

Lunch club catering for older vegans and vegetarians



Top tips and simple, tasty recipes for lunch club caterers

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Company number 6294709
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Introduction

This guide aims to support and encourage those running or setting up a lunch club to cater well for their vegan and vegetarian (veg*n) attendees.

You might already run a lunch club with some veg*n attendees and be looking for new recipe ideas, or perhaps you plan to set up an exclusively veg*n lunch club. Maybe you are a volunteer wanting to learn more about veg*n catering – or even a potential attendee trying to encourage your local lunch club to increase its veg*n choices.

Whatever your situation, this guide is here to inspire you, with handy tips to help you on your way. It will complement your existing recipes and skills by introducing some new ingredients to help you to put together a veg*n menu that is varied, well balanced, and nutritious.

WHAT VEGANS AND VEGETARIANS DO AND DON'T EAT

Vegetarians don't eat meat, fish, shellfish, or any products derived from dead animals (e.g. gelatine, suet, aspic).

Vegans don't eat any of the above, or anything else from an animal source, including milk, cheese and other dairy products, eggs, or honey.

However, we do eat bread, pasta, rice, fruit and vegetables, nuts, beans, peas, lentils, and other pulses. We can also eat meat-, fish- and dairy-alternatives, which are often made from soya, almonds, coconuts, oats and nuts. Pretty much any dish can be made vegan!

WHY OFFER A VEGAN OR VEGETARIAN OPTION AT YOUR LUNCH CLUB?

If you don't yet have veg*n attendees, you may wonder – why introduce veg*n options?

Firstly, potential veg*n attendees might suspect that they wouldn't be catered for. Vegetarian for Life has spoken to many veg*ns who feel this way – which is why we set up an online, exclusively veg*n, lunch club.

One vegan lady attended her local lunch club but had to take her own food because they didn't cater for her diet.

Around 10% of the UK population may have special dietary requirements because of their beliefs. Providing veg*n options makes your lunch club more inclusive – not only catering for veg*ns, but for those following a special diet for religious reasons, too.

Catering for special diets is an important aspect of honouring equality and diversity within your lunch club setting. You should always strive to meet the diverse needs of your local community and ensure equal access to services. Veganism is also protected by law under the Human Rights Act. You can find out more from Vegetarian for Life's 'Dietary diversity in the care sector' guide – available from our website or by calling 0161 257 0887.

With a little thought and planning, catering for those with dietary restrictions needn't create extra work. It can be an opportunity to create new, exciting, and innovative dishes. You may even find that your meat-eating attendees choose the veg*n option, too.

Top tips for catering for vegans and vegetarians

- Firstly, speak with any veg*n lunch club members about their preferences in order to offer a variety of suitable meals. Bear in mind that some veg*n's prefer to avoid faux meat products, for example, so it's worth checking on this. If in doubt, just ask.
- Think about your existing menu. What meat-free dishes would complement current provisions in terms of style and preparation? Many soups can be made vegan simply by changing meat-based stock to a vegetable stock. Making use of faux mince is an easy way to introduce some veg*n dishes. If you're making shepherd's pie, lasagne, Bolognese or chilli for example, simply make a separate one with vegan mince, or even offer the vegan version for all.
- Stocks and bouillon are not always suitable for vegans. Look for brands such as Kallo or Marigold. Vegan gravies are readily available such as vegetable gravy granules from ASDA, Tesco, or Co-op, and the red tub of Bisto Original Gravy Granules.
- Don't be scared to combine lots of different vegetables in one dish. You can cook them in many ways too: mashed, roasted, marinated, steamed, or fried.
- Think big and punchy flavours. Seek inspiration in international cuisine. Countries where large numbers of the population follow a meat-free lifestyle such as India, Israel, and Taiwan can be a good starting point.
- Consider your choice of sauces. They play a big part in adding flavour to already great veg*n dishes.
- Think about structuring veg*n options in the same way you structure meat dishes. We all need the same bases covered. Where's the protein? Where are the carbs? Where are the vegetables? Where's the flavour?
- Remember vegan options are suitable for all. Why not try serving everyone a vegan starter? It means you don't need to make lots of separate dishes and you may find it goes down a treat.
- You don't need to serve a completely different meal. If everyone is having sausage and mash, or fish and chips, for example, there are easy swaps so you can serve a vegan version of these dishes, rather than creating something totally different.
- Don't forget to label the veggie/vegan options clearly so they don't get muddled up.
- If you make separate vegan meals and only 1 or 2 people eat them, try cooking in bulk and freezing with clear labels. Then the meals can be served again at another lunch club and you will save some cooking time that week.
- Make use of some ready-made products to save time when needed. For example, frozen vegan sausages are a handy option.

