise is not your friend or simply a bad liar. Imperfection is what we should strive for, unafraid to barrel ahead and try new flavors, new techniques, and new food experiences overall, without the burden of idealism weighing us down. So much beauty and inspiration can be found in the most imperfect moments, and without it, we could never learn what does and does not work. Imperfection means there's always an opportunity to build upon those experiences to ultimately create something better.

Quite frankly, it's a lot more fun to fail, too. Are you really enjoying yourself when you're worried about recipes turning out exactly as they're depicted on social media? Is stress a more flavorful seasoning than the rich palate of spices in your pantry? Trust me, my everyday meals don't look half as glamorous either. As much as I adore styling aspirational images, I'm sure not going through all that rigmarole for a random pot of stew when all I need is to feed myself at the end of a long day.

As a recovering perfectionist, this radical shift in perspective hasn't been easy. It's taken years of collapsed cakes and soups as salty as sea water to finally understand that there's often more satisfaction to be found in the attempt than the final result. We don't talk enough about how creative freedom blooms in the cracks left by failure. A recipe for fudge that never set up as candy became the best ice cream topping sauce I ever made. Accidentally curdled soymilk taught me that I could make traditional farmers cheese without even trying. It's both a coping mechanism and a way of reclaiming control when things go awry.

Let go of the misguided notion that every dish must be Instagram-worthy and ask yourself if it's *eating-worthy*. Always choose joy over judgment. That's what keeps me moving forward, at least.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hannah Kaminsky". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Hannah Kaminsky  
Senior Editor of *Vegan Journal*

## 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-environment, 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 you care about on a special occasion, such as a wedding or birth. We'll send an acknowledgment to you and to the recipient(s) you choose. Your gift will support educational outreach programs and help promote veganism.

### Memorials & Honorary Gifts

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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](http://vrg.org/donate)

Special thanks to VRG volunteers Cheryl Van Beek and Julie Neild for writing new entries for VRG's online restaurant guide: [www.vrg.org/restaurant](http://www.vrg.org/restaurant)

Thank you to Tom Homan for his donation for Betsy Shipley's birthday.

Dr. William Wladyka made a generous donation in memory of Rosemary Wladyka.

Thanks to Kevin Lee for his generous donation in honor of Sophia Lee.

## Thanks for the Mock Crab Cakes Recipe!

I did want to send you some pictures of my "mock crab cakes" for which you sent me the recipe. They were very good and easy to make, and as soon as I find a 5-year-old who can get the pictures off of my phone and onto my work email, I'll send them. They weren't particularly crabby, but neither was the Veggie Grill version. I think I was the crabbiest thing about them since I was frying zucchini on a 100-degree day (what possessed me I'll never know). Nevertheless, so glad I made them and they are officially in the weekly/monthly rotation. Wish I could share them with you. Thank you again for the recipe.

*Blair M., via email*

## Update on 2020 VRG Scholarship Winner

*At a VRG networking dinner, we met the parents of 2020 scholarship winner Anna Sherwood and received this update:*

Anna founded [veganteen.net](http://veganteen.net) when she was 14 years old and added original content until her junior year of college in 2023. Anna has been accepted to medical school and is now set to

graduate in 2029! She continues to be steadfastly committed to veganism as part of making the world a more humane and just place for animals and humans alike. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' original position paper on vegetarian diets was important to our family's decision to transition to veganism in 2009 when Anna was 8 years old. We are very proud of Anna. We would like to contact everyone, including one pediatrician, who told us that veganism would impair her brain development and let them know that Anna turned out okay! Back in 2019, I helped Anna look for scholarships and saw VRG's listed everywhere, probably because of its generosity. I just checked VRG's website and see you offer even more scholarships these days, which is wonderful for veg\*n students and also—at least equally importantly—for raising awareness about veg\*nism among young people everywhere.

A million thanks to everyone at VRG for all you have done and all you continue to do to make the world a more humane, just, and healthy place.

*Kelly, via email*

*Editor's Note:* For information about the VRG scholarship contest, see: [vrg.org/student/scholar.htm](http://vrg.org/student/scholar.htm)

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](mailto:vrg@vrg.org)

or send a message to us on Facebook:

[facebook.com/thevegetarianresourcegroup](https://facebook.com/thevegetarianresourcegroup)

## Coming in the next issue...

# VEGAN ON A BUDGET

**Including:** *Cost Savings Ideas for Microwave Meals, Low-Cost One-Week Menu, and More!*

# Tip-Top Tapas

by Ellen Kanner

Good food, great friends, laughter, conversation, and perhaps wine; it's a recipe that invites lingering over a meal. The Spanish even have the word, *sobremesa*, to describe it, meaning "pleasure at the table." Taste Spain's exuberant culture and cuisine with this array of tapas, which are little plates meant for sharing.

While many tapas dishes in Spain are *jamón* (ham)-heavy, these traditional tapas are naturally vegan. They showcase fresh produce like umami-rich tomatoes and peppers as well as Spain's bold flavors and products including olive oil, sherry, a fortified wine from Spain's Xeres (pronounced "sherry") region, and *pimentón* (smoked paprika) from Extremadura.

All these recipes are quick-cooking, perfect as the temperature rises. With a little planning, you can make the process even quicker by roasting the Sherried Mushrooms and the *Pimientos Padrón* at the same time as the potatoes for the *Patatas Bravas*. The potatoes are a classic recipe from Catalan, Spain's Basque region. So is the Catalan spinach, which takes but minutes on the stovetop, as well as *Pa'am Tomaquet*. It translates literally as "bread with tomatoes", but like *sobremesa*, it has a lot more nuance to it. For optimal robust flavor and fun, make it just before serving, or even better, invite your guests to make their own. It's a wonderful party icebreaker, too.

You can prepare one or two of these recipes, but all five together make a meal that invites *sobremesa*. Serve, sit back, and savor the moment.



## Patatas Bravas (Fiery Potatoes) with Fresh Greens

(Serves 4 as an appetizer)

### *Roasted Potatoes*

**1 pound baby potatoes, or standard-sized potatoes cut into 2-inch bites**

**1 Tablespoon olive oil**

**Salt, to taste**

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper.

Bring a large pot of water to boil over high heat. Add potatoes and cook just until you can pierce them with a fork, about 8 minutes. They'll continue to cook in the oven, so they should still be firm, not cooked all the way through.

Drain well and blot dry. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Roast potatoes in the oven for about 10 minutes. Give them a stir or a flip and continue roasting for another 10-15 minutes. Potatoes should be golden and crispy outside and tender on the inside.

### *Spicy Tomato Sauce and Serving*

**1 Tablespoon olive oil**

**1 medium yellow onion, diced**

**3 cloves garlic, minced**

**One 14-ounce can crushed tomatoes**

**1 teaspoon sweet, hot, or smoked paprika**

**¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes**

**3 cups fresh spinach, arugula, or your favorite green**

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. When oil starts to shimmer, add the onions and garlic. Stir to coat in oil. Reduce heat to medium and sauté for 7-10 minutes or until the vegetables become translucent and fragrant.

Add tomatoes, paprika, and red pepper flakes. Bring to a simmer and cook for about 15 minutes or until the sauce thickens and the flavors blend. Allow the sauce to cool slightly, then blitz in a blender or food processor.

Serve potatoes with sauce on top of your choice of fresh greens.

Total calories per serving: 204

Carbohydrates: 32 grams

Sodium: 216 milligrams

Fat: 7 grams

Protein: 5 grams

Fiber: 4 grams

## Sherried Mushrooms

(Serves 4 as an appetizer)

**1 pound button or cremini (baby bella) mushrooms, halved if large and wiped clean**

**2 cloves garlic, minced**

**Pinch crushed red pepper flakes, if desired**

**1 Tablespoon olive oil**

**1/3 cup dry sherry (preferably Spanish)**

**Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste**

**Sprinkle of thyme leaves or chopped flat-leaf parsley to garnish (optional)**

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.

Spread mushrooms on the baking sheet. Sprinkle on the garlic and the red pepper flakes, if using. Drizzle olive oil and pour sherry over all. Stir lightly with a large mixing spoon.

Roast for 20 minutes, stirring halfway through. The mushrooms will be fragrant and tender, and much of the liquid will have reduced to a syrup.

Season with salt and pepper and sprinkle with thyme or parsley, if desired.

Serve mushrooms with crusty bread for sopping up any leftover cooking juices.

Total calories per serving: 91

Carbohydrates: 8 grams

Sodium: 9 milligrams

Fat: 4 grams

Protein: 3 grams

Fiber: 1 gram





## Pimientos de Padrón (Padrón Peppers)

(Serves 4 as an appetizer)

1 pound shishito peppers or *pimientos padrón*

2 teaspoons olive oil

Salt, to taste

Squeeze of lime (optional)

Preheat oven to 400 degrees and place a 9-inch cast iron skillet or rimmed baking sheet inside. Get it good and hot because the peppers need to meet the hot surface right away.

In a bowl, toss peppers in oil and transfer to the hot skillet or baking sheet. Place in oven and cook until lightly blistered, stirring after 2 minutes.

Give them another minute or so to get a char, and they're ready. Sprinkle with salt and optional lime juice. Serve right away, while hot and vivid green.

Total calories per serving: 50

Carbohydrates: 5 grams

Sodium: 13 milligrams

Fat: 2 grams

Protein: 3 grams

Fiber: 1 gram

## Pa'am Tomaquet (Catalan Tomato Bread)

(Serves 4 as an appetizer)

½ fresh baguette, cut into six to eight 2-inch slices  
1 garlic clove  
2 very ripe fresh tomatoes  
2 Tablespoons olive oil  
Salt, to taste

Toast bread lightly. Rub garlic clove over the toast.

Slice tomatoes in half, then use a box grater set over a bowl to pulverize them into a coarse pulp. Spoon the pulp onto the toast.

Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt before serving.

Total calories per serving: 184

Carbohydrates: 23 grams

Sodium: 247 milligrams

Fat: 8 grams

Protein: 5 grams

Fiber: 2 grams

## Catalan Spinach

(Serves 4 as an appetizer)

¼ cup raisins

Warm water, as needed

2 teaspoons olive oil

1 clove garlic, minced

¼ cup pine nuts, pistachios, or chopped almonds

6 cups fresh spinach, coarsely chopped

2 teaspoons sherry vinegar or other mild vinegar

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Pour raisins in a small bowl and cover with warm water to plump them up.

Heat oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add garlic, cooking briefly, just until the garlic starts to turn golden and fragrant. Drain raisins and add them to the skillet.

Add nuts, stirring to toast, for 1-2 minutes.

Add spinach a few handfuls at a time. Turn off heat, stir, and let spinach wilt just slightly. The leaves should remain bright green.

Splash in vinegar, stir for another minute, and season with salt and pepper.

Total calories per serving: 121

Carbohydrates: 12 grams

Sodium: 39 milligrams

Fat: 8 grams

Protein: 3 grams

Fiber: 2 grams

Ellen Kanner is the author of *Miami Vegan: Plant-Based Recipes from the Tropics to Your Table* and *Feeding the Hungry Ghost: Life, Faith, and What to Eat for Dinner*. She writes about food, culture, community, wellness, and sustainability. Read more at [ellenkanner.substack.com](http://ellenkanner.substack.com)



# Vegan Sources of Vitamin K

by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD

Vitamin K plays an essential role in blood clotting and bone health. Most people in the United States get a sufficient amount of vitamin K from food without the need for supplementation. Bacteria in our large intestines also create some vitamin K, which we can absorb. Vitamin K deficiency can occur in people with medical conditions such as ulcerative colitis, celiac disease, and cystic fibrosis, which affects their ability to properly absorb nutrients.

Vitamin K is a complex molecule and has several different forms that are found in foods and supplements. Phylloquinone (vitamin K1) is the main form of vitamin K that is found in foods. Menaquinone (vitamin K2) is made by bacteria and is found in small amounts in some animal foods and in fermented foods.

## The Adequate Intake (AI) for vitamin K is:

- Birth to 6 months: 2 micrograms/day
- 7-12 months: 2.5 micrograms/day
- 1-3 years: 30 micrograms/day
- 4-8 years: 55 micrograms per day
- 9-13 years: 60 micrograms/day
- 14-18 years: 75 micrograms/day
- 19 years and older: 120 micrograms/day (male); 90 micrograms/day (female)
- Pregnancy and lactation: 75 micrograms/day (14-18 years); 90 micrograms/day (19 and older)

Many whole plant foods supply us with vitamin K. As you can see, a small ½ cup portion of cooked greens provides all the vitamin K we need for a day.

## 10 Good Sources of Vitamin K for Vegans (in ½ Cup Cooked):

- Kale, 573 micrograms
- Collard greens, 530 micrograms
- Spinach, 494 micrograms
- Turnip greens, 426 micrograms
- Mustard greens, 415 micrograms
- Swiss chard, 286 micrograms
- Brussels sprouts, 150 micrograms
- Cabbage, 82 micrograms
- Broccoli, 81 micrograms
- Asparagus, 72 micrograms

Fat helps our bodies absorb more vitamin K. Eating vitamin K-rich vegetables along with a source of fat can increase the amount of vitamin K absorbed three-fold.<sup>1</sup>

The sources of vitamin K listed above all provide vitamin K in the form of vitamin K1. *Natto*, fermented soybeans found in Japanese cuisine, is one of the few plant-based sources of vitamin K2. There is no evidence to suggest that vegans whose diets contain adequate amounts of vitamin K1 need to be concerned about low dietary vitamin K2.<sup>2</sup>

Some studies find that vitamin K2 supplements that provide much higher amounts than could be obtained from food reduce the risk of fractures and increase bone mineral density in older women<sup>3,4</sup> but do not have a significant effect on bone mineral density in older men.<sup>5</sup> Additional research is needed on the effects of vitamin K2 supplements on bone health and heart disease in those following vegan diets.<sup>2</sup>

References can be found here:

[vrg.org/blog/2025/07/28/thinking-about-vitamin-k](http://vrg.org/blog/2025/07/28/thinking-about-vitamin-k)

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## NOTES FROM THE VRG SCIENTIFIC DEPARTMENT

### VEGAN EDUCATION

Reed Mangels, PhD, RD, and Arnie Alper, MD, staffed a VRG outreach table at the Food as Medicine Conference in Scotts Valley, California.

*Vegan Journal* Senior Editor Hannah Kaminsky created three videos on the uses of different types of plant milks:

- **Which Is Best Plant Milk for Lattes?** [youtube.com/shorts/UrwjvN7ec2U](https://youtube.com/shorts/UrwjvN7ec2U)
- **Which Plant Milk Should I Use for Pudding?** [youtube.com/shorts/WeMCqn1H23s](https://youtube.com/shorts/WeMCqn1H23s)
- **Which Plant Milk Works Best?** [youtube.com/shorts/0NWPHHjqzm0](https://youtube.com/shorts/0NWPHHjqzm0)

We were asked for permission to reprint our *My Vegan Plate* in an upcoming edition of the *Nutrition Science to You* textbook.

VRG sent English- and Spanish-language vegan coloring books to a child care center in Texas, as well as some vegan food samples to a scientist in Bangladesh working on technology for inexpensive foods which will last under various conditions.

# SCIENTIFIC UPDATE

by Reed Mangels,  
PhD, RD, FADA

## A REVIEW OF RECENT SCIENTIFIC PAPERS RELATED TO VEGETARIANISM

### Iron Absorption in Vegans

Iron, an essential nutrient, is found in food in two forms, heme and non-heme iron. Heme iron comes from meat, poultry, and fish and is well absorbed. Non-heme iron is also found in animal tissue and is the form of iron in plants (legumes, vegetables, grains, and nuts). Non-heme iron is thought to be less easily absorbed than heme iron. Spanish researchers recruited 27 study subjects ages 18-30 years old. Thirteen subjects had followed a vegan diet for at least the last six months. Fourteen were omnivores. Study participants were given almost three ounces of shelled pistachios to eat in a sitting. The pistachios provided 5.7 milligrams of non-heme iron. Blood samples were collected before and after eating the pistachios. Blood iron levels of both groups of participants were similar before eating the pistachios but were significantly higher in the vegans after eating the pistachios. This suggests that the vegan group absorbed more iron from the pistachios. The researchers theorized that those regularly eating a vegan diet may develop adaptations that promote non-heme iron absorption.

López-Moreno M, Viña I, Marrero-Fernández P, et al. Dietary adaptation of non-heme iron absorption in vegans: A controlled trial. *Mol Nutr Food Res*. 2025;69:e70096.

### Plant-Based Meat Promotes Iron Absorption

A factor, called a “meat factor,” has been shown to promote non-heme iron absorption from a meal that includes beef, poultry, or fish. Researchers wondered how important this factor is and whether plant-based meat would promote or inhibit non-heme iron absorption. Plant-based meat often contains phytic acid, a substance found in plants that interferes with iron absorption. The study subjects were

nonvegetarian women with low serum ferritin (stored iron).

They were randomly divided into two groups and were assigned to eat a lunch either containing four ounces of beef or four ounces of Beyond Meat every day for eight weeks. Other than the animal or plant-based meat, the lunch meals were identical. All of the women took an iron supplement that contained 32 milligrams of non-heme iron along with their lunch. Both groups were told to limit red meat at other meals to two meals per week. The women’s blood iron levels were measured at the start and the end of the study. After the eight week study, both groups had similar improvements in serum ferritin, body iron stores, and other indicators of iron status. These results suggest that the “meat factor” does not play an important role in improving iron status in women with low iron stores who are taking an iron supplement. The results also suggest that the phytic acid in the plant meat used in this study did not negatively affect non-heme iron absorption.

Hennigar SR, Miller KM, Murphy RD, et al. Effects of consuming an iron supplement with a meal containing animal or plant-based meat on indicators of iron status and anemia in women of reproductive age with iron deficiency: a randomized, controlled study. *Am J Clin Nutr*. 2025;122:859-865.

### Young Swedish Vegans, Lacto-Ovo Vegetarians, and Omnivores

A Swedish study examined the dietary intake and nutritional status of 16- to 24-year-olds. Sixty were vegan, 59 were lacto-ovo vegetarians, 55 ate fish, and 61 were nonvegetarians. All had followed their current dietary practice for at least six months; most for at least three years. The subjects kept records of what they ate for four days and underwent blood and urine tests. Vegans had higher intakes of iron, vitamin E,

and magnesium from food and supplements combined than all other groups. They had higher intakes of thiamin, and vitamins B6 and B12, than lacto-ovo vegetarians and fish eaters and higher intakes of folate and vitamin C than nonvegetarians and fish eaters. All dietary groups were at risk for inadequate intakes of vitamin D and selenium. This is noteworthy because, in Sweden, dairy and plant-based milk and yogurt and margarine are fortified with vitamin D. The vegan group was at risk for inadequate intakes of vitamin A and calcium, and the lacto-ovo vegetarians did not get enough vitamin B12. Approximately 73% of plant milks and yogurt in Sweden are fortified with vitamin B12, and 73-79% are fortified with calcium. Most vegans used vitamin B12 supplements. Blood indicators of iron and vitamin B12 status were in the normal range in all of the groups. The vegan, lacto-ovo vegetarian, and nonvegetarian groups all had low blood vitamin D concentrations. Urine iodine concentrations suggested that vegans, pescatarians, and nonvegetarians were at risk for an inadequate iodine status despite most participants using iodized salt every day. Limitations in the methods used to measure iodine status may have influenced these results. Overall, this study suggests that young Swedish vegans mostly meet their nutritional needs but should be more aware of good sources of calcium, vitamin A, selenium, and vitamin D.

