

Chapter 1

Vegetarian Cooking 101

In This Chapter

- ▶ Discovering different types of (and reasons for) vegetarianism
 - ▶ Getting essential nutrients and dealing with health issues
 - ▶ Handling social situations and dining out diplomatically
 - ▶ Shopping for food and setting the stage for cooking at home
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If you're of college age, can find your way to the kitchen, and are a vegetarian or thinking of becoming a vegetarian, then this book is definitely for you. In this chapter, I introduce the basics you need to start cooking vegetarian meals at home.

Checking Out Different Categories of Vegetarians

Vegetarianism has been described as *eating nothing that has a face*. But few things in life are that simple. There's no single *right way* to be a vegetarian; you have to settle on a diet that works for you. Will you eat all eggs, no eggs, or just eggs from free-range chickens? What about dairy products — yea or nay? Or perhaps you are or want to become a *vegan* — someone who avoids all animal products in food, clothing, and beyond?

Several basic categories of vegetarianism exist, but you may not fit neatly into one of the preset divisions, and that's okay. Don't make a vegetarian diet so involved that it's overwhelming; stick with foods that you're comfortable eating. Flip to Chapter 2 for more information on different types of vegetarianism.

Recognizing Why People Become Vegetarians

You are what you eat, but you're also what you *don't* eat. Most people who switch to a vegetarian lifestyle do so because they feel compassion for animals, hope to fight pollution and conserve the planet's natural resources, and/or want to improve their health.



There are almost as many reasons for becoming a vegetarian as there are vegetarians. You have to decide *why* you want to give up meat and then really commit to it. See Chapter 2 for full details on reasons why people become vegetarians.

Getting a Handle on Vegetarian Nutrition Know-How

Most vegetarians will tell you that they eat healthier than most people. Actually, this isn't necessarily the case. When you give up an entire food group, you have to give some attention to getting good nutrition from other foods. Vegetarians probably eat far more fresh veggies and fruits than most nonvegetarians, and that's good. But they may eat more junk food as well because a lot of junk food is technically vegetarian (potato chips, anyone?).



Being a vegetarian and eating healthy go together very well *if* you're aware of the balance of carbohydrates, protein, and fat you need to eat at each meal. The key is to eat a variety of foods. To help you out, the Mayo Clinic has developed a food pyramid for vegetarians (see it online at www.mayoclinic.com/health/vegetarian-diet/HQ01596; a more detailed version is at www.mayoclinic.com/health/medical/IM02769).

What if you're dealing with a health condition such as an allergy, diabetes, or a weight problem? Yes, sticking to a vegetarian diet is still possible with a little planning. Head to Chapter 3 for the full scoop on getting necessary nutrients and handling health issues on a vegetarian diet.

Dealing Gracefully with Social Situations and Dining Out

Here's the hard truth: Some people will feel awkward about your vegetarian diet, and maybe you're afraid that people will judge you. Some people may even feel like *you're* judging *them* if they eat meat. What to do? Try to look at the situation through their eyes. Reassure them that you're still the person you've always been and that you won't judge them if they don't judge you.

You may also have some trouble when you dine out rather than cook in the comfort of your home. If you're going to a friend's house, for example, make sure he or she knows in advance that you don't eat meat (or eggs, dairy, or any other foods that aren't in your diet). Before you go to a restaurant, look up the menu online and call the restaurant if you have questions. If you'll be traveling, take a backpack filled with snacks just in case you have trouble finding foods you can eat on the road. Sure, it may take a little extra effort to eat out, but don't let that keep you from enjoying life away from home.

Keep things in perspective. Lots of vegetarians face these kinds of challenges every day, and somehow they manage to deal with them while actually having a good time. You can too; just flip to Chapter 4 for some handy pointers.

Shopping Smart for Vegetarian Food

To start cooking at home, you need to shop for vegetarian ingredients. Before you venture out, though, you should make a list of vegetarian staples, such as veggies, fruit, beans, nuts, and grains. You also need to figure out how to decipher nutrition labels while you shop. These little bits of information tell you whether a food is filled with hidden animal ingredients and help you determine just how nutritious the food is.

Chapter 5 is filled with pointers on which vegetarian staples to stock in your kitchen. It also provides guidelines on interpreting food labels so that you always buy vegetarian-friendly, nutritious goodies.

Preparing to Cook on Your Own

You're almost ready to start cooking, but wait — do you have all the gear you need? Be sure you have essential tools and gadgets such as a mixing bowl, a sharp knife, a cutting board, a whisk, and a baking pan on hand. (You're probably also going to need some potholders; you don't want to burn yourself!)

Keep in mind that cooking is much easier when your kitchen is organized, too. Are your counters cleared so you have room to cook? Are spices and seasonings handy? If similar products are neatly grouped together in your pantry, seeing what you have on hand at a glance is much easier — having a lot of one particular item may help you decide what to cook so you can use up excess ingredients. And before you begin mixing ingredients for a recipe, set out all the utensils, pans, and foods that you're going to need.