HIDDEN INGREDIENTS

Be aware of non-veg*n 'hidden' ingredients. Some ingredients may appear to be veg*n but aren't. For example, Worcestershire sauce contains anchovies. Other foods may contain gelatine or food additives and colourings that aren't vegan. Many French and Italian cheeses are not vegetarian, such as Parmesan, but you can easily find suitable alternatives. Foods may also include dairy, honey or egg which aren't suitable for vegans, so always check the label.

READING FOOD LABELS

- The quickest way to check if something's suitable is looking for a vegan or vegetarian label or logo on the packaging. It may be a green V, VG or VE, a trademark from the Vegetarian Society or Vegan Society, or may simply state 'suitable for vegetarians and vegans'.
- Check the ingredients list. Allergens such as milk and eggs will be highlighted so are easy to spot.
- Look out for ingredients such as honey or hidden additives, which won't be marked as allergens but may not be suitable for vegans and vegetarians.

VEGAN BAKING

Vegan baking is much easier than you might think – often you only need to make a few simple swaps. Here are our Roving Chefs' top tips for successful vegan baking.

1. Switch butter for a dairy-free alternative such as Pure, Vitalite, Naturli or the Stork baking block.
2. If a recipe requires milk, simply swap it for a plant-based alternative, such as soya or almond milk.
3. When it comes to alternatives to egg for baking projects, different recipes require different approaches – not all substitutes work interchangeably. Some replacements work well for cookies and bars, some are good for the lighter batters of cakes and quick breads, while others can also lend themselves well to savoury baking. See the egg replacement guide on pages 5 and 6 of Vegetarian for Life's 'Vegan baking guide' – available from our website or by calling 0161 257 0887.



Vegan protein sources

You may be wondering which plant-based proteins are best to include in your menus. This needn't be a difficult decision because many options are widely available.

Pulses and beans – tinned black beans are a good store-cupboard essential. They taste great as an ingredient in wraps, casseroles, burgers, soups, and chilli. Chickpeas can be used to make all sorts of delicious dishes – from hummus to falafel and curries. They're very nutritious, containing good amounts of protein, iron, and fibre. Lentils can be added to Bolognese, soups, stews, and salads and can also be used to create meat alternatives, such as burgers.

Meat alternatives – several products are available, such as vegan mince, nuggets, 'chicken' pieces, fillets, fishless fingers, facon, and sausages. Common brands include Quorn, Fry's, Linda McCartney, Beyond Meat, and many supermarket brands.

Tofu – comes in extra firm, firm or silken (soft) forms. You can marinate, fry, grill, scramble, bake, or even blend it. Tofu is made from soya beans and is very versatile. It is flavourless but will absorb any flavour that you add, which makes it suitable for lots of recipes. Brands include The Tofoo Co., Cauldron, and Yutaka. Add firm tofu to stir-fries, curries, or make scrambled tofu as an excellent alternative to scrambled eggs. Soft tofu can even be used to make puddings such as mousse and cheesecake.

Nuts and seeds – choose from almonds, peanuts, pecans, pistachios, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds, flaxseeds, and many more. Both nuts and seeds are a great source of protein, and there's plenty you can do with them. Why not use them to garnish a dish, top a salad, or sprinkle on top of soups? Nut and seed butters can also be added to soups, sauces and stews to give added creaminess, flavour, and extra calories if needed.