Mulkerrins I, Medin AC, Groufh-Jacobsen S, et al. Micronutrient intake and nutritional status in 16-to-24-year-olds adhering to vegan, lacto-ovo-vegetarian, pescatarian or omnivorous diets in Sweden. *Eur J Nutr.* 2025;64:231.

## **Vegan and Vegetarian Diets in Recovery from Eating Disorders**

Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, may be treated in inpatient or outpatient settings. Meal plans that meet nutritional needs, promote normalized eating behaviors, and support weight gain as needed are a part of the treatment of eating disorders. There are no formal guidelines on whether these meal plans should encompass vegan or vegetarian diets for those who request them. In the past, meal plans did not allow foods to be excluded except for religious or medical reasons, such as allergies. The thinking was that promoting eating a

wide range of foods would support long-term recovery. More recently, clinicians have begun to acknowledge the need to respect long-standing dietary preferences, such as vegan or vegetarian diets. A recent report summarized eight studies that examined treatment practices for including or excluding foods in meal plans.<sup>1</sup> Most dietitians (81%) working in inpatient treatment settings allowed vegetarian diets while fewer (36%) allowed vegan diets. Most studies reported that foods could be excluded based on strong lifelong dislikes or exclusions that preceded the onset of the eating disorder. The researchers concluded that there was a lot of variability and a lack of standard, evidence-based protocols for determining which foods (or food groups) could be excluded from meal plans during recovery from eating disorders.

Another study surveyed 17 Australians (eight vegetarian, seven vegan, two semi-vegetarian/pescatarian) with a history of eating disorders about their treatment experiences.<sup>2</sup> Many participants recognized that vegan/vegetarian diets are sometimes chosen by people with eating disorders as a way of further restricting their diet. Others reported being vegan/vegetarian for a long time before developing an eating disorder. Participants described eating disorder treatment as rigid and that veganism/vegetarianism were generally not accommodated. Some felt their dietary preferences were not taken seriously and that they received little education about how to follow a healthy vegetarian or vegan diet during recovery. Others felt their choices were respected and that dietitians were knowledgeable about vegetarian/vegan diets. They emphasized the need for self-advocacy and the support of family and friends to follow a vegan/vegetarian diet during treatment. Some noted that having to compromise on their ethical principles by eating meat or other animal products during treatment made their recovery process harder. The study's authors called for more research "to explore how vegetarian or vegan values may be integrated into treatment models used to guide recovery."

<sup>1</sup> Bendall C, Winderlich J, Anderson A, et al. Meal plan inclusions and exclusions in the inpatient, outpatient and community setting for adolescent and adult eating disorder care: a scoping review. *J Eat Disord.* 2025;13:220.

<sup>2</sup> McLean CP, de Boer K, Lee MF, et al. The treatment experiences of vegetarians and vegans with an eating disorder: A qualitative study. *Nutrients.* 2025;17:345.

# Global Grab-and-Go

by Hannah Kaminsky

Life has never moved at a faster pace, seeming to accelerate with every passing year. Who can manage work-life balance when there aren't enough hours in the day to get three square meals on the table? The world isn't about to slow down, but culinary traditions across the globe have found ways to adapt. Every locale has their own legacy of quick-fix street foods, providing energy, comfort, novelty, and nutrition, right in the palm of your hand.

Pita pockets become the compact vessels for *arayas*, a Levantine favorite, stuffed with a spiced, "meaty" filling and grilled until crisp and juicy. *Suya*, a fiery Nigerian snack, delivers smoky, spiced "meat" on skewers with bold, addictive flavor. *Pupusas* from El Salvador offer thick corn cakes, hiding gooey cheese and creamy refried beans within. Jewish tradition hailing primarily from Eastern Europe and then NYC brings us knishes, the beloved potato pastries that can also conceal myriad flavor variations within. *Pinsa Romana*, though it looks and sounds like pizza, is a unique flatbread sensation all its own, with an airy, crisp, and chewy texture, made from ancient grains and a clever no-knead base. In Japan, *onigiri* are simple rice balls, plain or filled with anything you desire, always with a touch of umami.

No utensils need apply. These handheld savory sensations meet you where you are, on the road, packing for a picnic, or running to your next meeting.

## Arayas

(Serves 4)

- ¼ cup olive oil, divided
- 1 small yellow onion, minced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup button or cremini mushrooms, minced
- 1 Tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon ground coriander
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1½ cups cooked brown or green lentils
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, finely chopped
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
- Two 6-inch whole wheat pita breads

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, add 2 Tablespoons olive oil. Add onions and sauté for 3-4 minutes, until softened. Stir in garlic and mushrooms and cook for another 5-7 minutes, until the mushrooms release their moisture.

Add tomato paste, cumin, coriander, paprika, cinnamon, and crushed red pepper. Stir well and cook for 1-2 minutes until aromatic. Add lentils. cooking for another 2-3 minutes while mashing gently with the back of a spoon. Stir in parsley and season with salt and pepper.

Cut each pita in half to create pockets. Gently open each pocket and pack firmly with the lentil-mushroom mixture, keeping the exposed edges even.

Heat a grill pan or skillet over medium heat. Brush both sides of the stuffed pitas with remaining olive oil. With the cut sides down where the filling is exposed, cook for 2-3 minutes per side, pressing gently with a spatula, until crispy and golden brown all over.

Total calories per serving: 310

Carbohydrates: 37 grams

Sodium: 128 milligrams

Fat: 15 grams

Protein: 10 grams

Fiber: 9 grams





## Suya Skewers

(Serves 3)

### Seitan

- 1 cup vital wheat gluten
- 3 Tablespoons chickpea flour
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1 Tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 Tablespoon low-sodium soy sauce
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup low-sodium mushroom or vegetable broth

In a large bowl, combine wheat gluten, chickpea flour, garlic powder, and onion powder. In a small bowl, whisk tomato paste, soy sauce, and broth, then add to dry ingredients. Knead 2-3 minutes, until elastic.

Shape the dough into a log and wrap in foil. Set up a steamer by adding 1-2 inches of water to a pot and placing a steamer basket or rack above the water line. Bring the water to a gentle boil.

Place the seitan log in the basket, cover the pot with a lid, and steam for 25-30 minutes. The seitan is done when it feels firm and springy. Let cool completely.

### Yaji (Spice Mix)

- 3 Tablespoons roasted, unsalted peanuts
- 1½ teaspoons ground ginger
- 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- $\frac{1}{2}$ -1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Add all ingredients in a food processor and pulse to combine. The peanuts should be coarsely chopped; don't overdo it or it will turn into paste.

### Assembly

- 2 Tablespoons peanut oil
- Salt, to taste

Cut seitan you have prepared into thin strips. Place in a bowl and toss with oil and *yaji* spice mix, coating thoroughly. Season with salt sparingly. Marinate for at least 30 minutes and up to 24 hours.

Thread seitan onto skewers. Grill over medium-high heat for 3-4 minutes per side, or bake in a 425-degree oven for 15-20 minutes, turning once, until edges are crisp and slightly charred.

Total calories per serving: 332  
Carbohydrates: 13 grams  
Sodium: 242 milligrams

Fat: 16 grams  
Protein: 35 grams  
Fiber: 2 grams

# Pupusas

(Serves 12)

## *Curtido (Pickled Cabbage Slaw)*

- 2 cups shredded green cabbage
- ½ cup shredded carrots
- ¼ cup thinly sliced red onion
- ½ jalapeño, halved, deseeded, and thinly sliced
- ½ cup boiling water
- ¼ cup apple cider vinegar
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon salt

In a medium bowl, combine cabbage, carrots, onions, and jalapeños. Pour boiling water on top and let sit for 5 minutes, allowing the vegetables to soften. Drain thoroughly, then mix in vinegar, oregano, and salt. Cover and chill for at least 30 minutes.

## *Masa Dough*

- 3 cups *masa harina*
- 2¼ cups warm water
- ¼ teaspoon salt

In a mixing bowl, combine *masa harina*, warm water, and salt. Stir until dough forms, then knead for 1-2 minutes. The dough should be soft but not sticky. Keep covered with a lightly dampened kitchen towel.

## *Filling*

- 1 cup low-sodium refried pinto beans
- ½ cup finely diced red bell pepper
- ½ cup corn kernels
- ½ cup shredded vegan mozzarella cheese
- 2 cloves minced garlic
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper

In a medium bowl, combine all filling ingredients.

Divide the dough into 12 equal balls. Flatten one ball into a disk in your palm. Add 1-2 Tablespoons of filling in the center, gently fold the edges over, and pinch to seal. Flatten into a thick disk (about 4 inches wide), keeping the filling inside.

Heat a lightly oiled skillet or griddle over medium heat. Cook each pupusa for about 3-4 minutes per side, or until golden brown in spots and lightly crisped around the edges. Serve hot, alongside cool *curtido*.

Total calories per serving: 172

Fat: 2 grams

Carbohydrates: 34 grams

Protein: 5 grams

Sodium: 215 milligrams

Fiber: 6 grams

# Cheesy Broccoli Knishes

(Serves 12-14)

## *Knish Dough*

- 2 cups bread flour**
- ½ teaspoon baking powder**
- ⅛ teaspoon baking soda**
- ⅛ teaspoon salt**
- ¼ cup olive oil**
- ¼ cup aquafaba (liquid from canned chickpeas)**
- 2 Tablespoons water**
- ¾ teaspoon apple cider vinegar**

In a large mixing bowl, sift flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together. In a small bowl, whisk oil, aquafaba, water, and vinegar. Pour wet ingredients into dry and use a sturdy spatula or wooden spoon to incorporate. Stir until it forms a loose, shaggy dough.

