

Vegan Journal

Health, Ethics & Environment since 1982

Vegan on a Budget

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Nutrition Hotline

Federal Food Assistance Programs Offering Vegan Food

by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD



QUESTION: I'm a vegan who works at a low-wage job and am having trouble making ends meet. Are there programs that would help me buy vegan food?

S.I., via email

ANSWER: You may be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). According to USDA's website, this program "provides food benefits to low-income families to supplement their grocery budget so they can afford the nutritious food essential to health and well-being."¹ SNAP eligibility is based on income, resources, and other requirements. You can apply in the state where you live. SNAP benefits can be used to purchase food at authorized stores, at farmers markets, and in many locations online.

SNAP benefits can be used to purchase vegan foods including fruits and vegetables, breads and cereals, nuts, nut butters, plant milks, snack foods, non-alcoholic beverages, soy foods, veggie meats, and other foods. Benefits can be used to purchase seeds and plants that produce food, too. Vitamins and other supplements are not eligible.

Some states have restricted which foods can be purchased with SNAP benefits. Foods

affected vary by state and could include candy, sodas/soft drinks, energy drinks, "prepared desserts," and "sweetened beverages."² For example, in Arkansas, oat milk, coconut milk, and almond milk can be purchased but not malt/chocolate drinks³; no information was available about other plant milks or chocolate-flavored plant milks. This area of restricted foods is evolving; for the most current information, check with your state's program.

Those who meet income requirements and are pregnant or post-partum and/or have an infant or children under age 5 could be eligible for the Women, Infants, Children (WIC) program. This federal program provides participants with vouchers to purchase specific foods identified as being nutritious.

Although not all foods that can be purchased with WIC vouchers are vegan, many such as fruits and vegetables, tofu, peanut butter, dried and canned legumes, and whole grain products are. Some states allow plant milks, plant cheese, and plant yogurts that meet nutrition requirements, as well as nut and seed butters.⁴

Local programs can offer more help and may be open to all without the need to document income or employment. Free

food distributions may take place at local food banks, religious institutions, parks, and more. Vegan items including fruits and vegetables, grain products, legumes, peanut butter, canned goods, and others may be distributed. Some programs offer foods specifically for those without kitchens. Additionally, some offer cooked meals. Meals may be vegan or include some foods that vegans could eat. Your local library may have information about places providing food assistance. Search online for "local food assistance" as another way to find resources.

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¹ USDA. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). fns.usda.gov/snap/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program Updated August 2025.

² USDA. SNAP Food Restriction Waivers. fns.usda.gov/snap/waivers/foodrestriction Updated March 2026.

³ Arkansas Department of Human Services. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP). humanservices.arkansas.gov/divisions-shared-services/county-operations/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-snap

⁴ USDA. Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC): Revisions in the WIC Food Packages. 89 FR 28488:28488-28567. [federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/18/2024-07437/special-supplemental-nutrition-program-for-women-infants-and-children-wic-revisions-in-the-wic-food](https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2024/04/18/2024-07437/special-supplemental-nutrition-program-for-women-infants-and-children-wic-revisions-in-the-wic-food) April 2024.

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MANAGING EDITOR: Debra Wasserman

SENIOR EDITOR: Hannah Kaminsky

EDITORS: Keryl Cryer, MA;

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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

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

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Vegan Journal is one project of The Vegetarian Resource Group. We are a nonprofit that educates the public about veganism and the interrelated issues of health, nutrition, environment, ethics, and world hunger. To join VRG and receive *Vegan Journal* in the U.S., send \$25 to The Vegetarian Resource Group, P.O. Box 1463, Baltimore, MD 21203, or go to vrg.org/donate. Additional donations support our outreach and research.



Note from the Coordinators



Vegan on a Budget

We keep hearing that it's too expensive to be vegan. This is ironic to us, since for centuries, cultures around the world have largely eaten plant-based meals supplemented by a little meat due to economics and limited resources. Think of China (rice, vegetables, tofu, other soy products), India (rice, vegetables, lentils, chickpeas), the Middle East (pita, hummus, fava beans), Africa (cassava, yams, plantains, maize, peanuts, okra), and Latin America (tortillas, beans, rice). During the Great Depression and WWII in the United States, people even ate "Wacky Cake," made without eggs, milk, or butter, as those items were rationed.

To remove the cost myth as a hurdle from becoming vegan, we created this issue of "Vegan on A Budget." Let us know if you would like copies to give out. Also, please share *Vegan Journal* Senior Editor Hannah Kaminsky's videos on eating vegan on a budget. These are available on VRG's Instagram and YouTube channels and on Hannah's Instagram (@bittersweet__).

One of our interns said, "I kind of assumed being vegan was automatically expensive, especially since it's often shown like that in the media. However, The Vegetarian Resource Group demonstrated that it can actually be really affordable. For example, the Dollar Tree meal plan at www.vrg.org/nutrition/vegan-at-the-dollar-tree.pdf illustrated that someone could create a full week of vegan meals just using foods from there, like canned beans, rice, pasta, peanut butter, frozen vegetables, tortillas, and shelf-stable soymilk. This proved that, even at a discount store, you can still meet most basic nutrition needs when on a tight budget.... At the same time, this made me reflect more on the idea of accessibility.

'I also read VRG's testimony readings, and after looking through them, I realized the main purpose of their comments was to make sure vegan and vegetarian diets are actually represented in national policies.... It showed that small changes in wording can really impact people's access to food, because specifying supports clearer labeling for things like plant-based milks and asking WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) to include options like tofu. This made me think about how public comments actually do matter. They give organizations like VRG a chance to speak up before policies are passed, which is super important because it helps make sure vegan diets are taken seriously.'

Thank you to all our readers and VRG members working for a better world and helping to spread information that assists others.

Debra Wasserman Charles Stahl

Debra Wasserman & Charles Stahl
Coordinators of The Vegetarian Resource Group

VRG's MEMORIAL and HONORARY GIFT PROGRAM

How often have you wanted to make a gift in honor of a loved one or friend but weren't sure which charities are vegan-friendly, pro-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

In memory of: _____

In honor of: _____

Please send acknowledgment to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

My name and address:

Name: _____

Address: _____

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

Thank you to Cathy Conway, MS, RD, for staffing VRG's booth at FNCE (Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo) in Nashville, TN, as well as to Phil Becker for staffing the booth for VRG at the World Vegan Fest in San Francisco, CA.

Thanks to Robert and Martha Armenti, Roger Hansen, Franchesca Reece, and Barbara Stasz for their donations!

Thanks for the Work VRG Does!

We deeply appreciate the compassion and integrity behind the work you do. Thank you for being a trusted voice for animals, health, and the planet.

Gaia and Loki, via email

Thanks so much for everything you do to promote veganism and for having led the way in 1983 for me to turn over that new leaf that led me to this hugely-valued lifestyle!

Janet S., via email

VRG 2021 Scholarship Winner Update

I want to update you all on my successes throughout my time at University of California San Diego. In June 2025, I graduated with a dual major in political science & data analytics (BS) and global health (BA) plus a minor in climate change studies.

During my time at UCSD, plant-based and sustainable food advocacy was extremely important to me. Luckily, I was able to work on UCSD's Sustainability Team and serve as a Sustainable Food

Procurement Fellow through UC's Office of the President. With these roles, I worked on a range of sustainability projects, including creating plant-based educational resources, increasing plant-based options at UCSD's markets, and most recently (as of Sept. 2025), eliminating the upcharge on ALL plant-based milks served at UCSD's coffee bars!

Now that I have graduated, I hope to continue plant-based advocacy throughout my career. I am so grateful for the support from VRG since my time in high school, and really appreciate all you do!

Arpi Keshishian, via email

Editor's Notes:

See Arpi's VRG scholarship information on our website at vrg.org/blog/2021/05/17/california-student-arpi-keshishian-wins-10000-vegetarian-resource-group-scholarship

For information on other winners and to apply for VRG's annual scholarship contest, see 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 or send a message to us on Facebook: facebook.com/thevegetarianresourcegroup

Coming in the next issue...

BREAKING BREAD

Plus: 2026 VRG Scholarship Winners, Sheet Pan Meals, Make Your Own Natural Colors and Flavors, and More!

Low-Cost Vegan Menus

by Reed Mangels, PhD, RD

Based on USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Maximum Allotment

Every month, the United States Department of Agriculture updates the cost of its Thrifty Food Plan, which is based on the cost of groceries needed to provide a healthy, budget-conscious diet for a family of four.¹ In June 2025, the Thrifty Food Plan for a family of four (male and female, 19-50 years old; a 6- to 8-year-old child; and a 9- to 11-year-old child) cost \$229.50 for one week or \$994.40 for one month.² Compare that to four years prior (2021) when a week's food was estimated to cost \$192.84, or six years before (2019) when for a family of four, a week's worth of food was estimated to cost \$149.30.² These estimations are for the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia. Costs are higher in Alaska and Hawaii.

The Thrifty Food Plan is more than just a theoretical calculation. The \$229.50 per-week food cost for a family of four is what the U.S. government bases Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits on for residents of most states and the District of Columbia. These benefits are used at stores to purchase food. According to the most recent report, in fiscal year 2024, 12.3% of U.S. residents, about 41.7 million people per month, received SNAP benefits.³

Could a vegan family of four have a healthy diet that costs under \$229.50 per week? You might say "no" if you think of vegan diets with lots of specialty or convenience foods and out-of-season produce. You might say "yes" if you consider how prices for some non-vegan foods like eggs have gone up. In March 2025, we found that vegan egg replacers, including flax or chia seeds and commercial egg replacers, cost from 2 to 84 cents less per serving than the single egg they were replacing.⁴ Basic foods like dried or canned beans, whole grains, and seasonal fruits and vegetables are often less expensive than prepared fresh or frozen convenience foods or imported unseasonal produce.