Suppose you're in the middle of trying a recipe, but you don't understand some of the terms you're reading. Do you know the difference between *simmer* and *boil*? Between *sauté* and *brown*? Understanding the terms used in a cookbook or on package directions can often make the difference between making something that tastes delicious and something that's burnt.

Chapter 6 is filled with helpful hints on getting basic kitchen gear, organizing your kitchen, and understanding a variety of cooking terms.

Getting Support

Whether you're new to vegetarianism or a veteran vegetarian, you have a lot of resources to help you. Give the ones in the following sections a whirl.

Dietary resources

Even if you have health issues to deal with, a dietitian can help you squeeze everything you need into your vegetarian diet.

- ✓ *Vegetarian Journal* explains why you need a dietitian: www.vrg.org/journal/dietitian.htm
- ✓ Get a list of dietitians in your area from the American Dietetic Association site: www.eatright.org/programs/rdfinder

- ✔ At the *Ask the Dietitian* forum, you can type in a question and a registered dietitian will answer you: www.vegfamily.com/dietician/index.htm
- ✔ You can find basic food guides at The Vegan RD: www.theveganrd.com

Local vegetarian groups

Joining a local vegetarian group is fun and reassuring because everyone there has similar interests and experiences. Most colleges and universities have vegetarian clubs; here are some additional sites where local groups are listed by state:

- ✔ Soy Stache Vegetarian Organizations: www.soystache.com/vegorg.htm
- ✔ Vegan & Vegetarian Societies and Vegetarian Organizations: www.veganfood.com
- ✔ Vegetarian Resource Group: www.vrg.org/links/local.htm
- ✔ Vegetarians in Paradise: www.vegparadise.com/directory.html

National vegetarian societies

National organizations offer helpful links, diet suggestions, ways to get involved in your community, and more:

- ✔ American Vegan Society; phone 856-694-2887; www.americanvegan.org/index.htm
- ✔ Christian Vegetarian Association; phone 216-283-6702; www.christianveg.com
- ✔ FARM (Farm Animal Reform Movement); phone 888-327-6872; www.farmusa.org
- ✔ In Defense of Animals; phone 415-388-9641; www.idausa.org
- ✔ Jewish Vegetarians of North America; phone 410-754-5550; www.jewishveg.com
- ✔ Last Chance for Animals; phone 310-271-6096; www.lcanimal.org
- ✔ North American Vegetarian Society; phone 518-568-7970; www.navs-online.org

- ✔ PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals); phone 757-622-7382; www.peta.org
- ✔ Vegan Action; phone 804-502-8736; www.vegan.org
- ✔ Vegan Outreach; www.veganoutreach.org
- ✔ Vegetarian Awareness Network (VEGANET); phone 800-834-5463; <http://library.thinkquest.org/20922/index.shtml>

Vegetarian magazines

The following magazines have free information on their Web sites. Topics include book reviews, food articles, recipes, frequently asked questions, vegetarian- and vegan-specific health issues, vegetarian-friendly restaurants, and much more.

- ✔ *VegNews*: www.vegnews.com/web/home.do
- ✔ *Vegetarian Journal*: www.vrg.org/journal
- ✔ *Vegetarian Times*: www.vegetariantimes.com
- ✔ *Veggie Life*: www.veggielife.com

Online blogs, chat rooms, and forums

Online blogs, chat rooms, and forums are perfect when you want to ask a question or share what's happening in your life.

Online blogs to check out include the following:

- ✔ The Garden Diet: www.thegardendiet.com
- ✔ Vegan Peace: www.veganpeace.blogspot.com/2007/11/vegan-forums.html
- ✔ VegWeb: www.vegweb.com

Chat rooms include the following:

- ✔ Happy Cow: www.happycow.net/chat.html
- ✔ VegWeb: www.vegweb.com/index.php?action=chat
- ✔ Vegan Freak: www.veganfreak.com/chat
- ✔ Vegan Passions: www.veganpassions.com/defun/chat.html
- ✔ Vegetarian Passions: www.vegetarianpassions.com/defun/chat.html

Forums include the following:

- ✔ Minoesj: The Vegetarian Voice: <http://members.for-tunecity.com/ricardo005/Ricardo4you/id9.html>
- ✔ Vegan Discussion Forums: www.veganclub.org/forums
- ✔ Vegan Forum: www.vegtalk.org

Vegetarian restaurant locators

You're in luck. Aside from actual vegetarian restaurants, Asian and Indian restaurants have lots of veggie options. And don't totally ignore steakhouses and seafood joints; even they're beginning to offer vegetarian choices. Here are some links to sites that will do the searching for you. Now how easy is that!

- ✔ Happy Cow (the site automatically displays vegetarian restaurants in your city): www.happycow.net
- ✔ VegDining: www.vegdining.com/Home.cfm
- ✔ VegGuide (the site also has info for area vegetarian and vegan grocery stores): www.vegguide.org/region/2
- ✔ Vegetarian, Vegan, and Raw Restaurants: www.vegetarian-restaurants.net
- ✔ Veggie Life: www.veggielife.com