Turn the mixture out onto a lightly floured surface and knead for 5-10 minutes, until the dough becomes smooth and supple. Cover with a clean kitchen towel or piece of plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for at least an hour before proceeding. Alternatively, you could prepare the dough ahead of time and store it in the fridge for up to a day before using. Just let it warm back to room temperature first.

## *Cheesy Broccoli and Potato Filling*

- 1¼ pounds (about 2 large) russet potatoes, peeled and diced**
- 2 Tablespoons vegan butter**
- ¼ cup aquafaba**
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1½ cups finely chopped fresh broccoli**
- ½ cup nutritional yeast**
- 1 Tablespoon apple cider vinegar**
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper**

Place potatoes in a large pot and add enough water to cover. Set over medium heat and bring to a boil. Cook until fork-tender, about 15 minutes.

Thoroughly drain and transfer to a large bowl. Add vegan butter while still hot to melt in, along with aquafaba and salt. Mash thoroughly until smooth and creamy. Add broccoli, nutritional yeast, vinegar, and black pepper, folding with a spatula to combine.

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Divide the dough in half. Lightly flour your work surface and begin rolling one of the balls into a rectangle, as thinly as possible. Aim for about 14 inches long by 6 inches wide.

Mound half of the filling in a thick line down the horizontal center. Wrap pastry dough around it in a long cylinder, pinching the ends to seal. Cut the log into 6-7 pieces, about 2 inches long. For each individual piece, pinch and press one of the cut ends in, wrapping it over the filling but still allowing a peephole at the top. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat, and place the open end down on the mat, gently pressing into a slightly flattened round.

Repeat with remaining dough and filling, allowing at least an inch between each knish on the baking sheet. Bake for 30-35 minutes, rotating the baking sheet halfway through, until golden brown all over. Let cool for at least 10 minutes before serving.

Total calories per serving: 203  
Carbohydrates: 27 grams  
Sodium: 168 milligrams

Fat: 7 grams  
Protein: 7 grams  
Fiber: 3 grams



# Pinsa Romana

(Serves 4)

## Dough

2 cups all-purpose flour

¾ cup rice flour

⅓ cup soy flour or chickpea flour

1½ teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon dry active yeast

1 cup cold water

2 Tablespoons olive oil, divided

In a large bowl, whisk together the flours, salt, and yeast. Slowly add cold water, mixing with a wooden spoon or your hand until a shaggy dough forms. Add 1 Tablespoon olive oil and mix to incorporate. The dough will be sticky.

Cover and let rest for 30 minutes at room temperature. Then, take one side of the dough, stretch it, and fold it over. Rotate the bowl and repeat three more times. Cover and refrigerate for 24-72 hours to ferment slowly. This gives *pinsa* its signature texture.

Remove dough from the fridge and let it sit at room temperature for about 1 hour. Lightly flour your work surface and divide the dough in half. Gently stretch

each portion into an oval shape, about 8-10 inches long. Be careful not to press out too much air.

Preheat oven to 500 degrees. Transfer the dough to parchment paper and then slide the parchment paper onto baking sheet. Brush with remaining olive oil. Bake for 5-6 minutes, until lightly puffed.

## Toppings

Halved cherry tomatoes

Thinly sliced zucchini

Fresh arugula

Fresh basil

Balsamic glaze

Flaky salt

Vegan Parmesan (optional)

Remove from oven, scatter cherry tomatoes and zucchini over the surface of both pieces, and return to bake for another 7-10 minutes, until the edges are golden and crispy.

Top with arugula, basil, and a drizzle of balsamic glaze. Finish with a pinch of salt and vegan Parmesan, if desired.

Total calories per serving: 449

Carbohydrates: 79 grams

Sodium: 912 milligrams

Fat: 8 grams

Protein: 14 grams

Fiber: 5 grams

# Edamame Onigiri

(Serves 6)

## Rice

2 cups dry sushi rice

2¼ cups water

½ teaspoon salt

½ cup thinly sliced chives

Rinse the rice under cold water until the water runs mostly clear. In a medium saucepan, combine rice with fresh water and salt. Bring to a boil, then cover and reduce heat to low. Simmer for 15 minutes, remove from heat, and let steam for another 10 minutes. Uncover and let stand until cool enough to handle. Fold in chives.

## Filling

½ cup shelled edamame, lightly chopped

1 teaspoon toasted sesame oil

1 teaspoon toasted sesame seeds

1 teaspoon reduced-sodium soy sauce or tamari

½ teaspoon rice vinegar

In a small bowl, combine filling ingredients.

## Assembly

1 sheet nori, cut into 4-inch long strips

With lightly moistened hands, take ⅓-½ cup warm rice at a time, flatten slightly, and place 2 teaspoons of filling in the center. Fold the rice around the filling and shape into a triangle or ball, pressing gently but firmly.

Repeat with remaining rice and filling. Wrap a strip of nori around the bottom right before serving. The nori will continue to soften, so omit it if you plan to make these ahead of time.

Total calories per serving: 236

Fat: 1 gram

Carbohydrates: 49 grams

Protein: 5 grams

Sodium: 226 milligrams

Fiber: 2 grams

Based in Austin, Texas, Hannah Kaminsky is a recipe developer, food photographer, cookbook author, and Senior Editor of *Vegan Journal*. They focus on bold flavors and simple techniques to make vegan food more accessible and delicious for everyone.



# Vegan-Friendly Children's Books

By Amy Burger

Books can be a great way to teach children, young and old, about kindness, caring for others, and living more thoughtfully. If you're raising vegan children or know some, picture books are perfect for helping them develop compassion for animals and the environment from an early age.

## Picture Books Promoting a Vegan Lifestyle

The following books tell engaging, age-appropriate stories that naturally introduce the values behind veganism. Through fun rhymes, sweet animal stories, or colorful adventures, these books give adults easy opportunities to talk with younger kids about important ethics during reading time.

- ***V is for Vegan*** by Ruby Roth: An ABC-style book that teaches children the core values of veganism with fun rhymes and colorful images. Roth has written additional vegan titles, including *The Help Yourself Cookbook for Kids*.
- ***Junebug: No Life Too Small*** by Nicole Daniels: The plot follows a young girl who discovers the emotional depth of animals and begins to ask questions about eating them.
- ***Steven the Vegan*** by Dan Bodenstein: Steven goes on a school trip to a farm and along the way, explains his veganism to classmates with empathy and humor.
- ***Dave Loves Chickens*** by Carlos Patiño: A silly yet informative book featuring Dave, a blue alien, who learns why animals like chickens deserve kindness.
- ***The True Adventures of Esther the Wonder Pig*** by Steve Jenkins, Derek Walter & Caprice Crane: A charming tale based on a real animal who became a vegan icon, this story is about a micro pig who grew larger than expected and changed her humans' lives.
- ***A Boy and a Jaguar*** by Alan Rabinowitz: The story of Alan, who wants to be a voice for the big cats at the zoo, but struggles due to a stutter.

## Middle Grades & Young Adult Books Promoting a Vegan Lifestyle

As kids mature, they start thinking more deeply about right and wrong, figuring out who they are, and forming their own opinions. Fiction is a great way for them to explore vegan ideas, sometimes through characters who are vegan themselves, or through stories about animal rights, protecting the environment, or standing up against unfair systems. These books get readers thinking about their own choices and help them picture what the world could look like if we all acted with more compassion and stood up for what we believe in.

- ***Charlotte's Web*** by E.B. White: A beloved, classic story that emphasizes the emotional depth of animals and the concept of not eating friends.
- ***Black Beauty*** by Anna Sewell: A 19th-century classic told from a horse's point of view, advocating for humane treatment of animals.
- ***The One and Only Ivan*** by Katherine Applegate: Focuses on a captive gorilla and the ethics of animal entertainment.
- ***Vegan, Virgin, Valentine*** by Carolyn Mackler: This coming-of-age story of an aunt and niece who are very different from each other explores the question of self-identity.
- ***Vegan Teenage Zombie Huntress*** by G.G. Silverman: This quirky horror-comedy follows vegan teens through a zombie apocalypse and is the first in the two-book *Redvale Zombie Prom* series.
- ***How to Be a Good Creature: A Memoir in Thirteen Animals*** by Sy Montgomery: This nonfiction book chronicles the author's relationships with animals. Montgomery has written more animal-centric titles for a variety of ages.

*Amy is a VRG volunteer and former VRG intern. She's a librarian and part-time teacher in Georgia.*

# An Update on Carmine

by Jeanne Yacoubou, MS

The Vegetarian Resource Group received an email from a reader asking us to confirm whether Iberia Foods' Aloe Vera Strawberry drink contained insect-derived carmine. She noted that the red-tinted drink was labeled as *vegan*, along with all the other flavors sold in green-colored bottles.

We contacted the company in June 2025. The office manager at Iberia Foods told us that the word “vegan” appears on the label of all the aloe vera beverages. The only one that contains carmine, an insect-derived red coloring, is the strawberry variety.

The next day, we received a voicemail informing us that new labels were being printed without the word *vegan* for the strawberry drink. It would take some time before the new labels would appear in stores.

As a follow-up, The VRG emailed about company plans to remove carmine from their strawberry beverage. They replied: “As explained previously, we have stopped printing labels that state vegan due to carmine being one of the ingredients. I wasn't informed of any substitutions. It will remain the same ingredients.”



Cochineal, *Dactylopius coccus*, from which carmine is derived  
Photo by Roberto Michel / Getty Images

## Petrochemical Dyes Versus Natural Colorants on Ingredient Labels

In April 2025, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced the phase-out of eight petrochemical-based synthetic dyes—including FD&C Red No. 40—from food, beverages, pharmaceuticals, and other products. This is the latest “clean label” regulation in a growing number of countries.

To replace the synthetic dyes, the FDA recently announced the approval of three natural colorants, though none of them provides the same bright red hue characteristic of many foods and beverages, such as Iberia Foods' Aloe Vera Strawberry drink. Those new colorants are vegan.