From its earliest days as the Baltimore Vegetarians, The Vegetarian Resource Group has developed low-cost menus. In 1985, volunteer dietitian Ruth Ransom helped to create an inexpensive four-week meal plan. We have seen that vegan diets can be relatively inexpensive while still meeting nutritional needs and using foods that are readily available. In July 2025, we challenged ourselves to develop a week of vegan menus whose cost would not exceed the cost of USDA's Thrifty Food Plan for a family of four. The Thrifty Food Plan, as created by USDA, is not a vegan or vegetarian plan.

We planned a week's worth of vegan menus for a family of four consisting of a 40-year-old male, a 40-year-old female, their 13-year-old son, and their 6-year-old daughter. Menus were planned to meet the needs for most nutrients and to provide adequate calories for all the family members. In addition, we worked to include foods that would be available in mainstream grocery stores and would be easy to prepare. Weekday breakfasts and lunches required little preparation time; lunches were often based on leftovers. We planned on children bringing a lunch to school since few schools offer vegan options.

Interns and volunteers checked prices and availability of menu items in supermarkets both in-person and virtually. They found that store brands were often lower priced and nutritionally similar to name brands. Sometimes a larger package size was the best buy if the contents of the larger package would be eaten before they went bad. If only a small quantity was needed, sometimes a smaller package size was the sensible choice, even if it cost more per ounce.

We used the regular price of items rather than sale prices since sales are usually for a limited amount of time and don't reflect the price that a shopper could expect to pay.

The total cost of the menu was based on the amount of each ingredient actually used unless the food was perishable. For example, a container of salt might cost 89 cents but only 2 cents worth of salt would be used. We expect that some items will already be on hand and that this will balance out the cost of buying a larger

amount of other items than is needed for a week.

We checked prices in stores in Alabama, California, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, and Texas. Generally, stores carried most, if not all, items. With the exception of CA, food for a family of four for a week cost less than the Thrifty Food Plan cost of \$229.50 per week.

Store, location	Menu cost for 1 week of food for 4 people	Number of items not available at store
ALDI, College Park, Maryland	\$141.46 (\$155.99)	12; fresh kale, fresh collards, frozen peppers, dried basil, curry powder, ginger powder, mustard powder, turmeric, dried black-eyed peas, liquid smoke, burger buns, popcorn kernels
Giant, Rockville, MD	\$198.30	0
Walmart, Montgomery, AL	\$170.27	0
H-E-B, McKinney, TX	\$180.95 (\$181.30)	1; ginger powder
Stop & Shop, Pennington, NJ	\$201.91	0
Safeway, Salinas, CA	\$271.81	0
Kroger, Detroit, MI	\$179.11	0

** Amount in parentheses is the cost with all items included. Cost of missing items was estimated based on another area store.*

We did not visit stores like Costco or Sam's Club, that require a yearly membership fee. If you can afford the membership and the cost of purchasing large quantities of staple foods like dried or canned beans, pasta, soymilk, grains, and cereal, you may be able to cut costs even more.

Our menus include one or more servings of fortified soymilk every day because fortified plant milks are a convenient way to attain calcium, vitamin B12, and vitamin D. The higher protein content of soymilk, compared to many other plant milks, helps those with lower calorie needs meet their needs for protein without exceeding their calorie requirements. As fortified foods go, plant milks are relatively inexpensive, compared to breakfast cereals or plant-based burgers. A vegan multi-vitamin, multi-mineral supplement is another option but may not be feasible for those on a limited budget. SNAP benefits cannot be used to buy vitamins and supplements, so these would need to be paid for out of pocket. Fortified foods can be purchased with SNAP benefits.

We opted to mostly use canned beans and a few quick-cooking dried beans. Replacing the canned beans with dried beans will cut costs⁵ but will take more time to cook. Seasonal produce may be less expensive than the fruits and vegetables used in these menus.

Choosing a vegan diet can be a way to save money while eating a healthy, whole foods diet. The menus that are included in this project can be used by SNAP participants and others who need ideas and guidance for low-cost foods.

Thank you to our volunteers who made this project possible: Ellie Meyerstein, Neha Vivek, Chaltu Watkins, and Aileen Zhang.

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- 1 USDA Food and Nutrition Services. USDA Food Plans. www.fns.usda.gov/research/cnpp/usda-food-plans 2026.
- 2 USDA Food and Nutrition Services. USDA Food Plans: Monthly Cost of Food Reports. www.fns.usda.gov/research/cnpp/usda-food-plans/cost-food-monthly-reports 2025.
- 3 USDA Economic Research Service. Percent of Population Receiving SNAP Benefits in Fiscal Year 2024. www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/chart-gallery/chart-detail?chartId=55416 2025
- 4 Mangels R. Egg Replacers: Good for Animals and the Planet and Your Budget! vrg.org/blog/2025/03/27/egg-replacers-good-for-animals-and-the-planet-and-your-budget/amp 2025.
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Low-Cost Vegan Menus

One week for a 4-person household (2 adults and 2 children)

These menus are examples of low-cost meals. They can be customized to fit your needs, including adjusting portions, using different seasonal produce, and substituting other foods that you like. These menus do not meet the recommendation for vitamin D. See vrg.org/journal/vj2009issue2/2009_issue2_vitamin_d.php for information about vitamin D sources for vegans. Recipes for dishes with an asterisk (*) are at vrg.org/nutrition/low-cost-vegan-recipes.pdf

Sunday		6-year-old girl	13-year-old boy	Adult woman	Adult man
Breakfast	<i>Fruit French Toast*</i>	2 pieces	4 pieces	3 pieces	5 pieces
	<i>Orange</i>	1 orange	1 orange	1 orange	1 orange
Lunch	<i>Hearty Macaroni Dinner* (page 13)</i>	1/5 recipe	1/5 recipe	1/5 recipe	2/5 recipe
	<i>Steamed frozen broccoli</i>	1/2 cup	1/2 cup	1 cup	1 1/2 cups
	<i>Peanut butter on whole wheat bread</i>	-	1 slice whole wheat bread with 3/4 Tablespoon peanut butter	-	-
Dinner	<i>Creole Black-Eyed Peas*</i>	1/6 recipe	1/6 recipe	1/3 recipe	1/3 recipe
	<i>Brown rice, cooked</i>	1/2 cup	3/4 cup	1 cup	3/4 cup
	<i>Sautéed Collards*</i>	1/4 recipe	1/4 recipe	1/4 recipe	1/4 recipe
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup
	<i>Peanut butter on whole wheat bread</i>	-	1 slice whole wheat bread with 3/4 Tablespoon peanut butter	-	-
Snack	<i>Cantaloupe cubes</i>	1/2 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup
	<i>Whole grain crackers with Lentil Pâté*</i>	1 ounce crackers 1/8 pâté recipe	1.5 ounces crackers 1/8 pâté recipe	1.5 ounces crackers 1/8 pâté recipe	1 ounce crackers 1/8 pâté recipe

Monday		6-year-old girl	13-year-old boy	Adult woman	Adult man
Breakfast	<i>Whole grain cold cereal with fortified soymilk and banana</i>	1 ounce cereal 1 cup soymilk 1 medium banana	2 ounces cereal 1 cup soymilk 1 medium banana	1 ounce cereal 1 cup soymilk 1 medium banana	2 ounces cereal 1 cup soymilk 2 medium bananas
	<i>Whole wheat toast with jam or fruit spread</i>	1 slice toast 1 Tablespoon jam/ spread	2 slices toast 1 Tablespoon jam/ spread	1 slice toast 1 Tablespoon jam/ spread	2 slices toast 1 Tablespoon jam/ spread
Lunch	<i>Wrap with black beans and sweet potatoes</i>	½ cup cubed sweet potatoes ½ cup black beans 1 wheat tortilla 2 Tablespoons salsa	1 cup cubed sweet potatoes 1 cup black beans 2 wheat tortillas ¼ cup salsa	1 cup cubed sweet potatoes 1 cup black beans 2 wheat tortillas ¼ cup salsa	1 cup cubed sweet potatoes 1 cup black beans 2 wheat tortillas ¼ cup salsa
	<i>Cantaloupe cubes</i>	½ cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup
Dinner	<i>Spicy Sautéed Tofu with Peas* with brown rice</i>	¼ recipe ½ cup cooked brown rice	¼ recipe 1 cup cooked brown rice	¼ recipe 1 cup cooked brown rice	¼ recipe 1 cup cooked brown rice
	<i>Corn on the cob</i>	½ ear	1 ear	1 ear	2½ ears
	<i>Whole wheat bread</i>	-	-	-	2 slices
Snack	<i>Carrot sticks with peanut butter</i>	5 carrot sticks 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	10 carrot sticks 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	10 carrot sticks 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	10 carrot sticks 2 Tablespoons peanut butter
	<i>Popcorn</i>	1 cup popped	3 cups popped	2 cups popped	3 cups popped