Quinoa – can be used as a substitute for rice, whether as a side, mixed with vegetables, inside a wrap, or in a salad. It's easy to prepare and is a great source of protein.

Broccoli – broccoli can be a reasonable 'green' source of protein. 100 grams contains 2.8g of protein. Steam, roast, bake, or sauté it and add it to a soup, stir-fry, salad, or a pasta dish.



DAIRY ALTERNATIVES

A wide range of non-dairy milks is available including oat, rice, soya, cashew, almond, and coconut. Brands include Alpro, Koko, Oatly, and own-brands from all major supermarkets.

Oatly has a full range of plant-based alternatives including non-dairy milk, cream, crème fraîche, and ready-to-eat custards.

Bird's Traditional Custard Powder is suitable for veg*ns if prepared with non-dairy milk.

Vegan cheese is also available in most supermarkets. You'll find supermarket versions in the free-from section, as well as brands such as Violife and Sheese.

Vegan margarines include Pure, Vitalite, and supermarket free-from brands.

Several brands also make vegan ice cream, including Swedish Glace, Alpro, Ben and Jerry's, Booja Booja, and the major supermarkets' own brands.



COOKING AND SERVING FOOD

It is important to ensure that no cross-contamination has occurred during the preparation of veg*n foods. When cooking veg*n and non-veg*n dishes at the same time, it's vital that procedures are in place to prevent any mix-ups, contamination, or accidental addition of non-veg*n ingredients.

Here are some recommendations on avoiding food cross-contamination:

- Don't roast your vegetables anywhere near the meat. Use separate trays and oil.
- Make a separate veg*n gravy or serve the veg*n version to all.
- Deep fat frying items using the same oil in which meat and fish has been cooked is not acceptable for veg*ns. Use separate fryers or, if that's not possible, change the oil.
- Take care when grilling, barbecuing, or frying on hot plates, so that veg*n products do not come into contact with meat products. If possible, use a separate grill or barbecue. If that's not possible, ensure there are distinct sides to the grill/barbecue for veg*n food and ensure that meat fat cannot splatter onto non-meat products.
- Use separate woks or pans for frying where possible. It is not sufficient to wipe out the wok after stir-frying prawns, for example. It should be washed thoroughly before being used for veg*n items.

COOKING AND SERVING FOOD (CONT.)

- Use separate cooking utensils and chopping boards to prepare and cook non-meat products. Make sure that you have different basting spoons, tongs, draining spoons, and spatulas. Colour coded utensil handles are a good way of ensuring that they don't get mixed up. Use the official colour coded boards where possible or buy separate boards and ensure that everyone is clear which to use.
- Use separate serving utensils for veg*n food. Also use separate serving plates. For example, a tray of cut sandwiches should not contain meat or fish sandwiches alongside non-meat sandwiches.
- When using disposable gloves to prepare or serve food, these should always be changed after touching meat or fish products.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- If you organise days out as part of your lunch club, it's important to ensure these activities will be suitable for all members. For example, if you are arranging a trip to a pub for a meal, check the menu in advance to ensure they have a choice of veg*n options.
- If you host special celebrations as part of the lunch club, such as BBQs, a Christmas meal, or birthday cakes, it's important to provide veg*n alternatives so someone following a special diet doesn't feel excluded.
- If people ever bring in food to share, try and encourage them to ensure it's suitable for all. You could also keep handy alternatives in the cupboards to serve in these situations, so that no-one is left out.
- When advertising your lunch club, state that you provide vegan and vegetarian options. You may find that this increases membership when people see that you cater for all.



Recipes

We have put together some simple, tasty vegan recipes to help you get started. Further recipes can be found on our website.