As The VRG reported in 2009, the FDA requires mandatory labeling of all foods and beverages containing carmine or cochineal extract because of the possibility of severe allergic reactions to them. However, the insect source does not need to be specified.

## Carmine Market 2023-33

Demand for carmine as a natural red colorant is projected to increase significantly from \$50.8 billion in 2023 to \$91.8 billion in 2033. Peru, Mexico, and Chile are the top commercial carmine exporters. It takes approximately 70,000 female beetles to yield one pound of carmine.

## Carmine Substitutes and Insect-Free Carmine

In 2013, The VRG reported on plant-derived lycopene and anthocyanin, vegan substitutes for carmine. Microbial production of several different food colorings is also popular.

Increasing red colorant yields through traditional fermentation or precision fermentation using fungal or bacterial genes, some of which produce the same carminic acid found in beetles, is a rapidly growing area of research. In these cases, *insect-free carmine* is vegan.

# The Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG) Comments on the USDA's and FDA's Request for Information to Help Develop a Uniform Definition of Ultra-Processed Foods for Human Food Products in the U.S. Food Supply

September 8, 2025

The Vegetarian Resource Group (VRG) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the USDA's and FDA's Request for Information to help develop a uniform definition of ultra-processed foods for human food products in the U.S. food supply.

Nutritionally deficient ultra-processed foods including soft drinks, candies, salty snacks, processed meats, and baked desserts are an excessive part of the diet of many American children and adults. The negative health effects of diets high in these types of foods has long been recognized. There are, however, foods that could be categorized as "ultra-processed" that do not have the same negative health effects as other food categorized as "ultra-processed."

Although there have been a variety of attempts to define "ultra-processed" food, including those by various U.S. states, the definitions generally suffer from an inability to differentiate between foods that can have negative health effects and those where processing can be beneficial or have a neutral effect. An example of negative health effects would be processes by which sugars, salt, saturated fats, and other substances associated with negative health are added to foods. Positive health effects could include food fortification or processing to improve bioavailability of vitamins and minerals.

The Nova system identifies ultra-processed foods as foods that are ready to heat or to eat with little or no preparation.<sup>1,2</sup> Foods in this category have undergone processes such as salting, baking, frying, pickling, and canning. They are typically high-calorie, high-sodium, low-fiber foods that contain little protein and few vitamins or minerals. Regrettably, many foods, such as plant milks and commercial veggie burgers that may be eaten by vegetarians, vegans, and others seeking to reduce consumption of animal products, are categorized as ultra-processed foods.<sup>3-5</sup> It is impossible to equate a fortified soymilk and a corn syrup-sweetened soft drink in terms of nutritional quality or potential health effects.

Cow's milk is considered a minimally processed food; in contrast, fortified soymilk has been classified as an ultra-processed food. A recent study examined

the effect of substituting soymilk for cow's milk.<sup>6</sup> Substituting soymilk for cow's milk resulted in a reduction in blood pressure, LDL cholesterol, and C-reactive protein. Substituting soymilk for cow's milk did not affect blood glucose, diabetes control, or insulin levels and had no effect on body weight or BMI.<sup>6</sup> These results raise questions about categorizing fortified soymilk as an ultra-processed food.

A variety of research studies have found all foods categorized as ultra-processed do not have identical effects on the risk of heart disease and stroke,<sup>7,8</sup> cancer,<sup>8</sup> diabetes,<sup>8,9</sup> cognitive impairment,<sup>10</sup> body weight,<sup>11</sup> and frailty.<sup>12</sup>

For example, a study of more than 200,000 U.S. adults found that only processed meats and sugar-sweetened beverages were associated with an increased risk of heart disease and stroke, while ultra-processed savory snacks and cold cereals were associated with a lower risk of heart disease.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, a higher intake of ultra-processed breads and cereals was associated with a lower risk of stroke.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that different types of ultra-processed foods have different effects on the risk of heart disease and stroke.

Similarly, a study of more than 260,000 adults found that higher consumption of ultra-processed animal-based products and artificial and sugar-sweetened beverages was associated with a higher risk of multimorbidity (developing at least two chronic diseases, namely cancer, heart disease, and/or type 2 diabetes).<sup>8</sup> Higher consumption of ultra-processed plant-based alternatives or ultra-processed breads and cereals was not associated with an increased risk of multimorbidity.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, a more nuanced analysis of ultra-processed foods is warranted prior to developing labeling recommendations.

Another study of more than 110,000 U.S. adults found an increased risk of type 2 diabetes in those with the highest consumption of ultra-processed foods.<sup>9</sup> Subgroup analysis found that higher consumption of certain food groups, including breads made with refined flours, artificially and sugar-sweetened beverages, and animal-based products was associated with higher risk of type 2 diabetes. In contrast, greater

consumption of foods that were classified as ultra-processed including cereals, whole-grain breads, and packaged sweet and savory snacks was associated with lower risk of type 2 diabetes.<sup>9</sup>

A study of 4,750 middle-aged and older U.S. adults found that consuming an additional serving each day of ultra-processed animal products was associated with a 17% higher risk of developing cognitive impairment.<sup>10</sup> One additional serving per day of ultra-processed beverages (like sugar-sweetened soft drinks) was associated with a 6.3% higher risk of developing cognitive impairment.<sup>10</sup> Higher ultra-processed food consumption overall was not associated with a higher risk of developing cognitive impairment, nor was higher consumption of ultra-processed snacks, grains, or sweets.<sup>10</sup>

These studies and other similar studies that look at sub-categories of ultra-processed foods strongly support the idea that a blanket categorization of foods as ultra-processed will be confusing and is unlikely to provide health benefits. It may result in the avoidance of foods associated with positive health benefits.

Data indicate that the health effects of ultra-processed foods are highly dependent on their nutritional quality.<sup>13</sup> We support the evaluation of foods based on their nutritional and health effects, rather than solely focusing on the degree of processing. At this time, it is premature to unequivocally call for avoiding all ultra-processed foods. Additional careful study is needed before characterizing certain foods as “ultra-processed.” Ultimately, a subset of what are now classified as ultra-processed foods would be developed and would encompass those ultra-processed foods or categories of foods that are associated with clear public health risks. Other foods that are currently classified as “ultra-processed” would be placed in a different category, such as the one proposed by the American Society for Preventive Cardiology.<sup>14</sup> The American Society for Preventive Cardiology has proposed a new category of “smartly processed” foods that includes fortified plant milks and plant protein-based meat and egg substitutes.<sup>14</sup> Whole-grain breads and commercial bean spreads could also be in this category. The American Society for Preventive Cardiology describes “smartly processed” foods as low in saturated fat, refined carbohydrates, and cholesterol, and states that these foods can add nutritional value<sup>14</sup> to a balanced diet. This sort of categorization system that takes into consideration the nutritional quality of the food is more helpful than simply categorizing foods as “ultra-processed.”

Until additional research is completed, documents such as *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-2025* provide useful guidance and were developed to provide current information and to utilize evidence-based research and a stringent process to develop recommendations for foods to eat and foods to limit. These documents provide support for a marked reduction in consumption of those ultra-processed foods that are high in saturated fat, added sugars, and salt. Clearly identifying these foods on food labels and working with food companies to improve the composition of these foods should be a priority. 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.<sup>15</sup>

VRG is an independent nonprofit 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 for this work comes primarily from memberships and individual contributions.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important issue.

*Sincerely,*

**Reed Mangels, PhD, RD**, Nutrition Advisor,  
The Vegetarian Resource Group  
**Charles Stabler** and **Debra Wasserman**, Co-Directors,  
The Vegetarian Resource Group

*References:* [bit.ly/ultra-processed-foods-definition](http://bit.ly/ultra-processed-foods-definition)



## Veggie Underground Cheese Slices

To everyone who complains that vegan cheese doesn't melt properly, this one's for you. Veggie Underground has defied the odds by crafting unapologetically vegetable-forward slices, embracing whole plants rather than extracts and added flavors, and by mastering melting capabilities that eclipses most mass-produced options. Carrot, Parsnip, and Red Bell Pepper cheese slices are perfectly sized to fit on top of burgers and inside grilled cheese sandwiches, but can also be torn or cut to work as a topping for pizza, nachos, baked potatoes, and so much more. It's uncanny how much they taste like gooey, stretchy, satisfyingly unctuous dairy cheese, despite their wholesome foundations. In fact, they taste cheesier than some processed "cheese" foods; omnivores may not be fooled, but they could easily be won over. Gluten-, nut-, soy-, GMO-, and palm oil-free. Available at Central Market in TX, Union Market in NY, specialty stores nationwide, and Amazon.com. Read more at [veggieunderground.com](http://veggieunderground.com)  
*Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor*



## Bitchin' Sauce Chocolate Sauce

Best known for their spicy almond-based dips, Bitchin' Sauce has stepped out of their savory comfort zone to make a decadent dessert topping worthy of your sweetest cravings. Dark and rich as ganache, with a subtle grit reminiscent of coarsely ground Mexican chocolate, it's almost like eating brownie batter stolen straight from the mixing bowl. Chilled or gently warmed, it has the ideal consistency for dipping fresh fruit or drizzling over ice cream. Far more decadent than ordinary chocolate almond butter, its bold yet balanced sweetness sets it apart from the average spread. Take it over the top by adding a salty contrast, like pretzels or potato chips—but only if you trust yourself not to eat the whole container at once. Certified gluten-free, kosher, and non-GMO. Available at Kroger, QFC, Smiths, and [bitchinsauce.com](http://bitchinsauce.com)  
*Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor*