Tuesday		6-year-old girl	13-year-old boy	Adult woman	Adult man
Breakfast	<i>Oatmeal with peanut butter</i>	½ cup cooked oatmeal 1 Tablespoon peanut butter	1 cup cooked oatmeal 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	1 cup cooked oatmeal 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	1 cup cooked oatmeal 2 Tablespoons peanut butter
	<i>Orange</i>	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	-
	<i>Whole wheat bread</i>	-	-	-	2 slices
Lunch	<i>Chickpea Italiana* sandwich</i>	2 slices whole wheat bread ¾ chickpea recipe	3 slices whole wheat bread ¾ chickpea recipe	2 slices whole wheat bread ¾ chickpea recipe	2 slices whole wheat bread ⅓ chickpea recipe
	<i>Carrot sticks</i>	5	10	10	10
	<i>Banana</i>	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium
Dinner	<i>Tofu Italiano*</i>	⅓ recipe	⅔ recipe	⅓ recipe	⅔ recipe
	<i>Steamed kale</i>	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1½ cups
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	½ cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup
Snack	<i>Peanut butter sandwich</i>	1 slice whole wheat bread with 1 Tablespoon peanut butter	1 slice whole wheat bread with 1 Tablespoon peanut butter	2 slices whole wheat bread with 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	2 slices whole wheat bread with 1 Tablespoon peanut butter
	<i>Apple</i>	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium

Wednesday		6-year-old girl	13-year-old boy	Adult woman	Adult man
Breakfast	<i>Peanut butter toast with a sliced banana and cinnamon</i>	1 slice whole wheat bread 1 Tablespoon peanut butter ½ medium banana	1 slice whole wheat bread 2 Tablespoons peanut butter 1 medium banana	2 slices whole wheat bread 2 Tablespoons peanut butter 1 medium banana	3 slices whole wheat bread 2 Tablespoons peanut butter 1 medium banana
	<i>Apple</i>	-	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup
Lunch	<i>Wrap with black beans and sweet potatoes</i>	1 cup cubed sweet potatoes ¾ cup black beans 1 wheat tortilla 2 Tablespoons salsa	1 cup cubed sweet potatoes 1 cup black beans 1 wheat tortilla ¼ cup salsa	¾ cup cubed sweet potatoes ¾ cup black beans 1 wheat tortilla 2 Tablespoons salsa	1 cup cubed sweet potatoes 1 cup black beans 2 wheat tortillas ¼ cup salsa
	<i>Banana</i>	-	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium
	<i>Orange</i>	1 medium	-	-	-
Dinner	<i>Lentil-Spinach Pilaf* (page 14) with rice</i>	½ pilaf recipe ½ cup cooked rice	⅓ pilaf recipe ¾ cup cooked rice	⅓ pilaf recipe 1 cup cooked rice	⅓ pilaf recipe 1½ cups cooked rice
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	½ cup	1 cup	½ cup	-
Snack	<i>Carrot sticks with Lentil Pâté* (leftover from Sunday)</i>	5 carrot sticks ⅛ pâté recipe	10 carrot sticks ⅛ pâté recipe	10 carrot sticks ⅛ pâté recipe	10 carrot sticks ⅛ pâté recipe
	<i>Popcorn</i>	1 cup popped	3 cups popped	3 cups popped	3 cups popped

Thursday		6-year-old girl	13-year-old boy	Adult woman	Adult man
Breakfast	<i>Whole grain cold cereal with fortified soymilk and banana</i>	1 ounce cereal 1 cup soymilk 1 medium banana	2 ounces cereal 1 cup soymilk 1 medium banana	1 ounce cereal 1 cup soymilk 1 medium banana	2 ounces cereal 1 cup soymilk 2 medium bananas
	<i>Whole wheat toast with jam or fruit spread</i>	1 slice toast 1 teaspoon jam/spread	1 slice toast 1 teaspoon jam/spread	1 slice toast 1 teaspoon jam/spread	1 slice toast 1 Tablespoon jam/spread
Lunch	<i>Tofu Squash Patties* on whole wheat bread</i>	1 patty on 2 slices whole wheat bread	2 patties on 2 slices whole wheat bread	2 patties on 2 slices whole wheat bread	4 patties on 2 slices whole wheat bread
	<i>Steamed kale (leftover from Tuesday)</i>	½ cup	1 cup	1 cup	1½ cups
	<i>Apple</i>	1 medium	1 medium	2 medium	1 medium
Dinner	<i>Garbanzo Bean Burgers* (page 12) on whole wheat buns with tomatoes</i>	1 burger 1 bun 2 medium slices tomato	2 burgers 2 buns 6 medium slices tomato	1 burger 1 bun 6 medium slices tomato	2 burgers 2 buns 8 medium slices tomato
	<i>Baked sweet potatoes</i>	½ cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup
	<i>Steamed frozen broccoli</i>	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup
Snack	<i>Whole grain crackers with/without peanut butter</i>	1 ounce crackers	1.5 ounces crackers 1 Tablespoon peanut butter	1 ounce crackers 2 Tablespoons peanut butter 1 medium apple	1 ounce crackers 2 Tablespoons peanut butter

Friday		6-year-old girl	13-year-old boy	Adult woman	Adult man
Breakfast	<i>Peanut butter toast with a sliced banana and cinnamon</i>	1 slice whole wheat bread 1 Tablespoon peanut butter ½ medium banana	2 slices whole wheat bread 2 Tablespoons peanut butter 1 medium banana	2 slices whole wheat bread 1 Tablespoon peanut butter 1 medium banana	2 slices whole wheat bread 2 Tablespoons peanut butter 1 medium banana
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup
Lunch	<i>Fast and Lean Bean Dip* on whole wheat bread</i>	½ bean dip recipe 2 slices whole wheat bread	½ bean dip recipe 3 slices whole wheat bread	½ bean dip recipe 3 slices whole wheat bread	¾ bean dip recipe 3 slices whole wheat bread
	<i>Orange</i>	1 medium	1 medium	-	2 medium
Dinner	<i>Brown rice, cooked</i>	½ cup	¾ cup	¾ cup	1 cup
	<i>Baked Tofu*</i>	⅛ recipe	¼ recipe	¼ recipe	⅜ recipe
	<i>Carrot and Cabbage Sauté*</i>	⅛ recipe	¼ recipe	¼ recipe	⅜ recipe
	<i>Mashed sweet potatoes</i>	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	1 cup
	<i>Whole wheat bread</i>	1 slice	2 slices	2 slices	3 slices
Snack	<i>Carrot sticks with peanut butter</i>	5 carrot sticks 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	10 carrot sticks 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	10 carrot sticks 2 Tablespoons peanut butter	10 carrot sticks 2 Tablespoons peanut butter
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	½ cup	-	-	-

Saturday		6-year-old girl	13-year-old boy	Adult woman	Adult man
Breakfast	<i>Tofu Scramble*</i>	¼ recipe	¼ recipe	¼ recipe	¼ recipe
	<i>Sautéed Potatoes*</i>	⅓ recipe	¼ recipe	¼ recipe	⅓ recipe
	<i>Orange</i>	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium	1 medium
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup	½ cup
Lunch	<i>Rice, Chickpea, and Spinach Dish*</i>	¼ recipe	¼ recipe	¼ recipe	¼ recipe
	<i>Whole wheat bread</i>	-	1 slice	-	1 slice
Dinner	<i>Kitchen Sink Minestrone*</i>	⅛ recipe	¼ recipe	¼ recipe	⅜ recipe
	<i>Whole wheat bread</i>	1 slice	2 slices	2 slices	1 slice
	<i>Peanut butter</i>				2 Tablespoons
	<i>Carrot sticks</i>	5 carrot sticks	10 carrot sticks	10 carrot sticks	10 carrot sticks
Snack	<i>Whole wheat Apple Muffins* (page 15)</i>	2 muffins	3 muffins	2 muffins	2 muffins
	<i>Banana</i>	1 medium	2 medium	2 medium	2 medium
	<i>Fortified soymilk</i>	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup	1 cup

Low-Cost Vegan Recipes

Garbanzo Bean Burgers

Adapted from *Simply Vegan* by Debra Wasserman
(Makes 6 patties)

2 cups cooked garbanzo beans, mashed
1 stalk celery, finely chopped
1 carrot, finely chopped
½ teaspoon onion powder
¼ cup whole wheat flour
Salt and ground black pepper, to taste
2 teaspoons vegetable oil
Buns, sliced tomatoes, lettuce, and/or pickles,
to serve (optional)

In a medium bowl, combine all ingredients except oil, buns, and optional toppings. Form 6 flat patties. Fry in oiled pan over medium-high heat, turning once, until golden brown on each side, about 4-5 minutes.

Assemble burgers with buns and any vegetable toppings you'd like. Enjoy hot.

Total calories per burger: 125
Carbohydrates: 20 grams
Sodium: 16 milligrams

Fat: 3 grams
Protein: 6 grams
Fiber: 5 grams





Hearty Macaroni Dinner

Adapted from *Simply Vegan* by Debra Wasserman
(Serves 4)

2 cups (8 ounces) dry elbow macaroni
4 cups water
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
2 Tablespoons vegetable oil
3 cups no-salt-added tomato juice
10 ounces (2 cups) frozen corn kernels
One 15-ounce can kidney beans, rinsed and drained
4 teaspoons chili powder
Salt and pepper, to taste

Cook pasta in boiling water until *al dente*. Drain well.

In a large pot, sauté onions in oil over medium heat until lightly browned, 6-8 minutes. Add remaining ingredients, followed by the cooked pasta. Simmer 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until slightly thickened and piping hot.

