

## When a Vegan comes for Dinner

By Rosie Bank

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Having a vegan for dinner might be on your mind, given the preponderance of plant-based eating showing up throughout the media. Did you know that the meal served at the Golden Globes held on January 6, 2020, was [completely plant-based](#)? Yes, even in Hollywood, eating this way has taken hold. Chances are you know someone *personally* (not including Beyoncé, Michelle Pfeiffer, Woody Harrelson, and Ellen DeGeneres) who does not eat animal flesh or fluid.



The summary of what you will learn here:

1. What to feed a vegan guest
2. Being Left Out by Your Friends
3. What Can I Feed My Vegan Friends?
4. Oh! The Stress of Feeding a Vegan
5. What Do Vegans Eat?
6. What to Avoid when A Vegan Comes for Dinner
7. **Vegan Cooking Tips**

Coincidentally, recently, during the month of [Veganuary](#) – an international event during which those celebrating do not eat any animal products or their derivatives – I just happened into two amazing conversations on this very topic with two different good friends. The topic was about hosting a meal for friends who are vegans. Having a vegan for dinner turned out to be a pretty juicy and somewhat charged topic. I felt somewhat enlightened as well as concerned by what they shared with me. This was what inspired me to write this for you.

### **WHAT TO FEED A VEGAN GUEST**

As one who is committed to a whole-foods plant-based (vegan) lifestyle, I cannot possibly represent all guests nor all hosts. However, the chances are becoming greater that if you are a non-vegan host you will find yourself preparing a meal for someone who eats no animal products because of [this trend](#) which is continuing to evolve. I am offering you some helpful host and guest tips here. Whether you are

having a vegan for dinner or if you are the vegan *guest* of someone, perhaps you can relate to my experience.

What if you practice a vegan lifestyle, and carnivorous or pescatarian friends come for dinner... do you have to serve them animal-based protein? I'll show you how I handle this in a bit. This discussion is about friends with different eating styles coming together to share a meal, with ample happiness, camaraderie and satisfaction to pass around.

I'll show you how to get prepared, meet in the middle in terms of people's preferences, and learn from other's who eat differently than you do.



### **BEING LEFT OUT BY YOUR FRIENDS**

My good friend Darlene recently welcomed about ten friends to her home for a special occasion feast. Darlene is a very good cook. Her husband, our friend Dominick, mentioned that we (my husband, Mark, and I) were not included because it was a carnivorous-based meal. When I told them that we would be happy to “just eat the salad” Darlene enlightened me to the fact that that would not be acceptable to *her*, as the host and chef. Why? Because for an elegant dinner party that Darlene is planning and for which she is creating the entire meal, she wants all her guests to be fed by her as well as experience complete satisfaction. (At a separate occasion, Darlene and Dominick have been excellent hosts to Mark and me and have served us delicious plant-based cuisine.)

What Darlene told me was eye-opening. I respected her prerogative as a host. I was naïve in thinking that just because it was okay for Mark and me to “just eat the salad”, for hosts like Darlene, that still did not work. Really, I had not thought of this before. This made me feel better about not being invited. I bet that some of you reading this can relate. Having a vegan for dinner might mean not for a *particular* meal, but perhaps for a different one.

### **WHAT CAN I FEED MY VEGAN FRIENDS?**

Here is an idea for non-vegan hosts. If you love to prepare beautiful food for your guests like Darlene does, you may decide that for different guests you will make different food. When you have a vegan for dinner, you might have one chicken parmesan and one dairy-free eggplant one, for example. Or you might serve a salad but keep the shredded cheese and bacon bits on the side for guests to choose for themselves. If the soup calls for chicken broth, you may discover some delicious plant-based options, which are easy to find at your local market. Veggie broth and mushroom broth are full of flavor.

But clearly this is not always possible. When you are creating a non-vegetarian based meal, this does not mean that you are expected to make special dishes for your vegan friends, or more to the point, even invite them. Mark and I suspect that some of our friends do not invite us for dinner because they simply do not want to deal with this challenge.

Another friend helped me understand this challenge at an even deeper level. What if, when you have a vegan for dinner, you make a special meal for your plant-loving friends and you need to buy special ingredients for one or more recipes? I don't think anybody wants to waste money on food. I understand a reluctance to buy items that might go to waste after the meal, especially if you don't plan on cooking with them again.

Here are few examples of foods that plant-based eaters use on a regular basis. These are all versatile, easy to cook with, loaded with nutrition and taste great. Yes, you are reading this correctly. I am suggesting that, since you are reading this, you might want to become aware of and consider adding some of these ingredients into your cooking in general, including not plant-based.