## Bare Life Dairy-Free Hot Cocoa Mix

Few things are as comforting as a steaming mug of dark, bittersweet hot cocoa. Bare Life makes an instant mix, both in bulk bags and individually portioned packets, that skips the dairy in favor of creamy powdered coconut milk, paired with earthy coconut sugar. That means you only need to add hot water to whip up a velvety brew. Coconut is the base flavor, but if you're not a big fan of the tropical fruit, try the seasonal Peppermint or Pumpkin Spice variations that more effectively disguise it. If it's sweltering outside, grab the Frozen Hot Cocoa Mix instead, designed to be blended with ice into a frosty frappe. No one would be the wiser if you wanted to slip some coffee, or coffee liqueur, into the blender as well. Certified gluten-free, kosher, organic, refined sugar-free, and soy-free. Available at Whole Foods across the East Coast, small food co-ops, and [eatbarelife.com](http://eatbarelife.com)  
*Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor*



## Red Fox Spices Ethiopian Meal Kits

To many people in the U.S., Ethiopian cuisine is still mysterious, if not daunting, which is why Red Fox Spices meal kits are so groundbreaking. It bundles those distinctive spice blends, legumes, and ready-made *injera* (teff flatbread) so anyone can enjoy time-honored dishes like *ater kik* (yellow split pea stew), *misir* (red lentil stew), and *shiro* (chickpea stew), regardless of cooking experience or skill level. Recipe cards are included to ensure success. All you need to add is fresh produce like onions, garlic, and ginger, plus oil and water. Anyone with a taste for adventure will relish this flavorful trip to Africa from the comfort of their own home. Each kit makes 3-4 servings, and the leftovers only get better with time. For those of more timid palates, proceed with caution as they do not hold back on the heat. Certified gluten-free. Available at [redfoxspices.com](http://redfoxspices.com)  
*Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor*



## Farmer Foodie Cashew Parm

When plain nutritional yeast just isn't cutting it for a cheesy fix, but you still want to stick to whole foods, cashew parm is the umami, healthy solution.

Made solely from cashews, nutritional yeast, and spices, it tastes homemade—in a good way. Golden Cheddar delivers on that classic powdered cheese topping flavor, while Italian Herb imparts a distinctly pizzeria type of taste. Both can be used as stand-alone condiments on all the usual suspects, like popcorn and pasta, or incorporated into recipes for sauces, eggless scrambles, mashed potatoes, and so much more. Though it won't melt or dissolve without a trip through the blender, that added texture is an asset against otherwise monotonous meals. Certified fair trade and gluten-free. Available in select Whole Foods, East Coast co-ops and specialty stores, and through Amazon and [thefarmerfoodie.com](http://thefarmerfoodie.com)

*Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor*



## Every Body Eat Snack Thins

Crackers are the backbone of any good party spread, though rarely given the credit that they're due. Every Body Eat puts the humble staple at the center of the charcuterie tray, crafting allergen-free crisps that command full attention. Cheese-Less takes on a buttery, cheddar-like flavor that put the conventional Cheez-It® to shame. Chive & Garlic sits squarely between ranch and sour cream and onion, sure to please fans of both. Fiery Chile Lime injects some real spice and zest into the conversation, delivering a bold kick that lingers long after the first bite. Sea Salt Chia may sound basic in comparison but showcases a rounded nutty, toasted taste, without any nuts involved. Standing up to the thickest dips without buckling under pressure, their strength and resounding crunch defies their delicate appearance. Certified corn-free, gluten-free, kosher, and non-GMO. Available at H-E-B, Sprouts, Whole Foods, and [everybodyeating.com](http://everybodyeating.com)

*Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor*



## Edward & Sons Organic Rice Noodles

Rice noodles have been around for over 2,000 years and seem to only get better with every passing day. Now, we have a quartet of upgraded options emphasizing high-quality whole grains. Most visually striking are the Organic Brown & Black Rice Pad See Ew Noodles, which are broad, flat, and have a distinctly lilac hue. These are also available as a plain Organic Brown Rice version for all the same toothsome texture with less dramatic effect. Organic Brown & White Rice Vermicelli Noodles are delicate and thin, cooking almost instantly once they hit boiling water. For fans of Thailand's national dish, the Organic Pad Thai Rice Noodles with Turmeric don't disappoint, delivering crave-worthy chewy, subtly sticky strands with a golden glow. Stay loyal to the classics or noodle around to choose culinary adventure; each variety brings something uniquely satisfying to the table. Certified gluten-free and organic. Available at national co-op grocers and [edwardandsons.com](http://edwardandsons.com)

*Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor*



## Beyond Meat Sun Sausage

Originally at the forefront of the hyper-realistic plant-based meat movement, Beyond Meat has gone back to basics by introducing a new line of sausages that celebrate beans and grains. Rather than alluding to pork, beef, or any other animal, these links focus on bold seasonings instead. Cajun has a serious bite, emboldened by hot paprika and crushed red pepper, making it a welcome addition to dirty rice, étouffée, and jambalaya. Pineapple Jalapeño blends sweet and spicy notes that beg for an invite to your next pizza party but are welcome guests at the backyard BBQ, too. Pesto is sure to be a fast favorite, leading with a sweet basil flavor that's a perfect match for pasta and other Italian dishes. Certified gluten-free, GMO-free, kosher, and soy-free. Available at Sprouts and Whole Foods. Read more at [beyondmeat.com](http://beyondmeat.com)

*Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor*



# The VRG's 2025 Video Contest Winners



*Zaire Lamb from Florida*

“I’ve been veggie for two years, and while there have been ups and downs along the way, it’s been one of the most rewarding lifestyle shifts I’ve made. The Vegetarian Resource Group has been a great support in my journey, and I appreciate the work they do to encourage young people like me to stick with it. I love recreating meals I used to eat in plant-based versions. As a Black vegetarian, I think it’s important to share this part of myself. In our community, vegetarianism isn’t always common, and I want to help break the stigma that it’s boring or something not obtainable. It can be cool, fulfilling, and, if done right, really affordable, too.” See: [bit.ly/VRG-Zaire](https://bit.ly/VRG-Zaire)



*Angelica Okoroha from Texas*

“I’m interested in veganism because of how it affects my entire life. My veganism didn’t just stop at deciding not to eat animal products; it catapulted my love for the earth and efficient living. Before I became vegan, I had no interest in what was around me. However, because I made this choice, I never want to stop giving back what the Earth has been giving me.” See: [bit.ly/VRG-Angelica](https://bit.ly/VRG-Angelica)

*Vani Patel from Texas*

“I believe being veggie is a compassionate way to care for our planet, animals, and the environment. It shows that you are a kind and caring person. It is a small act, but it is so powerful, as it preserves our beautiful planet and protects the animals. I enjoy promoting healthy eating, and I hope this video inspires others to consider choosing a plant-based lifestyle and the positive, impactful change it can bring.” See: [bit.ly/VRG-Vani](https://bit.ly/VRG-Vani)



- **The deadline** for the next Vegetarian Resource Group video contest is July 15, 2026. See [www.vrg.org/videoscholarship.php](https://www.vrg.org/videoscholarship.php)
- **For information** about VRG’s \$5,000 scholarships for high school seniors who have promoted veganism, see [www.vrg.org/student/scholar.htm](https://www.vrg.org/student/scholar.htm). The deadline is February 20 each year.
- **To support VRG’s outreach** to young people and beyond, join at [www.vrg.org/member](https://www.vrg.org/member)
- **Or donate** at [www.vrg.org/donate](https://www.vrg.org/donate)

# Vegan Backpacking and Camping Meals

by Debra Wasserman

Outdoor enthusiasts who follow a vegan diet have long looked for lightweight, nutritious, and easy-to-prepare meals to take on the trail. Fortunately, several companies now offer freeze-dried and dehydrated foods that don't compromise on flavor or nutrition. These are a few of your best bets for eating well while roughing it.

## Backpacker's Pantry

Known for its wide range of freeze-dried meals, Backpacker's Pantry has several vegan-friendly options. *See:* backpackerspantry.com

- Chana Masala: Spicy Indian chickpea stew
- Cuban Coconut Rice & Black Beans: Caribbean rice and beans
- Kathmandu Curry: Himalayan lentils and brown rice
- Louisiana Red Beans & Rice: Creole-seasoned staples
- Pad Thai: Noodles with vegetables and peanuts
- Three Bean Veggie Stew: Chickpeas, pintos, and red beans
- Three Sisters Southwestern Quinoa & Beans: Southwestern-seasoned vegetables and whole grains

## Base Camp Luxefly

Base Camp Luxefly makes gourmet entrées to be enjoyed in more rustic settings. *See:* luxeflybasecamp.com

- Vegan Roasted Root Vegetables: A blend of roasted butternut squash, beets, and carrots
- Vegan Red Curry with Kabuto Squash and Organic Rice: Thai-inspired curry with sweet squash and rice

## Good To-Go

Founded by a professional chef, Good To-Go offers an extensive range of meals inspired by global cuisine. *See:* goodto-go.com

- Carrot-Ginger Power Bowl: Hemp, kale, and carrots
- Cucumber Chaat Salad: Indian-style cucumber salad
- Kale and White Bean Stew: Cozy stew featuring the flavors of fennel and thyme
- Mexican Quinoa Bowl: Spicy quinoa with black beans, corn, and squash.
- Mushroom Risotto: Creamy Arborio rice with mushrooms and basil
- Oatmeal: Hearty, classic, high-fiber breakfast
- Pasta Marinara: Gluten-free pasta in tomato sauce

## Peak Refuel

While best known for their meat-based meals, the brand also includes a few vegan options. *See:* peakrefuel.com

- Butternut Dal Bhat: Traditional Nepalese lentil and rice dish with squash
- Mountain Berry Granola: Ready-to-eat breakfast
- Three Bean Chili Mac: Beans and pasta in a sweet and spicy chili sauce

*Meals labeled "vegetarian" may include dairy or honey. Always check labels to verify if a meal is fully vegan.*

## 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 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 in Japan: Travel Tips & Tricks

By Hiroko Kato

When I returned to Japan after my VRG internship 25 years ago, finding restaurants offering vegan options was not easy. The vegan movement in Japan has progressed slowly compared to most metropolitan areas, and only a small number of people are interested in an animal-free diet out of climate change concerns. Given these circumstances, one of the key drivers promoting veganism in Japan is the growing number of foreign tourists with diverse dietary needs. Now you can see vegan versions of ramen, sushi, *okonomiyaki*, *gyoza*, and even *sashimi*. However, challenges remain when it comes to accessing vegan menus or products. Here are some tips for your journey.