Total calories per serving: 482
Carbohydrates: 83 grams
Sodium: 190 milligrams

Fat: 10 grams
Protein: 17 grams
Fiber: 9 grams

Lentil-Spinach Pilaf

Adapted from *Vegan Meals for One or Two* by Chef Nancy Berkoff
(Serves 6)

1 cup dried green or brown lentils (See *Chef's Note*)
3 cups water
2 Tablespoons vegetable oil
3 cloves garlic, minced
3 cups frozen chopped spinach, thawed and drained
2 Tablespoons dried parsley
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground black pepper
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon ground cumin

Cook lentils in water over medium heat for 45 minutes or until tender. Drain.

In a large frying pan, heat oil over medium heat. Add garlic and cook, stirring, about 2 minutes. Add lentils, spinach, parsley, pepper, and cumin. Stir until heated through, about 3 minutes.

Chef's Note: You can replace 1 cup uncooked dried lentils and 3 cups water with two 15-ounce cans of lentils.

Total calories per serving: 179
Carbohydrates: 24 grams
Sodium: 60 milligrams

Fat: 5 grams
Protein: 10 grams
Fiber: 6 grams

A photograph of a red apple and several whole wheat apple muffins on a wooden surface. The apple is in the upper right, and the muffins are in the foreground and background. The muffins are golden brown with visible chunks of apple and cinnamon. The background is slightly blurred, showing more muffins and a bowl of ingredients.

Whole Wheat Apple Muffins

Adapted from *Vegans Know How to Party* by Chef Nancy Berkoff
(Makes 9 muffins)

1 Tablespoon vegetable oil
1½ cups whole wheat flour
1½ Tablespoons sugar (organic if preferred)
2¼ teaspoons baking powder
⅛ teaspoon salt
1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
¾ cup water
½ cup unsweetened applesauce
1 cup peeled, cored, and chopped apples

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Oil muffin tin.

In a large mixing bowl, combine dry ingredients. In another bowl, combine water and applesauce. Add chopped apples to the dry ingredients and mix. Add applesauce mixture and stir. Divide batter evenly into nine muffin cups. Bake for about 20 minutes or until lightly browned.

Total calories per muffin: 105
Carbohydrates: 20 grams
Sodium: 124 milligrams

Fat: 2 grams
Protein: 3 grams
Fiber: 3 grams

Healthy and Affordable Meals

by Nava Atlas

There's a lingering myth that plant-based fare involves esoteric and expensive ingredients. Let's put that idea to rest once and for all. The recipes presented here prove that you don't have to choose between healthy and affordable food, but in fact, you *can* have it all! These easy, family-friendly main dishes focus on common ingredients found at most grocery stores. Budget-wise plant proteins, like tofu and beans, plus seasonal vegetables, add up to hearty meals that will keep you satisfied all year long.

Hungarian-Style Cabbage Noodles

(Serves 4-6)

10-12 ounces bowtie pasta (or any short pasta shape),
cooked *al dente*

2 Tablespoons oil (olive oil preferred)

4-5 scallions, sliced, white and green parts separated

One 16-ounce bag coleslaw (See *Cook's Note*)

¼ cup water

½ cup chopped fresh parsley

1 Tablespoon poppy seeds or everything bagel
seasoning, more or less as desired (optional)

Salt and freshly ground pepper

Cook the pasta according to package directions until
al dente, then drain.

Meanwhile, heat oil in a large skillet. Add the white parts of the scallions and sauté over medium heat for a minute or two. Next, add the green parts of the scallions, coleslaw, and water. Cover and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until the cabbage is limp, about 5-8 minutes.

Add cooked pasta to cabbage mixture and toss together gently. Stir in parsley and poppy seeds. Season to taste with salt and lots of pepper, and serve at once. A simple salad with beans or chickpeas tossed in complete the meal.

Cook's Note: If you prefer, use shredded fresh green cabbage instead of bagged coleslaw. Sixteen ounces is about 6 packed cups, but feel free to use more!

Total calories per serving: 367

Carbohydrates: 63 grams

Sodium: 35 milligrams

Fat: 8 grams

Protein: 11 grams

Fiber: 6 grams

Vegan Sheet Pan Hash Browns

(Serves 4-6)

4-5 medium or 3 large golden or red-skinned potatoes (about 1½ pounds)
2 Tablespoons oil (olive oil preferred), divided
One 14-ounce container extra-firm tofu
5-6 leaves curly or lacinato kale, rinsed and dried
1 cup cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
2 scallions, thinly sliced
Sweet or smoked paprika, to taste
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Line a half sheet pan (18- x 13-inches) with parchment paper.

Scrub potatoes and cut them into ½-inch dice. If preferred, peel before dicing. Combine with 1 Tablespoon oil in a mixing bowl and toss together. Transfer to the sheet pan.

Cut the tofu into 6 slabs crosswise. Blot well between paper towels or clean tea towels. Cut the slabs into ½-inch dice.

In the mixing bowl, combine tofu with the remaining oil and toss gently. Transfer to the sheet pan and stir in with the potatoes. Bake 25-30 minutes, until golden brown. Stir every 10 minutes or so.

Meanwhile, prepare the kale. Strip the leaves away from the stems, discard stems, and chop or slice leaves into bite-sized pieces. Massage the kale until it softens and turns a deeper shade of green, about 1 minute.

Scatter kale over potato and tofu mixture, then return to oven. After 5 minutes, the kale will wilt down a bit. Stir it in with the potatoes and tofu, along with the tomatoes and scallions.

Continue to bake until the potatoes and tofu are browned to your liking, 5-15 minutes longer. This varies greatly due to true oven temperature and the pan's position, so keep your eye on the mixture, checking every 5 minutes or so.

Sprinkle with a generous dusting of paprika. Season with salt and pepper and serve hot.

Total calories per serving: 291
Carbohydrates: 34 grams
Sodium: 21 milligrams

Fat: 12 grams
Protein: 14 grams
Fiber: 4 grams





Tofu Stew with Corn, Green Beans, and Tomatoes

(Serves 6)

One 14-ounce container extra-firm tofu

2 Tablespoons oil (olive oil preferred), divided

8 ounces fresh green beans, trimmed and cut in half,
or frozen cut green beans

Water, as needed

4 cups fresh (4 large ears) or frozen corn kernels

1 pound ripe tomatoes, diced

3-4 scallions, sliced

2 teaspoons sweet paprika

¼ cup minced fresh parsley

Salt and freshly black ground pepper, to taste

Cut tofu into 6 slabs crosswise and blot very well between layers of paper towel or clean tea towels. Cut each slab into ½-inch dice.

Add half of oil to a large skillet over medium-high heat. Sauté the tofu until golden on most sides, about 10-12 minutes. Remove to a plate.

Place green beans in the same pan with a little water, just enough to keep the bottom moist. Cover and steam for 5 minutes, and then add corn. Cook, covered, until both are tender-crisp. Drain off any remaining liquid.

Add tomatoes and scallions. Cook just until the tomatoes have softened up a bit, about 4 minutes.

Stir tofu back into the pan. Drizzle in remaining oil and sprinkle in paprika. Stir in parsley and season with salt and pepper. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Total calories per serving: 210

Carbohydrates: 25 grams

Sodium: 25 milligrams

Fat: 10 grams

Protein: 11 grams

Fiber: 5 grams

White Bean Stew with Sweet Potatoes and Squash

(Serves 6-8)

- 1 Tablespoon oil (olive oil preferred)
- 1 large onion, finely chopped
- 2-3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 large or 2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and diced
- 2 cups water
- Two 15-ounce cans cannellini or Great Northern beans, drained and rinsed (about 3 cups cooked)
- One 15-ounce can small red or kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- One 15-ounce can reduced-sodium fire-roasted diced tomatoes
- 1 cup reduced-sodium tomato salsa, any variety
- 1 Tablespoon chili powder or barbecue seasoning
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- 1 medium yellow summer squash
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- Fresh herb of your choice (fresh oregano, chopped cilantro, etc.) for garnish, optional

Heat oil in a large soup pot. Add onions and sauté over medium heat until translucent, 3-5 minutes. Add garlic and sauté until golden, 2-4 more minutes. Add sweet potatoes and water and bring to a slow boil. Turn the heat down and simmer gently for 10 minutes with the cover ajar.

Add beans, tomatoes, salsa, chili powder, and cumin. Stir in and continue to simmer.

Cut squash in half lengthwise. Slice the thinner end into half-circles; cut each half of the thicker end in half again and slice. Stir into the soup pot. Return to a simmer and cook, covered, until squash and sweet potatoes are tender but not mushy, about 10 minutes.

If the stew needs more liquid, add another cup of water, but it should stay nice and thick. Season with salt and pepper. If time allows, let it stand off the heat for 30-60 minutes to develop flavor and heat through as needed. If you can't wait, feel free to serve at once! Garnish each serving with some fresh herb, if you'd like.

Total calories per serving: 280
Carbohydrates: 50 grams
Sodium: 13 milligrams

Fat: 3 grams
Protein: 13 grams
Fiber: 12 grams





BBQ-Flavored Lentil Sloppy Joes

(Serves 6)

2 teaspoons oil (olive oil preferred)
1 medium onion, finely chopped
6-8 ounces cremini or white mushrooms, cleaned, stemmed, and chopped
3 cups cooked lentils or two 15-ounce cans lentils, drained and rinsed
1-1½ cups low-sodium barbecue sauce
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
Red pepper flakes or Sriracha to taste, optional
6 vegan burger buns, small ciabatta breads, or toasted English muffins
Veggies (use any or all): shredded lettuce, grated carrots, thinly sliced onions

Heat oil in a large skillet. Add onions and sauté over low heat until golden, 8-10 minutes. Add mushrooms, cover, and cook over medium heat until wilted, about 3-4 minutes.