Nutritional yeast (tastes like parmesan cheese, good source of vitamin B12, which is the only vitamin that vegans need to get in supplement form)

Ground flax ([egg substitute for baking](#))

Soy or Coconut Amino Acids (perfect substitute for soy sauce, minus the wheat, gluten, caramel, chemicals, and other additives) My brand of choice is [Bragg's](#), which is fairly easy to find online or at your local market.

Fruits and vegetables. The greater variety the better. Raw, steamed, grilled, sautéed, baked. This includes the more common veggies (lettuce, apples, oranges, broccoli, etc.) plus all types of potatoes, beets, squashes, and peppers. We love our veggies! Salads, over pasta, in wraps, in sandwiches... there is no limit as food like this is among the most versatile.

Beans and legumes. All beans, lentils, chick peas, etc. You will find that this type of food is a hearty addition to your dishes and among the most satisfying.



Legumes

Flax, hemp, chia seeds for salads, cooked veggies, cooked quinoa. (Adds flavor and texture. Seriously pro-nutritious, so recommended for everyone. Good source of plant protein, omega-3 oils, and fiber. Good for heart health.)

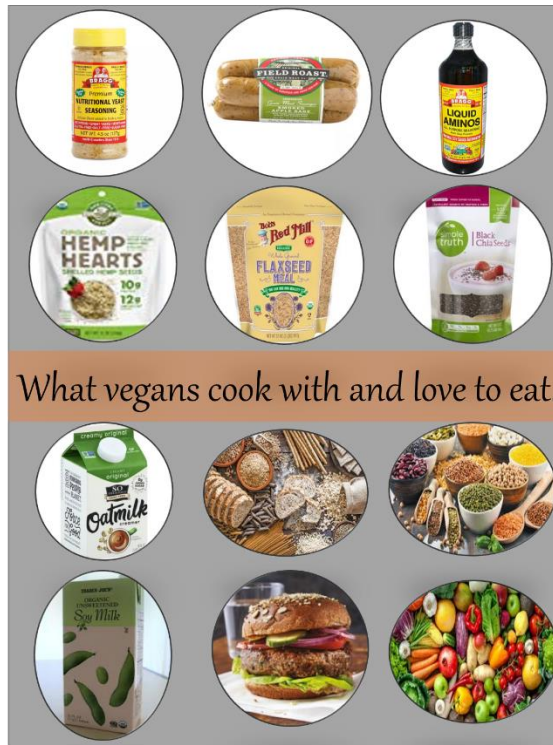
Tofu, tempeh, soy sausage, miso (soup, stir fry, salad, burgers) (Don't worry about soy products. They are [very good for your health](#), in spite of some misinformation that circulated around correlating soy with breast cancer.)

Plant-based beverages (oat, almond, soy, other nuts. For soups, baking, over cereal, anytime you would use milk. Even for creaming your coffee.) Here's a great article on selecting your [plant-based beverage](#). Mark and I were thrilled that oats came out as the winner.

Burgers and sausages. Homemade burgers made with beans, veggies, cooked brown rice or quinoa, onions... the works... are among the tastiest food there is. I make the one from [NutritionFacts.org](#) all the time. With all the fixings – onions, pickles, avocado, lettuce, tomato – this is a remarkably satisfying dish. Whole grain or, even better, sprouted grain, buns are more nutritious than those made with white flour, and to some palettes, tastier and more satisfying. The vegan sausage is easy to find. Trader Joe's has a delicious version called [Italian sausage-less sausage](#). There is a recipe at [Forks Over Knives](#) for a delicious burger.



Whole grains, such as brown rice, oats, and quinoa (actually a seed). Even better are whole grains that are also sprouted, such as in tortillas, bagels, bread, and pasta.



**OH, THE STRESS OF FEEDING A VEGAN!**



Mark and I live in a community where dining at other peoples’ homes is a big part of our social lives. I’ve not seen this topic explored down to the nitty gritty, although I have heard more than a few people describe their challenge from both perspectives – the host and the guest. Having a vegan for dinner can be something that people avoid, or about which might even get stressed out.

One of my neighbors confessed that when we are over, she feels guilty for eating chicken from the grill. She knows that I do not project any judgements whatsoever, that it was, in her words, her “stuff.” But you can see how this would make it difficult for someone who feels this way to invite a vegan for dinner. Yikes! No wonder people get freaked out about this.