Soups

Spiced vegetable soup

Time to prepare 10 minutes

Time to cook 45 minutes

Serves 12

- 200g/7oz pearl barley
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tsp brown mustard seeds
- 2 tsp cumin seeds
- 4 green chillies, deseeded and finely chopped
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tsp ground turmeric
- 2 large onions, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 parsnips, cut into chunks
- 400g/14oz butternut squash, cut into chunks
- 400g/14oz sweet potato, cut into chunks
- 2 tsp paprika
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 400g/14oz red lentils
- 4 large tomatoes, chopped
- 3.3 litres of water
- Small bunch coriander, chopped
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- Salt to taste



- 1** Rinse the pearl barley and cook following packet instructions. When it is tender, drain and set aside.
- 2** Heat the oil in a deep, heavy-bottomed pan. Fry the mustard seeds, cumin seeds, chillies, bay, and turmeric until fragrant and the seeds start to crackle.
- 3** Add in the onion and garlic, then cook for 5–8 minutes until soft.
- 4** Stir in the parsnip, butternut squash, and sweet potato, and mix thoroughly, making sure the vegetables are fully coated with the oil and spices. Sprinkle in the paprika, ground coriander and seasoning, and stir well.
- 5** Add the lentils, cooked pearl barley, tomatoes and 3.3 litres of water. Bring to the boil, then turn down and simmer until the vegetables are tender. When the lentils are almost cooked, stir in the chopped coriander, lemon juice, and salt.

Carrot and bean soup

Time to prepare 10 minutes

Time to cook 20 minutes

Serves 8–10

- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 4 large leeks, washed, halved lengthways and finely sliced
- 1.4kg/3lb 1oz carrots, chopped
- 2.8 litres vegetable stock
- 8 garlic cloves, finely grated
- 4 x 400g/14oz cans cannellini beans in water
- 1 pack parsley, roughly chopped

1 Heat the oil in a large pan over a medium heat. Add the leeks and carrots, and fry for 5 minutes to soften.

2 Pour over the stock. Stir in the garlic, the beans with their liquid, and three-quarters of the parsley. Cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until the veg is just tender. Stir in the remaining parsley before serving.

Sweetcorn chowder

Time to prepare 10 minutes

Time to cook 20 minutes

Serves 8–10

- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 onions, roughly chopped
- 2 small red peppers, finely sliced
- 2 celery sticks, chopped
- ½ tsp chilli flakes
- 600g/1lb 5oz frozen sweetcorn
- 1.6 litre vegetable stock
- 2 x 400ml cans coconut milk
- 2 tsp smoked paprika
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 spring onions, sliced on the diagonal

1 In a large pan, heat the oil on a medium heat. Add the onion and fry for 2 minutes, then add the red pepper, celery and chilli flakes and cook for a further 2–3 minutes to soften slightly.

2 Add the sweetcorn, vegetable stock and coconut milk, then increase the heat to high.

3 Stir in the smoked paprika, then cover with a lid. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

4 Remove from the heat and season. Pour half the soup into a blender and blitz until smooth. Pour the smooth half back into the unblended soup and mix well.

5 Bring back up to the heat. Scatter with spring onions to serve. Add croutons if desired.





Sweet potato and kale soup

Time to prepare 10 minutes

Time to cook 20 minutes

Serves 12

- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 large onions, diced
- 8 medium garlic cloves, crushed
- 4 tsp dried oregano
- 3 tsp cumin
- 2 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp black pepper
- ½ tsp paprika
- 950g/2lb 1oz sweet potatoes, peeled and diced
- 2 litres vegetable stock
- 2 x 400g/14oz cans chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 tsp salt
- 170g/6oz kale, roughly chopped
- 6 spring onions, thinly sliced
- 4 radishes, thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp lime juice

1 In a large pan, heat the olive oil over a medium heat. Add the onions and cook until soft.

2 Reduce the heat to medium. Add the garlic, oregano, cumin, garlic powder, black pepper and paprika. Stir for 1 minute.

3 Stir in the sweet potatoes, then add the vegetable stock, chickpeas, and salt.

4 Bring to the boil, then simmer for 15 minutes until the sweet potato is tender. While simmering, roughly chop the kale. Thinly slice the spring onions and radishes.