Add lentils, barbecue sauce, and black pepper. If you desire more heat, add a pinch of crushed red peppers or a drizzle of Sriracha, to taste. Bring to a simmer and cook over low heat, uncovered, for 10 minutes or until everything is piping hot. The liquid should be thickened and envelop the lentils and mushrooms.

For each serving, spoon some of the filling onto the bread of your choice. Top with any of the suggested veggies. Serve open-faced or closed.

Total calories per serving: 337
Carbohydrates: 64 grams
Sodium: 238 milligrams

Fat: 4 grams
Protein: 14 grams
Fiber: 9 grams

Quick Black Bean and Sweet Potato Chili

(Serves 6)

1½ Tablespoons oil (olive oil preferred)
1 large or 2 medium onions, minced
2-3 cloves garlic, minced
1 medium red bell pepper, deseeded and diced
2 medium-large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into ¾-inch dice
Two 15-ounce cans black beans, drained and rinsed, or 3 cups cooked black beans
One 14.5-ounce can reduced-sodium fire-roasted diced tomatoes
1 cup reduced-sodium tomato salsa, any variety
1 cup water
¼-½ cup chopped fresh cilantro
2 teaspoons chili powder
2 teaspoons ground cumin
½ teaspoon dried oregano
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Heat oil in a large soup pot. Add onions and sauté over medium heat until golden, 5-7 minutes. Add garlic and bell peppers and sauté for 2 minutes longer.

Add the remaining ingredients, except for the salt and pepper. Bring to a rapid simmer and lower the heat to cook gently, covered, for 15-20 minutes, or until sweet potatoes are tender.

Season sparingly with salt and pepper. If time allows, let stand for an hour or two and reheat as needed. Garnish each serving with extra cilantro, if desired.

Total calories per serving: 218
Carbohydrates: 39 grams
Sodium: 41 milligrams

Fat: 4 grams
Protein: 9 grams
Fiber: 10 grams



Nava Atlas is the author of many vegan cookbooks, most recently the 5th edition of *Vegan Soups and Stews for All Seasons*. She is also the author of visual nonfiction including *Inspired by Cats: Writers and Their Mews(es)* and the forthcoming *Women Writing Dangerously*. Find her at TheVeganAtlas.com and LiteraryLadiesGuide.substack.com.



SCIENTIFIC UPDATE

by Reed Mangels,
PhD, RD, FADA

A REVIEW OF RECENT SCIENTIFIC PAPERS RELATED TO VEGETARIANISM

How Can Over-Purchasing and Food Waste Be Reduced?

Household food waste is defined as the edible part of foods that were not consumed after being purchased. For example, if you have to throw away a head of lettuce that you found at the back of the refrigerator, that would be household food waste. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that, in 2019, about 4% of household food waste was composted; the remainder went to the landfill, to the incinerator, or down the drain.¹ The EPA also estimates that the average family of four spends almost \$250 per month on food that does not get eaten.¹

Researchers studied sales data from eight large Swedish supermarkets.² They focused on produce because half of all wasted food is from this category. Over a two-week period, individual cucumbers and heads of broccoli were either priced with a Multi-Unit Promotion condition (e.g., two for \$3) or the Single-Unit Discount condition (e.g., one for \$1.50). Sales were 19.5% higher when the consumers were offered two products for a certain price, the Multi-Unit Promotion condition. A follow-up survey of consumers found that all of the respondents who purchased items priced with a Single-Unit Discount consumed all of the food purchased; none was wasted. About 12% of survey respondents who purchased items priced with a Multi-Unit Promotion reported that they did not consume all of the product that they purchased. These results suggest that pricing schemes that promote the purchase of larger quantities of produce may result in increased food waste. The study authors suggest that supermarkets voluntarily adopt a policy that eliminates multi-unit offers for highly perishable vegetables as a way to reduce food waste. They also suggest that stores indicate the usual, non-sale price of an item so that consumers can see that they may actually be saving very little by purchasing multiple units of a product. Another suggestion is to have signs placed prominently near perishable

vegetables, saying, “I am happy to come home with you if you will eat me.”

Regardless of whether any of these policies are implemented, consumers should think carefully about purchasing multiple units of perishable foods that may go to waste.

¹ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Preventing wasted food at home. epa.gov/recycle/preventing-wasted-food-home 2025.

² Gravert C, Mormann M. In-store food promotions increase sales as well as household food waste. *Sci Rep.* 2025;15:18035.

Substituting Canned Beans for Other “Protein Foods” Improves Diet Quality in U.S. Adults

Savvy vegans know that legumes (beans, peas, and lentils) are an inexpensive source of nutrients including protein, fiber, iron, and zinc. Legumes have many other health benefits including a lower risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes (For more details see *Vegan Journal*, issue 4, 2022). Unfortunately, the average intake of legumes in the United States is only one-tenth of a cup per person per day. A recent study used computer modeling techniques and data from a survey of adults in the United States to examine the effect of replacing one or two servings of “protein foods” with a half cup or one cup of canned beans on nutrient intake and diet quality. “Protein foods” were defined as meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, seeds, and soy products. Canned beans were studied because they are the most popular form of legumes in the United States.

When canned beans replaced “protein foods,” fiber intake increased by 30% (one serving of beans) or 51% (two servings of beans). Iron, magnesium, potassium, and folate intake also increased significantly, while

intakes of fat, saturated fat, sodium, and protein were lower. Fewer than 10% of U.S. adults currently meet fiber recommendations, and fewer than 5% meet potassium recommendations. Overall diet quality scores were significantly higher when canned beans replaced “protein foods.” Higher consumption of beans in place of animal products could lead to health benefits as well as to lower food costs.

Papanikolaou Y, Papanikolaou A, Slavin J. Replacing protein foods for canned beans increases shortfall nutrient intakes and improves diet quality in adults. *Med Res Arch.* 2025;13.

It Doesn't Necessarily Cost More to Eat a Healthy, Environmentally Sustainable Diet

Researchers from Tufts University wondered what the effect on food expenses would be of consuming a model diet that promotes human health and environmental sustainability. They collected more than 48,000 prices for 860 food items sold in 181 countries. They determined the water footprint, the carbon footprint, and the nutritional profile of each food. They calculated the average price, the average carbon footprint, and the average water footprint per 100 calories for each food group. The food groups were animal-source foods; legumes, nuts, and seeds; starchy staples; vegetables; fruits; oils and fats; and sugars, sweets, and candies.

Generally speaking, animal-source foods had the highest carbon footprint per 100 calories and the highest water footprint per 100 calories compared to other food groups. For these foods, each 10% increase in price was associated with a 21-gram higher carbon footprint and a 5-liter higher water footprint per 100 calories of food.

In almost all food groups, the most expensive items had greater environmental footprints. For example, in the vegetable group, less expensive vegetables like carrots and onions had similar carbon footprints to other vegetables while the most expensive vegetables, such as asparagus and mushrooms, had higher carbon footprints. The carbon footprints of the more expensive vegetables were similar to or higher than the carbon footprints of the least expensive animal-source foods (small fresh fish and eggs).

The finding that more expensive items have greater environmental footprints contradicts the popular idea that more environmentally sustainable diets will cost more. The most expensive foods within each group did not necessarily score higher for nutrition quality. The study authors point out, “despite the fact that many consumers... pay a premium for products that are advertised as healthier, lower-priced options within each food group are often equally or more nutritious.”

Martinez EM, Blackstone NT, Wilde PE, et al. Retail prices, environmental footprints, and nutritional profiles of commonly sold retail food items in 181 countries. *Am J Clin Nutr.* 2025;122:1265-1274.

Dollar Stores

Dollar stores commonly offer packaged foods and beverages but little to no fresh fruits and vegetables. Based on household food spending, these stores are the fastest growing food retailers in the United States. In 2008, the average household purchased 62.3% of their calories from grocery stores and 3.4% from dollar stores. In 2020, the average household purchased 55.1% of their calories from grocery stores and 6.5% from dollar stores. Households located in rural areas purchased more of their calories from dollar stores than other retailers. Researchers at Tufts University and the USDA wondered if food purchased at dollar stores is less healthy compared with food purchased at other types of stores. To address this question, they used data from a yearly survey of food purchases of about 50,000 U.S. households.

The researchers examined the healthfulness of food purchases and found that foods purchased at club stores (such as Costco or Sam's Club) were more healthful, followed by grocery store purchases, and then by dollar stores, drug stores, and convenience stores. Shoppers who buy less healthy foods in dollar stores appear to use other stores (such as grocery stores) to buy healthier foods. Dollar stores may be a way of saving money on less healthy foods so that more money is available to buy healthier foods at grocery stores. Dollar stores, however, may contribute to the closing of traditional grocery stores, thus limiting access to fresh foods.

Feng W, Page ET, Sun B, et al. The healthfulness of foods purchased at dollar stores: Insights from household scanner data from 2008 to 2020. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2025;125:1736-1745.