The next conversation occurred over the New Year’s Eve weekend. Mark and I were visiting our dear friends, Jack and Lucy, at their lovely home in the Seattle area. We have stayed in each other’s homes before and shared countless wonderful meals. Since I was never aware of any challenges around meal

preparation, and since I knew that Jack and Lucy have other vegan friends, I just assumed that Mark and I would eat the vegan dishes and that Jack and Lucy would prepare non-vegan dishes for themselves and our other friends who were also there for the weekend.

Well, not so fast! Unbeknownst to me, Lucy was struggling with the stress of feeding Mark and me prior to our arrival. Fortunately, we spoke openly to figure out what everyone felt, and how best we could resolve any differences and issues that needed to see the light of day.

*You can take away from this the need to speak frankly about what to eat and how to feed friends and family for all parties to feel okay about these events.*

The conversation was not completely comfortable, but it was entirely helpful. Mark and I were coming from the place that there is always enough food, that Lucy and Jack always serve ample plant-based dishes (along with other non-vegetarian items) and all was easy. Lucy was concerned that we wouldn't have enough food, that we might not get enough amino acids, and we might go home hungry.

Lucy was worried about how much she and Jack needed to make allowances. For example, using Lucy's words, *how strict were we*, meaning Mark and me? If there was butter in the dish, or a little cheese, would that be okay? Are you getting a sense of how delicate this topic can be, even among seasoned friends? Like with Darlene, I wanted Lucy to know that I respected her concerns, and I wanted to know how best to support her. *Not* sharing meals and *not* staying in each other's homes was not an option. We needed to figure this out.

My suggestions with Lucy were to assure her that there was always enough food. She realized that was something she did not need to worry about. We had a meeting of the minds, and stomachs too, I suppose. I asked her to let go of worrying about protein and amino acids. That would be unfair and unreasonable for any host to try to meet the nutritional needs of her guests at that level. God forbid I would enter someone's homes as a guest with this expectation!

I explained to Lucy that a [plate of steamed veggies](#) and/or a salad would be plenty for Mark and me. This was difficult for her to comprehend since a plate for vegans looks very different than a plate for carnivores. So, we talked about this. For the salad I suggested that if Mark and I wanted more than lettuce (and whatever other veggies were in the mix), we could always grab a handful of nuts from her pantry. Incidentally, we did not need to do this. The food was marvelous, and we felt quite satisfied.



Rather than make our hosts responsible for all our meals during our visit, Lucy and I decided that I would oversee one dinner. I brought a big pot of black bean soup and some chocolate brownies – all plant-based. The great thing about many people, I have found, including the friends whom I have mentioned, is that they often enjoy a plant-based meal. They just don't want to eat that way all the time. Fortunately, our friends told us that they felt satisfied and plenty full following the meal that I made.

## WHAT DO VEGANS EAT?

I thought a lot about Lucy's question concerning how "strict" Mark and I are. I confess, I struggled with letting her know that if she and Jack chose to cook with butter, I would simply pass on that dish. The beliefs about "just a little butter" or some other general thought like that are common for non-vegans. I loathe making a social visit about preaching to my friends or family about why Mark and I eat the way we do. In fact, I feel uncomfortable even thinking about this. But when a dear friend rightfully asks "is a little bit of butter okay" I must ask myself where I draw the line. Fortunately, they cooked with a plant-based butter substitute, so this difficulty was overcome.

About strictness, I'd like to add that the specifics of anyone's dietary preferences are not only personal, but also potentially charged. By that I mean that getting into why someone does or does not eat animal products, or why someone is or is not a vegetarian or vegan is cutting to the quick of someone's values. Unless we are speaking generally and somewhat philosophically, I tend to keep my reasons to myself. Having a vegan for dinner, speaking as the *guest*, means that I am paying attention to these potential blips on the screen.

I share my reasons openly when I have my professional hat on, am helping my clients, or speaking publicly. And even in these situations, I pay attention to sharing my experience and avoiding at all costs even the hint of judging someone for their choices. I do not judge others for their choices, in fact. I prepared a lavish vegan meal for a group of six friends at one of my friends' homes. She brought out some grated cheese, thinking that the meal would be better as a result. I thought, how perfect. This is her home!

Being mindful of these boundaries is especially important because of the close relationships with friends and family that are so dear to me. I told Lucy that I just wanted to be part of the gang of friends. Funny story... we went to a restaurant after hiking with the dogs. In an earnest attempt not to bring attention to our food choices, I spoke quietly and in private to the chef/host about requesting modifications on the menu, such as eliminating cheese where possible. I thought I was keeping this whole thing under wraps. The server came up to the table and said in a loud voice that carried, "So, who are the two vegans at this table?" I wanted to crawl under a bed of steamed spinach.