## Essential Words and Phrases for Vegans

While English speakers are more common in tourist areas, Japanese is still the dominant language. If you are unsure whether a food is vegan, translation apps can help—especially when trying to understand the mix of three types of characters (*kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*) that appear on menus and food labels.

Words like beef, pork, chicken, cheese, yogurt, and gelatin are commonly recognized in Japan. Here are some useful Japanese words to remember—even though these items are often understood in English as well:

- **Niku (肉):** meat
- **Sakana (魚):** fish
- **Tamago (卵):** eggs
- **Gyūnyū (牛乳):** milk
- **Hachimitsu (蜂蜜):** honey

When ordering, you can say “*Watashi wa ~ wo tabemasen* (I don’t eat ~).” For example: “*Watashi wa niku wo tabemasen* (I don’t eat meat).”

A card that says which foods you avoid can help when communicating with staff—even better if it includes a Japanese translation, which you can easily create using Google Translate or AI. It’s convenient to keep it on your phone to show when needed. When no one is available to help, don’t forget you can use Google Lens to translate menus, food labels, and maps in real time.

The simplest phrase would be “*Kore wa vegan desu ka?* (Is this vegan?)” However, keep in mind that not everyone may understand what vegan means.

## Finding Vegan-Friendly Restaurants

Japan has a rich tradition of Buddhist vegan cuisine (*shojin ryori*), served at some temples and specialty restaurants. Since *shojin ryori* can be expensive and not widely available, you might prefer more casual options. A simple Google search for “vegan restaurant” may bring up confusing results, as some listed places may not be truly vegan. Seek out more reliable sources like Happy Cow ([www.happycow.net](http://www.happycow.net)), a global vegan dining directory. Joining Facebook groups focused on vegan travel in Japan offers up-to-date and helpful advice from fellow travelers.

Tourist information centers and airports sometimes provide pamphlets of vegan-friendly restaurants. For example, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government releases a detailed annual guide: “Tokyo Vegan and Vegetarian Restaurant Guide” (available online). Below are some other helpful local resources worth checking:

- **Chugoku area:** Hiroshima and Western Honshu Vegetarian Friendly Guide
- **Fukuoka prefecture:** Fukuoka’s vegetarian-friendly fare for every type of diner
- **Iwate prefecture:** Vegan and Vegetarian Guidebook
- **Minakami city:** VEGETOWN MINAKAMI
- **Nagano city:** What do you want to eat today? (SHOKU TABI NAGANO)

If fully vegan restaurants are unavailable, some chain restaurants with plant-based options may be a good choice. Note that they may use shared kitchen tools for both vegan and non-vegan dishes, and that menus can change without notice or vary by locations.



**MOS Burger:** A hamburger chain offering a regular menu item, Green Burger Teriyaki, fully plant-based. **Soup Stock Tokyo:** A soup bar chain with vegetarian options (excluding meat, fish, eggs, dairy; honey should be checked on their website) with rice/bread.

**CoCoICHI:** Over 12,000 locations across Japan serve plant-based curry with add-ons including a variety of vegetables and *natto* (fermented soybeans).

**Doutor:** Offers a whole grain soy meat sandwich with tomato-stewed beans and vegetables; contains no animal ingredients.

**Royal Host:** Offers a vegetable curry using plant-based meat and no animal ingredients.

**Denny's:** Some hamburger steak dishes allow a soy meat substitute (extra 55 JPN). The ZEROMEAT soy-based hamburger steak salad is on the regular menu.

**IKEA:** Offers various plant-based options.

**Starbucks:** Offers a plant-based donut, hot tortilla, bagel sandwich, and snacks.

Salad bowl spots and Italian restaurants are also good bets. Indian restaurants that offer vegan menus are widespread across Japan; however, Japanese curry typically uses a roux that contains animal products.



### Common Challenges in Figuring Out What Is Vegan

Many dishes that appear vegan, such as miso soup, soba, udon, tofu dishes, simmered vegetables (*nimono*), seasoned greens (*ohitashi*), often contain fish-based broth called *dashi*. Double check before ordering. Only a few places offer vegan *dashi* made from *kombu* (kelp) and dried shiitake mushrooms. You might want to ask if soy sauce can be used instead.

Also, be mindful of colorings and common additives like cochineal, lard, and casein. However, food labeling laws in Japan don't always require full ingredient disclosure. Many products include eggs, dairy, gelatin,

and other animal ingredients without clear labeling, and vegan food labels are still limited. When in doubt, choose items made with simple ingredients, or minimally seasoned foods, such as only with salt.

You may find items labeled as plant-based, but it's safer to check the food labels to make sure they don't contain eggs or dairy products. Another trap is soy meat products, which sometimes include meat extracts.

### Grocery Shopping

It's always wise to carry vegan snacks with you, especially during long train rides or road trips. Train station vendors and highway rest stops rarely offer vegan meals, so plan ahead to avoid ending up with only plain *onigiri* (rice balls).



Fresh fruits and roasted nuts are good choices. Some SOYJOY soy snack bars and certain tofu bars are plant-based options that are suitable. Traditional Japanese sweets such as mochi can be an option. Still, check the food label carefully for non-vegan ingredients. Keep in mind that the use of white sugar is not always clearly indicated. Try consulting [www.isitvegan.jp](http://www.isitvegan.jp) for a database of known vegan products and brands.

My top recommendation is *yakiimo*—grilled sweet potatoes with amazingly rich flavor, widely available, and very satisfying. *Hoshiimo* (dried sweet potatoes) and *amaguri* (sweet roasted chestnuts) are excellent.

Convenience stores (*konbini*) generally have limited vegan selections, and again, it's important to check labels carefully, as even salads may contain meat or fish. Some better finds include unsweetened soy milk, freshly made smoothies, and fresh edamame. Natural Lawson, a natural foods convenience chain with about 130 locations mainly in the Tokyo area, sells plant-based products such as buddha bowls, snacks, and instant ramen, udon, and soba noodles.



Another great place to explore is *michi no eki* (roadside rest areas with local products). While they're found throughout Japan, those in mountainous or rural areas carry locally grown vegetables, fruits, and packaged snacks that happen to be vegan-friendly.



### Rest Easy as a Vegan in Japan

Staying at a traditional Japanese inn (*ryokan*) is a unique cultural experience. In addition to sleeping on a futon laid out on a *tatami* mat and soaking in a Japanese-style bath, these accommodations typically include multi-course dinners and breakfast prepared by in-house chefs. When booking, clearly explain your dietary needs and confirm whether vegan meals can be arranged. *Shukubo*, or Buddhist temple inns, may offer *shojin ryori*, but be sure to check whether their meals are truly vegan friendly. Hotels are generally more experienced with dietary requests, but it's still important to notify them in advance.



If you prefer to shop at local supermarkets and cook for yourself, you'll see soy meat, vegan cheese, egg substitutes, plant-based curries, pasta sauces, soy ice cream, and more, though availability may vary by location. You'll also find canned beans, frozen vegetables and fruits, various tofu products, and pre-cooked rice. If stocking up on perishables, make sure your room includes a mini fridge, not to mention at least a microwave to prepare it. Natural food stores may offer an even wider selection, and chains like Kaldi and GYOMU Super carry a broad range of ethnic foods, from Indian to Mexican, that can be suitable for vegan cooking.



### Be Part of the Change

In recent years, more and more local governments have begun hosting vegan-focused seminars for the tourism industry. In addition to Tokyo and Kyoto, a number of cities are working to promote vegan-friendly services and menus.

Your presence and feedback as a vegan traveler help strengthen this movement. So don't hesitate to share your thoughts—and enjoy exploring Japan's rich and diverse food culture in a vegan way.

*Hiroko Kato is a freelance writer in Japan. She interned with VRG over 25 years ago and keeps in touch.*

# Book Reviews

## Seed to Plate Soil to Sky

by Lois Ellen Frank, PhD

Get ready to savor a bold, flavorful journey through Native American Southwestern cuisine, reimagined with a vibrant vegan twist. While the heart of this book is rooted in promoting health and wellness within Native communities, the recipes are a celebration of heritage and taste that everyone can enjoy.

The introduction explains the history of Native American cultivation and cooking. Corn, beans, squash, chiles, tomatoes, potatoes, cacao, and vanilla are the star ingredients throughout this cookbook. They're also the basis of how the chapters are organized, emphasizing each ingredient in different ways. These items are considered to be gifts from the Native Peoples of the Americas to the world. The author states, "Some of the recipes are presented as they have been prepared for millennia, while others are contemporary versions of traditional dishes."

In the Corn chapter, you will find dishes such as White and Blue Corn Tortillas, Tamales, Posole with Red Chile, Hominy Harvest Stew, Grilled Sweet Corn, and Blue Corn Pancakes with Piñon Butter. Bean-focused dishes include three Bean Spreads, Black Beans with Chocolate and Chipotle, Navajo Minestrone Soup, and Bean and Spinach Tacos.

Moving on to Squash, you'll see recipes for Kabocha Squash Salad, Spaghetti Squash Slaw, Savory Pumpkin Spiced Crispy Chickpeas, and Pumpkin and Ginger Scones. The Chiles chapter presents Red Chile Sauce, Red Chili Potato Stew, Green Chili Enchilada Lasagna, Poblano Corn Bread, and Chile Pecans.