Veggie Bits

Trader Joe's Organic 3 Grain Tempeh

Although there's little competition for commercially prepared tempeh to begin with, Trader Joe's own offering is the one to beat. Subtly nutty, without a hint of bitterness, it's an ideal introduction for those unfamiliar with the Indonesian fermented bean cake. Brown rice, barley, and millet make up the whole grain trio at the base, though soybeans remain at the forefront of the protein powerhouse. Ringing up at just about \$2.49 for half a pound, it's noticeably cheaper than name-brand versions sold at natural foods stores. Firm enough to bake, sauté, air fry, or grill, you could just as easily crumble it to make a hearty ground beef facsimile. It soaks up marinades nicely, making it a robust all-purpose protein for every meal. For the price and versatility, it's a solid staple to keep on hand, and it freezes well, too. With no added fillers, gums, or preservatives, it's a great pick to add whole-food, plant-based options to your diet.

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Rosarita Refried Vegetarian Beans

If you ask me, a house without refried beans in the pantry is not a home. As the foundation of countless Mexican meals, these creamy pinto beans are an indispensable part of any good culinary arsenal. Traditionally, lard may have been a concern for compassionate cooks, but these days, more brands are proudly eschewing animal products for healthier, and quite frankly more economical, options. Rosarita is tried and true, low in fat and high in flavor. Smooth, well-seasoned, and easy to heat up in minutes, they go in everything from burritos to nachos, or just with a side of rice and salsa. You may be able to find them for as little as \$1.09 per can in some markets, up to \$1.59 at most. Amazon carries them at a discount, with the option to cut back more via their Subscribe & Save program. Target, Walmart, and many more mainstream grocery stores usually carry this longstanding brand, either with the canned beans or Latin American specialties.

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Sprouts Organic Baked Beans

Baked beans are a perennial favorite for serving at backyard barbecues, topping breakfast toast, and smothering steaming baked potatoes alike. Sprouts Farmers Market has the recipe down pat, less sweet and more tomato-forward than many other mainstream contenders, creating a more balanced and savory flavor overall. Toothsome yet tender white beans enveloped in a glossy red sauce come ready to eat, right out of the can, straight off of a spoon, if you're so inclined. For the more patient and industrious, they make an excellent base for soups, stews, and hearty pots of chili, too. At \$2 per can, they're competitively priced, especially for using organic ingredients and no corn syrup, which is common on the shelf. Instead, a hint of molasses gives these beans a warmth and depth, brightened by a hint of vinegar and onion powder.

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Marketside Classic Hummus

Call it basic, and you'd be right. That simplicity is the beauty of Walmart's house brand for fresh hummus, found in the refrigerated deli area. Stripped down to the bare essentials, it's a blank canvas, ready for your creative, flavorful flourishes. The silky smooth, velvety texture, more than any strong flavor, is what defines it. Hints of tahini, garlic, and cumin are well blended to the point of melding entirely with the chickpea foundation, which makes it easy to pair with any sandwich filling, raw veggie dipper, crackers, or salad bowl. To make it more party-ready, top it with a bit of smoked paprika, pine nuts, chopped garlic, and a drizzle of good olive oil, and it'll suddenly seem gourmet. Coming in around \$2.72 to \$2.87, the price is tough to beat, even compared to hummus made from scratch.

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Veggie Bits

Earth Grown Southwestern-Style Chipotle Black Bean Burger

Frozen meals are a boon for busy people trying to get a meal on the table but often out of reach on a reasonable budget.

Fortunately, veggie burgers will always have your back. Earth Grown's Southwestern-Style Chipotle Black Bean Burger patties taste like something homemade, without the legwork of cooking from scratch. Reheating from frozen in mere minutes, the brown rice-, black bean-, and soy protein-base has a satisfyingly hearty yet supple texture, perfect for piling high with any of your favorite toppings. Smoky chipotle offers a gently warmth without overtly hot spice, making them a good choice for the more timid of palate without sacrificing overall depth of flavor. Each package contains four patties, which breaks down to just over \$1 apiece. Though a bit thin, it wouldn't be a splurge to stack up two for heartier appetites.

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Earth Grown Organic Extra Firm Tofu

Is there anything tofu can't do? This versatile staple has been a foundational building block of the earliest vegan diets, and remains just as essential today. Widely available in mainstream supermarkets, Aldi's house brand offers extra-firm tofu at the lowest price we've seen nationwide, at just \$1.75 per 14-ounce package. Sturdy enough to slice or cube without falling apart in the pan, it's ideal for pan-frying, sautéing, air frying, simmering, and so much more. Roughly mashed with nutritional yeast and onion powder, it transforms into a satisfying breakfast scramble. Blended with olive oil, lemon zest, salt, and black pepper, you suddenly have a lusciously creamy, party-ready dip. Anyone who claims to dislike tofu simply hasn't had it prepared well; fortunately, at this price, you can afford to keep trying every which way imaginable until you fall in love for good.

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



El Milagro Flour Tortillas

With tortillas, anything is possible. Tacos are an easy go-to entrée that can be stuffed with any leftovers and pantry staples on hand. Beyond that though, there's a whole world of chilaquiles, chips, enchiladas, quesadillas, taquitos, tostadas, and so much more. El Milagro Flour Tortillas are soft and pliable, yet remain robust and resilient after toasting, baking, or grilling, refusing to crack under pressure. They have a subtle wheat flavor and a satisfying chew that stands out from other comparable flatbreads. Toast one briefly on a hot skillet to develop a lightly blistered surface and faintly smoky aroma, greatly enhancing the overall eating experience. Each 12-count package costs \$1.55 at Aldi; at less than 13 cents each, these are a smart choice to keep on hand at all times.

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



Casa Mamita Black Bean and Corn Salsa

"Salsa" simply means "sauce," explaining the near infinite range and utility of this Mexican condiment. Tomatoes are at the heart of this chunky medley, buttressed by a smattering of black beans and sweet corn kernels. Exact seasonings are kept a secret, referred to only as "spices," imparting a gentle kick with a bright, fresh finish. Thick enough to scoop up with crisp tortilla chips, wrap into burritos, or dollop on top of nachos, it won't water down your next meal or savory snack. Best of all, it makes an excellent soup or stew base to build off of when you're feeling more ambitious, coming in handy especially when tomatoes are out of season. For a full pound of salsa packaged in a convenient reusable glass jar, expect to pay around \$2.75 at Aldi.

Hannah Kaminsky/Senior Editor



VEGAN ON A BUDGET: FAST FOOD COMPARISONS

If you eat at fast food or quick-service chains, you can choose vegan options that cost less than or the same as options with meat. For example:



MCDONALD'S HAMBURGER

\$2.34

Regular Bun, Beef Patty, Grill Seasoning,
Ketchup, Pickle Slices, Onions, Mustard



TACO BELL BEAN BURRITO

\$2.12

Flour Tortilla, Refried Beans,
Red Sauce, Diced Onions



CHIPOTLE CHICKEN BURRITO

\$9.98

Black Beans, Brown Rice, Chicken,
Cheese, Flour Tortilla



CHIPOTLE SOFRITAS BURRITO

\$9.98

Black Beans, Brown Rice,
Tofu Sofritas, Flour Tortilla

Note: Prices after tax in Leland, NC, as of February, 2026.

Thank you to Whitney McVerry for gathering the data and to Hannah Kaminsky for designing this page.

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Quantity Cooking on a Budget: For Parties, Restaurants, and More

by Chef Nancy Berkoff, EdD, RD

When you want to feed a crowd but stick to a budget, consider serving pasta, potato, grain, sandwich, or dessert bars. Bars allow you to provide a seasonal and economical bounty with many options, empowering guests to create meals to their own tastes. For catering, bars mean reduced staffing needs, which can also help with the bottom line.

For potato, pasta, or cooked grain bars, plan for protein ingredients, including lentil and lentil combinations, bean and bean combinations, crumbled tofu, or crumbled veggie burgers. For texture and bulk, roasted or steamed seasonal or frozen veggies, such as mushrooms, onions, bell peppers, and tomatoes; cauliflower “steaks”; and mashed veggies (sweet potatoes, turnips, carrots, etc.) are great options. For toppings and sauces, stock salsas, hummus, refried beans, bean dips, and a “cheesy” sauce of mashed potatoes with nutritional yeast and thinned with vegan milk.

For a sandwich bar, start with tortillas (either crisped or steamed), pita, flatbread, toasted French bread, cornbread, or rolls. Chickpea or lentil salads prepared with vegan mayonnaise or silken tofu and chopped veggies make crowd-pleasing sandwich fillings, as do fried or baked falafel, vegan meatballs or a sliced meatless loaf, or grilled eggplant, onions, and mushrooms. If your budget can accommodate, sliced vegan cheese could be offered. Depending on your sandwich fillings, provide hot mushroom gravy, tomato sauce, “cheesy” sauce (see above), and/or sliced fresh veggies and salad greens. Condiments including salad dressings, mustard, soy sauce, hot sauce, and salsas could be tasty finishing touches.

If a bar won’t work for your needs, consider sheet pan entrées. These are main dishes prepared “en masse” rather than individually. Cooking and serving are streamlined, which means that the cost of individual meals can be lowered.

Greek Sheet Pan: Combine olive oil, dried oregano, dried parsley, lemon juice, fresh or dried minced garlic, and black pepper together and set aside. On an oiled sheet pan, spread crumbled extra-firm tofu (or diced seitan if your budget permits), coarsely diced zucchini or summer squash and diced onions, whole cherry tomatoes, and whole button mushrooms. Toss with the seasoning mix, cover, and bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. Uncover, mix, and bake uncovered for an additional 10 minutes, or until golden brown. Serve over pita, rice, or roasted potatoes and garnish with slivered bell peppers. Offer hummus as an accompaniment.