Lucy was more concerned than Mark and I were about finding something to eat at the restaurant, which was another source of stress for her. I have seen this literally *every* time I've gone to a restaurant with friends. You might be surprised to learn this, but it's true. Each time we have eaten out, someone at the table asks us if we will be okay and is there anything to eat. And frequently someone announces to the server that we are vegans and are there any options. They point to things on the menu suggesting that we could select this or that. Of course, everyone means well, and their concern is genuine. It just makes it harder to fly under the radar and "be one of the gang."

If you are the host or the guest and you are discussing how to share a meal when your eating styles are different, you can imagine how close you can come to the reasons behind your respective choices. You may ask yourself, as I did when I was talking with my friends, if you really want to go there. I did not. There is a huge difference between voicing a preference for no cheese with a burrito and making a case for the care and treatment of farm animals. Although I am secure in my choices and values, it is unthinkable to me to lay a trip on friends whose choices and values are different than mine. This is always true, but especially so in social situations like the ones I have been describing here.

## WHAT TO AVOID WHEN HAVING A VEGAN FOR DINNER

A common challenge for hosts and something I have heard from a significant number of people is to wonder if their vegan guests would be upset or grossed out by animal products on the table. I can only speak for myself on this one. Mark and I went to someone's home who served us plenty of plant-based food, along with baked chicken for themselves. In general, this does not bother me. I've seen salami served many times as an appetizer at parties I've attended. Again, it's not something I would select, but seeing it is not a problem.

What can be challenging is if someone's home is filled with the smoke of meat cooked at high temperatures. This is difficult for me, so I either go outside if possible, or inside, if the meat is being cooked out on the grill. I have been around very strong smells that come from cooking meat, but the degree to which I prefer not to be around this depends on the situation. The strong smell of burned meat, fish, or chicken – like when the style is to *blacken* – is something I prefer to avoid.

For you hosts, if you wanted to make some decisions to support your vegan friends coming for a meal (even when you are preparing and serving animal-based products) you might consider this. Preparing some types of meat can fill the air with a very strong smell. This could be something you choose to avoid. Or have very good ventilation.

While we are talking about potentially challenging issues, I hope that none of us – guests and hosts – try to convince each other to eat against their own personal preferences. On a handful of occasions, some individuals have tried to encourage me to eat something non-vegan. Fish is a common example because so many people believe that fish is a “health food.” I'm often asked if I am allowed to eat this or that. In both instances I simply explain that I believe that I can eat whatever I want, and that I make certain choices. If you want to help a vegan feel welcome in your home, my suggestion is to avoid challenging her on whether she *can* eat something. Having a host remind me that I “can't have the fish, right?” puts me in an awkward position. “No, thank you” is my best reply, and I remind myself to let go explaining that, again, I can have anything I want.

Every situation is different. I used to be one of those people who thought that vegans were kooky extremists. And their dietary preferences were inconvenient and unreasonable. Obviously, my perspective has changed. I trust that when the motivation to socialize with friends and family is there, being open-minded and flexible can go a long way to figure this out. Sharing meals is among the most sacred rituals with people who we love.

There is no one-size fits all when having a vegan for dinner. Each of our eating preferences come as a result of where we are on our own journeys. The dynamics between you and your friends and family have a lot to do with your choices and how you handle each situation. One option is simply not to share a meal, not to invite a vegan for dinner, or not to accept an invitation from someone who does not cook to your preferences. For me, as you can tell, it's worth it to communicate in order to break bread together happily.

Back to my comment about whether I feel compelled to serve my non-vegan guests animal products. When my friends come for dinner, I find amazing plant-based dishes that I believe will tantalize their palette and leave them quite satisfied. It is my choice to stick with the plants, even for my carnivore



friends. Not all vegans feel this way. Again, this is a personal preference. I must confess, I take pleasure in turning people on to the joys of plant-based eating with no expectation of converting them.

And if you are hosting a vegan for dinner, and if you are open to trying some plant-based meals there are quite a few great online resources. I love *How Not to Die Cookbook* by Dr. Michael Greger, [available in paper and Kindle](#). Also, check out the [Forks Over Knives](#) website for some terrific recipes.

If you go that route, you will have taken a challenging situation and made the most of it. If you really do want to invite a vegan over for dinner, you might discover new veggies and ways to prepare them that can become part of your favorite meals.