Tomato-centered dishes include Tomato Quinoa Salad, Hearty Tomato Soup, and a Cherry Tomato Tarte. Potatoes take center stage in Potato and Green Chile Tacos; Sweet Potato, Kale, and Wild Rice Bowl; Potato and Blue Corn Gnocchi; and Sweet Potato and Black Bean Tamale.

Vanilla shines in Vanilla Grilled Peaches, Baked Berry Vanilla Crisp, and Vanilla Almond Milk. Finally, find cacao in Mole Sauce, Cacao Spice Rub, Chocolate Bread Pudding, and Chocolate Nice Dream.

The chapter on Pantry Staples covers many useful basics like Chile Garlic Oil, Toasted Pumpkin Seeds,



Vegetable Broth and Stock, and No Fry Frybread. You'll also find a terrific list of sources for Native foods as well as an extensive bibliography.

*Seed to Plate Soil to Sky* (ISBN 978-0-3068-2729-7) is a 320-page hardcover book. It is published by Hachette Go and retails for \$30. *Debra Wasserman/VRG Coordinator*

## A Grain, a Green, a Bean

by Gena Hamshaw

Gena Hamshaw, MS, RD, uses grains, greens, and beans to create over 80 delicious vegan recipes. You'll find a wide range of dishes in this cookbook. For instance, take the section on Bowls & Salads. How does Lemon Orzo, Tempeh Meatballs, and Roasted Zucchini sound? Or why not try Wheat Berries, Crispy Chickpeas, and Kale with Apples for an autumnal change of pace?

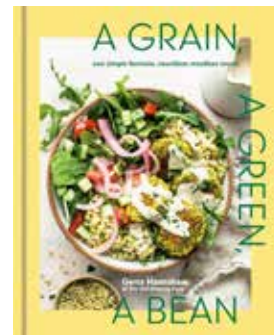
Moving on to the Beans & Greens on Bread chapter, you'll find Marinara White Bean and Kale English Muffins, French Onion Brothy Beans and Greens with Garlic Toast, and Pita Chips and Crispy Broccoli and Green Tahini Sauce. All these creative combinations make incredibly satisfying full meals!

Stovetop Meals include dishes such as Noodles with Spicy Soy Protein and Baby Bok Choy; Red Lentil Carrot Soup with Pearl Couscous; and Cornbread Muffins, Smoky Black-Eyed Peas, and Collard Greens. In the mood for some savory baking? Try Lasagna Rolls with Tofu Cashew Ricotta and Spinach or Sheet-Pan Gnocchi, White Beans, and Arugula with Roasted Butternut Squash.

Don't worry if you're a cooking novice. Gena covers the Basics including Red Pepper Sauce, Cashew Sour Cream, Tahini Sauce, and Cheesy Topping. As a reward for all your hard work, there are plenty of desserts like Chocolate Snack Cake, Banana Bread, Chocolate Chunk Cookies, and Olive Oil Cake.

Credit should also go to Ashely McLaughlin, a talented food photographer and stylist. Her stunning visuals shine throughout this fantastic book.

*A Grain, a Green, a Bean* (ISBN 978-1-9848-6320-1) is a 240-page hardcover book. It is published by Ten Speed Press and retails for \$26. *Debra Wasserman/VRG Coordinator*



# Vegan Cooking Tips

## Quick and Easy Dishes

### Featuring Fresh Herbs

by Chef Nancy Berkoff, EdD, RD



**H**erbs have been used for both medicinal and culinary purposes for centuries. They add unparalleled flavor, texture, and color to everything they touch. The usual wisdom for calculating substitutions is to use twice as much fresh herbs as dried. For example, one teaspoon of dried rosemary would become two teaspoons fresh, and vice versa.

**Rosemary**, a richly aromatic herb, can have an antibacterial effect on food. What this means is that rosemary may actually reduce the bacterial levels in some foods, acting as a natural preservative. Use rosemary in earthy, rich, and hearty dishes like soups, stews, grilled or roasted vegetables, marinades for meatless proteins, and more. If you have a full branch of fresh rosemary, strip the leaves and use the remaining stick as a skewer to create aromatic kabobs.

**Parsley** and **basil** have concentrated levels of *chlorophyll*, the green pigment found in plants. Chopped fresh parsley and basil add wonderfully verdant color and flavor to sauces, sandwiches, salad dressings, dips, pasta, rice, and salads. Create an open-faced sandwich with a crusty baguette or sourdough bread, a layer of pesto or tomato sauce, thinly sliced onions and peppers, and a sprinkle of nutritional yeast, topped with shredded fresh basil and parsley. Or make a fast, creamy soup by blending soft silken tofu with a small amount of canned tomatoes, chopped onions, minced garlic, and fresh parsley and basil in a food processor or blender until smooth. Heat, stirring, until bubbly. Be careful not to overcook, as these more fragile herbs lose flavor with more time and heat.

**Sage** is a robust and earthy herb with silvery-green leaves that are slightly fuzzy to the touch. Its savory, slightly peppery flavor makes it an ideal match for hearty, autumnal dishes. Try using chopped fresh sage in roasted squash or sweet potato dishes, lentil stews, or plant-based stuffing. Lightly sauté in olive oil before stirring into creamy sauces, or crisp whole sage leaves

in a pan and sprinkle over grain bowls or risotto for a fragrant, textural finish. A little bit goes a long way.

**Dill**, with its feathery leaves and bright, clean taste, adds a burst of freshness to many dishes. Traditionally used in Eastern European and Mediterranean cuisines, dill complements creamy, tangy, and pickled foods especially well. Stir chopped fresh dill into vegan yogurt or cashew cream to create a quick *tzatziki*, or toss it with cucumbers, lemon juice, and vinegar for a classic salad. In addition, dill pairs beautifully with roasted potatoes, white beans, or grains like barley and farro. Its delicate leaves wilt quickly, so add it just before serving to preserve its distinctive flavor.

**Cilantro**, also known as coriander, has a bold, citrusy punch that enlivens countless global cuisines. Whether blended into salsas, sprinkled over curries, or folded into rice and grain salads, cilantro brings brightness and a hint of spice. It's particularly popular in Mexican, Indian, and Southeast Asian cooking. Add generous handfuls of chopped fresh cilantro to tacos, stir-fries, or lentil soups for a pop of color and flavor.

**Chives** are slender, tubular green herbs with a mild, onion-like flavor. Unlike their more pungent allium relatives, chives are best used fresh and uncooked. Snip them into creamy soups, sprinkle over baked potatoes or mashed cauliflower, or blend into vegan spreads and dressings for subtle sharpness and a touch of green.

**Mint** contains menthol, a volatile oil that imparts a distinctive cooling sensation. It can be used in cold salads and dressings, hot and cold beverages, as well as sweets and dessert. Add chopped mint leaves to scrambled or baked tofu or to cold tofu salads. Mix with cooked barley, finely diced red onions, tomatoes, parsley, and a lemon vinaigrette to make tabbouleh. Mint is also a very popular addition to peas. Again, it's best to add the herb at the end of the cooking process for maximum mint flavor.

# Mary Finelli

## Advocating for Fish



by Amy Burger

of fishes. The documentary film *Seaspiracy* also helped raise awareness of fish exploitation and depletion on a global scale. She was pleasantly surprised when the phrase “Fish are friends, not food” from *Finding Nemo* gained traction. That small cultural touchstone helped make empathy for fishes more approachable.

Finelli finds inspiration in a growing community of supporters and in seeing public concern for fishes gradually increase. Her advice to new advocates: “Do it! Don’t let others discourage you.” She recommends that budding activists research, create educational materials, leverage social media, and build a network of like-minded people. “Urge other animal activists to support your cause to exponentially increase advocacy of it,” she suggests.

When not working, Finelli enjoys gardening and spending time with her husband, long-time activist Howard Edelstein, along with their companion animals. She also appreciates a good vegan seafood dish, naming Great Sage and Yuan Fu in Maryland, and the mobile vendor Oh My Cod as favorite spots.

Through her leadership at Fish Feel, Finelli continues to highlight the intelligence, sensitivity, and unique personalities of fishes, urging us all to rethink how we relate to our aquatic neighbors.

For more information, see: [fishfeel.org](http://fishfeel.org) and [www.vrg.org/journal/vj2017issue2/2017\\_issue2\\_fishes.php](http://www.vrg.org/journal/vj2017issue2/2017_issue2_fishes.php)

Mary Finelli, founder and president of Fish Feel, is a passionate advocate for fishes. Through strategic outreach, educational campaigns, and coalition-building, she has worked to shift public perception and drive systemic change in how fishes are viewed and treated.

Finelli says that widespread misperceptions often fuel disregard for fishes, explaining that “concern for fishes has been lacking among the public in general largely due to social cues that misrepresent fishes, indicating that they are unthinking, insentient things.”

Since founding Fish Feel in 2013, Finelli has witnessed meaningful change in the public recognition of fish as “beings deserving of respect and compassion.” She credits books like *Do Fish Feel Pain?* and *What a Fish Knows* with expanding people’s understanding

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.





**THE VEGETARIAN RESOURCE GROUP**  
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### Enter VRG's Video Contest: Deadline July 15, 2026



Create and submit an original video relating what you want to tell others about veganism. Some possible topics: food, nutrition, your feelings about veganism, water usage and veganism, animal rights, or other vegan topics that appeal to you. Humor and honesty are appreciated. All videos should be positive, not be critical of anyone, and not include any footage of animal cruelty. You may submit a video you have already made. AI-generated videos are prohibited.

Judging criteria include accuracy and engagement potential for social media. Entrants give permission to The Vegetarian Resource Group to post and to share the video, to link to and from the video, and share the video with the media. Several monetary prizes will be awarded. For more information, see [vrg.org/videoscholarship.php](http://vrg.org/videoscholarship.php)

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