Garbanzo and Veggie Sheet Pan: Combine olive oil, dried basil, powdered garlic, paprika, cumin, and lemon zest and set side. On an oiled sheet pan, spread chopped fresh broccoli or cauliflower (florets and stems), drained garbanzo beans, sliced bell peppers, chopped carrots, peeled and diced sweet potatoes, peeled and diced winter squash, and minced onions. Drizzle seasoning mixture over the vegetables, cover, and bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Uncover, stir, and continue to bake for another 15 minutes, or until sweet potatoes and squash are tender. Serve over toasted bread, cooked quinoa or barley, or mashed potatoes.

Low-Cost Microwave Meals

by Chef Nancy Berkoff, EdD, RD

When time is short, microwave meals can be a lifesaver. Making your own bowls at home is not only fast and economical; it's also a fun way to create a variety of delicious, customized meals. You can mix and match ingredients to make infinite combinations of flavors and textures. Even leftovers can be transformed into something new, helping you save time and reduce food waste.

Sweet Bowls

Start with a base of cooked cereal, rice, or even a baked, peeled sweet potato. Place your chosen starch in a microwave-safe bowl; then add your favorite sweet toppings.

- Fruits: Fresh or canned pineapple, peaches, pears, apples or applesauce, raisins, or other dried fruits
- Crunch: A bit of vegan cold cereal, crumbled graham crackers, or whole wheat crackers
- Flavor Boosters: A spoonful of nut butter or apple butter, plus a splash of maple syrup, fruit preserves, or apple juice

Mix everything together and microwave until hot. For a creamy finish, top with a dollop of puréed silken tofu or vegan yogurt, if desired.

Savory Bowls

Use a base of whole grains such as rice, quinoa, barley, polenta (cornmeal), kasha, bulgur, or couscous (not technically a whole grain, but close in texture). Add your cooked grain to a microwave-safe bowl; then layer in your favorite protein, veggies, and seasonings.

- Protein: Cooked lentils, black or red beans, baked beans, shelled edamame, chickpeas, diced tofu, or seitan
- Veggies: Fresh, canned, or frozen corn, tomatoes, mushrooms, or mixed vegetables

- Seasonings: Minced garlic (fresh or powdered), parsley or cilantro (fresh or dried), onions (chopped fresh or dried), peppers (fresh or pickled), olives, salsa, soy sauce, nutritional yeast, or crumbled nori

Mix your ingredients, microwave until hot, and enjoy! Don't limit yourself to plain grains, though. Leftover fried rice, mashed potatoes, pasta, or even shredded tortillas can also serve as great bases for savory bowls.

DIY Healthy Seasoning Mixes for Savory Dishes

Want to add a boost of flavor and wellness to your meals? Making your own seasoning blends is an easy, cost-effective way to enhance any savory dishes. Here are two simple, health-focused spice mixes you can create at home:

Earthy Seasoning Mix

A warm, earthy blend perfect for enhancing broths, stews, or roasted vegetables.

Combine 2 Tablespoons each of ground turmeric, ground cinnamon, ground ginger, and ground nutmeg plus 1 Tablespoon ground cloves.

Herbaceous Seasoning Mix

A fragrant, herbaceous blend ideal for savory dishes like soups, sauces, and grains.

Combine 1 Tablespoon each of dried oregano, dried basil, dried thyme, dried rosemary, dried marjoram, and dried parsley.

Mix ingredients well and store in an airtight container. These blends can be sprinkled sparingly into savory microwave bowl meals, in addition to soups, curries, broths, chilis, dips, dressings, roasted or grilled vegetables, and plant proteins.

Eat Vegan, Save Money

by Chaltu Watkins, VRG Intern

Eating vegan doesn't have to be expensive. With a few smart strategies and community resources, you can eat healthy, plant-based meals while staying on budget. Here are some tips from vegan advocate Crystal Forman, MPH, MHA.

Affordable Vegan Staples

Simple vegan meals like chickpea or kale salads, roasted vegetables, and hearty soups or stews are filling and cost-effective. Staples like beans, rice, oats, carrots, bananas, and frozen produce are affordable and versatile. Discount grocers like Aldi, Grocery Outlet, and Lidl offer great deals on both conventional and organic produce, bulk dry and canned beans, and frozen options like veggie burgers and spring rolls.

Where to Shop

Ethnic grocery stores such as African, Asian, and Caribbean markets often sell spices, grains, and nuts at lower prices than mainstream supermarkets.

Buying in bulk can save money on items like brown rice, cashews, nutritional yeast, and oatmeal. Some programs offer free produce, bread, and even vegan-friendly items such as plant-based yogurt and milk. These services aren't income-based and are designed to help reduce food waste. Many churches, libraries, and local farms also offer free food or volunteer-based opportunities where you can earn fresh produce. Some farmers markets give out unsold imperfect foods at the end of the day.

Meal Prep and Waste Reduction

Meal prepping can do wonders to stretch a dollar. Cook large batches of soup, whole grains, or roasted veggies to portion out or freeze for busy days. Freeze extra produce before it spoils, or dehydrate it for later use. Only buy what you know you'll use and store leftovers properly to reduce waste.

For sample low-budget meal plans, see:
vrg.org/nutrition/#nutrition-meal-plans

NOTES FROM THE VRG SCIENTIFIC DEPARTMENT VEGAN EDUCATION

This spring, we greatly enjoyed having two virtual interns from a New York City high school. See Alexia's VRG Blog post on school meals and Alya's VRG Blog post of a vegan recipe for Turkish Lentils Balls at vrg.org

VRG Vegan Dinner and Discussion in San Antonio, Texas: The Vegetarian Resource Group and Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Vegetarian Nutrition Dietetic Practice Group will hold a vegan networking dinner for dietitians and local VRG members on Sunday, October 25, 2026, at 6 p.m. All are invited. Pre-registration and payment are necessary. For details, email vrg@vrg.org or visit <https://bit.ly/VRG-Dinner-SATX>

If you're attending the dietetic conference, be sure to stop by The VRG educational booth.

Shop Smart

By Hannah Kaminsky

I've been fortunate to never forgo meals, but years of being utterly broke through college and beyond have prepared me well for uncertain economic times. No matter how much I love cooking, shopping for the ingredients to make it possible can range from stressful to downright demoralizing when working with incredibly limited funds. Though the recent spike in grocery prices has shone a new light on the issue, it's hardly a new one, especially for the millions of people in the U.S. at or below the poverty line. I've picked up a lot of tricks to help ease the strain at the cash register.

Un-Extreme Couponing

Gone are the days of bringing your total down to almost nothing with a few clever coupons, but they can still come in handy. Search online and you can find a small number of printable coupons, although your best bet is to reach out directly to the manufacturers of the products you're already buying. Send emails to express how much you love their food but struggle to fit it into your current budget; many will be sympathetic and offer to mail coupons for discounts or freebies to thank you for your support.

To that end, it doesn't hurt to follow your favorite brands on social media. You can often find promotions for new products, special events, and even giveaways just for being a fan. Food companies are acutely aware of the budgetary constraints everyone is dealing with, so it's in their best interests to help.

When shopping online, check for promo codes using crowdsourced websites like retailmenot.com and couponcabin.com to make sure you aren't leaving money on the table. Far from foolproof, you'll have to sift through older codes that may or may not work for your cart, but the payoff of free shipping or greater overall savings is worth the effort.

Loyalty Pays Off

Most grocery stores (and restaurants, for that matter) have loyalty programs that reward you for shopping with them. Some offer custom coupons based on your past purchases, lower prices on sale items in general, or rewards for hitting certain totals, which could mean bigger discounts or free items. These discounts can sometimes be stacked along with paper coupons, too. They cost nothing to join and require just a few minutes to sign up. Also, don't forget to check the weekly sales flyer, either in store or online, to make the most of seasonal produce specials.

Bargain Bins

Hidden in the back, off to the sides, or somewhere in the corner, you'll likely find a small section of discounted general merchandise at the grocery store. Some of these are seasonal items for holidays now passed, perfectly good foods nearing their expiration dates, products that simply aren't selling, or overstock that needs to be cleared out.

Mixed in with the regular produce or held off in a separate area, you can find the same markdowns on produce that is maybe slightly bruised, odd looking, or a touch wilted. With a little love, these fresh foods can turn into wonderful dishes, including stews, jams, and more.

Small Scale Bulk

Bulk bins are sometimes a great way to save money on volume purchases, and the same goes for much smaller amounts, too. When you need just ½ cup of a grain or bean for one specific dish, you can buy exactly that, with no overage or extra expense. Some stores even offer bulk herbs and spices. This is especially helpful when you've never tasted that ingredient before and aren't sure you'll want to eat it again. It takes all the risk out of trying new foods.

Case Closed

Most people don't realize that many stores offer case discounts on packaged foods. A case is usually one dozen of any given item, which means that, if you buy 12 cans of chickpeas or cartons of soymilk at once, you can shave anywhere from 5% to 10% off the total cost, which can really add up over time. Always ask employees in advance; some are unaware of the policy since it's rarely used these days.

Mind the App

Rebates are a bigger deal than coupons these days, with dozens of apps allowing you to scan receipts to get money back after shopping. Always check them in advance to make sure that you're buying the right products and package sizes to prevent disappointment. My favorite apps include Fetch, Ibotta, Receipt Hog, and Swagbucks. Even if you don't think you've hit any special items, always scan your apps after shopping just to make sure you aren't missing anything.