### **VEGAN COOKING TIPS**

Last week I received a text from my lovely, gracious, and decidedly carnivorous friend, Judy. She decided to prepare dinner for Mark and me, plus two other dear friends. Judy announced that she was going to prepare... get ready for this... squash soup, sweet potato bruschetta, artichoke spread, vegetable pasta, and salad. And fresh fruit and sorbet for dessert. If you are blown away by this ambitious menu, then you and I had the same reaction. I sent Judy a string of kissy face, hands clapping, and lip-smacking happy face emojis.

News flash: *you do not have to prepare food like Judy!* This is an example of a spectacular and ambitious plant-based meal, not for nervous newbies who are trying to learn how to cook for vegans the very first time. Judy confessed that she was a bit anxious to prepare so much food, especially how unfamiliar this style of cooking was to her. But she made the choice and we all agreed that the meal was spectacular. She made the best squash soup I had ever tasted using no animal products at all. The meal was a huge success including for our brave host.

My five best tips for cooking vegan style:

1. Keep it simple! Basic plant-based recipes can be incredibly delicious. Brown rice with steamed broccoli, cubed tofu, served with a blend of sesame tahini and miso with a little garlic powder is quite tasty. A spinach salad with cranberries, red onions, black beans, cubed sweet potato, and pumpkin seeds plus some flavored vinegars and fresh herbs is delicious and refreshing.
2. Do not worry about protein. If you are concerned how vegans get protein you can use tofu, beans, and legumes, chickpeas, lentils, nutritional yeast, nuts, seeds (flax, chia, hemp, sunflower, pumpkin), tempeh, quinoa, and one of the greatest sources for vegan protein – vegetables! But it's worth reiterating, *don't worry about the protein*. (You can learn about [the protein myth](#).)
3. Have some go-to recipes online that are easily accessible. My favorites are [Forks Over Knives](#) and <https://nutritionfacts.org/cookbook/> available on Kindle. Look at the recipes because there might be some ingredients that are unfamiliar. Miso, sriracha tofu, nutritional yeast, and Bragg's Amino Acids are often used in recipes, as examples. You might enjoy these flavors so much that you use them even after the meal for your vegan friends. Other excellent online resources for recipes include [www.forksoverknives.com](http://www.forksoverknives.com),

[www.engine2diets.com](http://www.engine2diets.com), and <https://cleanfooddirtygirl.com/>. You might want to practice making a dish in advance of your guests coming.

4. Wraps are your friends. This might be my favorite part of this entire document. This might lead you to your own breakthrough in cooking for vegan friends. Take a [sprouted grain tortilla](#). I buy mine at our local Trader Joe's and Sprouts Market. Lay each tortilla out on the counter. Now your choices are endless! Any of the following make a delicious, filling, and attractive dinner for your vegan guests: Hummus; cooked, rinsed, and drained beans; any veggies imaginable, raw or cooked and chopped; slices of avocado; store-bought or homegrown sprouts; slices of sriracha tofu; cooked sweet potato; sliced pitted olives; raw or cooked sliced onions; roasted or raw mushrooms; cherry tomatoes; herbs; hemp/chia/ground flax combo... I meant it when I wrote that your choices are endless. Pile these ingredients to that they cover about one-third of the tortilla and roll it so it is snug, tucking the ingredients in as you go. You may have to practice. And if your first tortilla falls apart, you don't have to fall apart because the "droppings" will taste just as good.
5. Quinoa is also your friend. The same way you could pile all those yummy ingredients into a wrap, you could add to cooked quinoa. I love to add to cooked quinoa a [ginger-garlic-miso-sesame dressing](#). Another excellent way to jazz up the flavor of the quinoa, which works just as well with the wraps is store-bought or [fresh homemade](#) salsa. Talk about a party in your mouth!
6. Get in a good state when you prepare food. Cooking for vegans or otherwise, so much of the stress of meal prep can be mitigated by taking your time in an unhurried environment. I often play music and I always sip a cup of tea while preparing a meal. Breathing helps, as does reminding yourself to relax if you feel like you are getting worked up. I recommend reading recipes several times in advance of trying something new. Visualizing the process empowers you to make the dish with confidence and calmness. Are there items you can prepare in advance? Breaking up the food prep does wonders for you being a relaxed and happy host.

Have fun. Don't stress. Remember that love is the first ingredient in all the food that we prepare in our kitchens for our loved ones. Eat hearty. Be blessed with your health and with love in your heart. I hope you and your precious friends and family can figure this out. The rewards of coming together are great. In addition to being well fed, everyone might just get a little more enlightened along the way.