Web-based rebate services like Aisle (discover. gotoaisle.com/offers) offer stand-alone discounts by working directly with manufacturers, ranging from dollars off to BOGO (buy one, get one) deals. They're often a good way to try new products that might otherwise be too expensive to justify.

Love Your Leftovers

Restaurants, convenience stores, and grocery stores with unsold foods are increasingly turning to consumers to help pick up the slack. Snap up extra meals, snacks, and treats using the Too Good To Go app, which in turn helps support small businesses and prevent food waste. Excess baked goods and entrées can be frozen at home to enjoy throughout the week, helping stretch your dollars even further. Similarly, check out FlashFood, an app that acts like a virtual bargain bin for deeply discounted groceries available for pickup nearby. Quality can vary greatly depending on the source, so always check your items before leaving, and don't be shy about reaching out to customer support to make things right.

Most importantly, don't buy things that are on sale or for which you have coupons, simply because they're discounted. If you don't already have them on your grocery list, you're still spending more money than intended, even if it's a good price. Always check expiration dates, ingredient lists, and packaging seals when browsing to make sure you aren't buying a dud in the first place. Sometimes, it's worth buying the best option, not the lowest priced one. There's a fine line between being frugal and being cheap.



Support VRG Outreach

Ellie Meyerstein

My Summer Internship with VRG

Creating a Vegan World



When I started working with The Vegetarian Resource Group, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Over the course of 10 weeks, I had the opportunity to participate in numerous projects that took me (virtually) all over the country. I began by tabling at the Green Mitzvathon Environmental Fair in Baltimore, Maryland. There, I was able to engage with people of all ages and backgrounds about veggie issues.

One of my favorite projects this summer was watching the videos for VRG's video contest and sending responses to the contestants. Each of the videos focused on a different aspect of veganism that was important to the individual. Everyone has a different reason for doing this work, but we are all doing it together and that is what is important.

Another project that I helped with involved reviewing restaurants for VRG's extensive restaurant guide. (See: vrg.org/restaurant) I researched and reviewed vegan and vegetarian restaurants from all over the country, and even went to a couple that were local. This showed just how much the world of veggie food has expanded and evolved over the past decade. It proves how the work that The VRG and other organizations have been doing with advocacy and education is working.

Through this internship, I worked a lot on projects that will hopefully make veganism more accessible to people. People shouldn't be limited just because of their financial or living situation. Part of this was helping to put together a low-income vegan meal plan, which will hopefully demonstrate that veganism doesn't have to be expensive, though it often appears that way in the media.

I worked on vegan education with VRG's other summer intern, Chaltu. I interviewed her, and we discussed veganism as a whole and being vegan on a budget. The video is posted and available on VRG's social media and blog. One aspect of vegan education that I had the chance to see in action was attending a vegan cooking class by Crystal Forman, MPH, MHA, in Baltimore City at Christopher Place, a program for formerly homeless men. I was very glad to have had this opportunity and could be a part of the crucial work that Ms. Forman is doing. The participants, and myself, were captivated watching her cook and explain the science behind it.

I also had the opportunity to work with VRG Volunteer Coordinator Whitney on a project researching assisted living facilities that offer vegan food options. I hope the information will ensure that elderly individuals do not have to compromise their values to get the help they need.

I'm grateful for my time with The VRG and I hope the organization continues the incredible work they're doing.

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

To support VRG internships, donate at vrg.org/donate or join at vrg.org/member

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Vegan Cooking Tips

Quick and Easy Ideas for Cooking on a Budget



by Chef Nancy Berkoff, EdD, RD

Who says eating well has to break the bank? With a little strategy and smart planning, you can enjoy delicious meals and stick to your budget, without compromising on either end.

Eat with the seasons and preserve the harvest:

Get your fill of fresh produce when it's at peak ripeness, and then freeze to enjoy the rest throughout the year. Fresh berries can be washed, patted dry, and then frozen in a single layer. Once frozen, transfer to a zip-top bag for long term storage. Frozen berries can be added into beverages instead of ice cubes, baked into muffins and breads, blended into smoothies, stewed into jam, or stirred into hot cereal or vegan yogurt. The same approach works for pitted and sliced stone fruits, like apricots, peaches, and plums.

Fresh corn can be cut off the cob and frozen for later use. If you have the time, boil the cobs with onion skins and carrot peels to create a flavorful, zero-waste veggie broth. It's perfect to use in any soup or stew, for cooking rice or beans, or in savory bakes or tofu scrambles. Take advantage of affordable seasonal vegetables by stocking up: prepare steamed or grilled veggie combinations and freeze for later use. Use frozen veggie combos to top freshly baked cornbread or as a filling for a hot wrap. Consider grilling eggplant or zucchini slices, and then freeze to use in lasagna, skewers, and sandwiches. Now, you can enjoy a taste of summer during fall and winter.

Root for root vegetables! Throughout the year, different varieties of root vegetables are always economically priced. Most root vegetables, such as beets, carrots, parsnips, rutabagas, and turnips can be mashed and used as the foundation for a hearty one-bowl meal. Root veggies can be thinly sliced and baked to make low- or no-oil veggie chips. Thickly sliced, they can be roasted or grilled, adding lots of texture and color to countless meals.

Cook and bake in bulk:

Bake your oatmeal, cream of wheat, or polenta. Baking breakfasts in bulk saves time, energy, and cooking fuel. It can also help stretch limited ingredients to make more (or more voluminous) portions. To make a favorite morning treat that tastes like banana bread, start by mashing very ripe bananas, enough to cover the bottom of a lightly oiled baking pan, about one inch thick. Add old-fashioned (not quick-cooking) rolled oats and mix to combine. Sprinkle with cinnamon and any other spices or seasonings you would like, such as cardamom, ginger, or orange zest. Stir in enough vegan milk to moisten the mixture. For extra color, flavor, and nutrition, top with frozen berries. Bake, uncovered, at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes or until the oats are at the ideal texture, somewhere between *al dente* and creamy. For more sweetness or richness, top with maple syrup or nut butter. Allow to cool, cut into squares, and store in the refrigerator until ready to eat.

Get saucy! Hone your skills on two or three vegan sauces that can be made in quantity and used as the base for many meals. For example, consider a basic chunky tomato sauce, made with fresh or canned diced tomatoes and tomato paste, seasoned with dried herbs and spices. This essential sauce can be used for any number of Italian and Mediterranean dishes, especially with the addition of garlic and oregano. Think baked ziti, a hot sandwich of tomato-sauced mushrooms, lentil stew, minestrone soup, pita pizza, or spaghetti and meatless balls.

For a lighter option, consider a lemony tahini sauce, made in a blender with tahini, water, lemon juice, fresh garlic, and a dash of white pepper and cumin. This can be used as a salad dressing, a dip for crackers and cut veggies, a topping for a grilled veggie sandwich or cooked grains, a coating to toss with cold noodles, or a sauce for baked sweet potato wedges.

Crystal Forman

A Holistic Take on Vegan Advocacy

by Chaltu Watkins



For Crystal Forman, MPH, MHA, veganism is more than a diet; it's a lifelong commitment to ethics, public health, and community empowerment. As the founder of Holistic Wellness and Health, Forman integrates cooking, gardening, mindfulness, and social justice to make healthy living accessible and rooted in compassion.

Her journey began over a decade ago with a 40-day plant-based challenge. "I always knew as a kid that I was going to be at least vegetarian," she recalls. "I was very sensitive to eating animals. I would feel bad eating foods like bacon or crab cakes." That trial quickly evolved into a permanent lifestyle.

In 2011, a year after going fully vegan, Forman became a mentor with Baltimore's Vegan Living Program, guiding newcomers through their transition. Around the same time, she began volunteering at an urban farm in the Park Heights section of Baltimore City, where she worked in exchange for fresh produce. There, she discovered unfamiliar vegetables like kohlrabi and pattypan squash and recognized the power of sharing that knowledge. Teaching others to prepare plant-based meals became central to her work.

But for Forman, it was never just about food. Realizing that recipes alone weren't enough, she

began addressing the broader issues of food justice, environmental impact, and community care. She now runs a free/donation-based Plant-Based Living Program twice a year for four weeks, with weekly themes exploring the dairy, egg, seafood, and meat industries. Each session includes a live cooking demo and discussion on how these industries affect low-income, BIPOC, and indigenous communities, connecting personal health with systemic change.

What makes Forman's advocacy stand out is her holistic lens, with master's degrees in public health and health administration. "I focus on where people are mentally with food, and I encourage compassion for themselves and other beings."

This approach is reflected in all aspects of her work. She volunteers as a Baltimore City Master Gardener, mentors youth through holistic agriculture and cooking programs, and supports local farms as a food safety educator. She also serves on the boards of the Black Veg Society, The Unity Collective, the Baltimore City Master Gardeners, and the Economic Development Committee for the Carter School of Music. She leads cooking demos at Christopher Place, a transitional residence for men experiencing homelessness, as both a teaching tool and a form of care.

"When people feel better physically, that's great," she says. "But when they also realize they're not supporting industries that abuse animals and people, it helps shift their mindset long term."

You can follow Forman's current work through social media at linktr.ee/holisticwellnessandhealth and holistic-wellnessandhealth.com

Chaltu Watkins wrote this article while interning with The Vegetarian Resource Group. She is a student at the University of Maryland in College Park.





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