5 Once the sweet potatoes are tender, remove from the heat and stir in the kale, spring onions, and lime juice.

6 Serve garnished with radishes.

Sandwich filling ideas

Sandwiches are a great option for lunch clubs. They are also perfect for those with smaller appetites. Vegan sandwiches don't need to be limited to a dollop of hummus and a stack of soggy vegetables. To give you some inspiration, we've put together some suggestions. These tasty fillings can be served on sliced bread, rolls, or wraps. You could even serve some of them on a baked potato.

Cream cheese

Vegan cream cheese, such as Violife Original Soft Cheese Dairy Alternative, served with spinach or rocket leaves, and sundried tomatoes.

Rainbow crunch

Rainbow sandwiches are very popular and there are lots of variations of sweet and savoury that you can try. Spread the bread with hummus or vegan cream cheese and add a selection of colourful toppings such as:

Red: tomato, bell pepper, strawberries, grated beetroot

Orange: bell pepper, grated carrots, sweet potato, orange slices

Yellow: bell pepper, yellow beetroot, pineapple rings

Green: leafy greens, sliced cucumbers, avocado, pickles

Blue: roasted portobello mushroom, blueberries

Purple: shredded purple cabbage, purple lettuce, purple sauerkraut

Roast vegetables and hummus

This works well in a wrap or a pitta pocket. Try roasting carrots, aubergine, and courgette strips in a little olive oil. Serve with hummus and salad leaves of your choice.

Italian roasted red bell peppers

Roast sliced red bell peppers with a little olive oil. Serve with a vegan Mozzarella, such as Violife, then top with vegan pesto such as Sacla.

Cheese savoury

Grated vegan cheddar, such as Violife, mixed with vegan mayonnaise, such as Hellmann's or Sacla, and blended with grated carrot and diced onion.



BBQ jackfruit

Jackfruit is becoming more popular and is readily available from most supermarkets. This recipe takes a bit longer to make but the results are worth it. This works well in a baked potato or a crusty roll.

Time to prepare 5 minutes

Time to cook 40 minutes

Serves 4

- 3 x 410g/14oz jackfruit in water
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- ½ large onion, sliced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 60ml vegetable stock
- 170g/6oz vegan/vegetarian* BBQ sauce

1 Preheat your oven to

200°C/400°F/gas mark 6. Lightly grease a baking tray.

2 Drain and rinse the jackfruit and cut into smaller pieces.

3 Add the olive oil to a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Add the onion and garlic. Fry for about 5 minutes until the onions are soft and beginning to brown. Add in the chopped jackfruit and vegetable stock.

4 Cover and continue to cook for another 8–10 minutes until the jackfruit is soft enough that it can be mashed. Mash the jackfruit with a potato masher, until it breaks apart and looks pulled or shredded.

5 Spread the jackfruit in an even layer across the baking tray and heat in the oven for 15 minutes. Remove from oven, pour over half of the BBQ sauce, and stir to combine.

6 Place the jackfruit back in the oven for about 10 minutes, until it looks golden. Remove from the oven. If desired, stir in the remaining BBQ sauce to make it even saucier.

*Check that the BBQ sauce you use is suitable for vegans or vegetarians depending on requirements.



Butter bean and sundried tomato pâté

This easy-to-make pâté is nutritious and tasty. It goes well on sandwiches with salad leaves, as well as on bagels or even toast.

Time to prepare 10 minutes

Serves 6

- 400g/14oz can butterbeans, drained and rinsed
- 10 sundried tomatoes from a jar
- 2 tbsp oil from sundried tomato jar
- Juice of 1 lemon
- 4 sprigs fresh oregano
- 3–4 tbsp water
- Salt and black pepper to taste

1 Tip the butterbeans into a blender or food processor. Add the sundried tomatoes, oil, lemon juice, leaves from the oregano sprigs, and 3 tbsp of water.

2 Blitz to a smooth paste. Taste and season as required. If the pâté is a little too thick, add another tablespoon of water and blitz again.

Tofu and roasted vegetables

If you have extra roast vegetables from another dish, try mixing with shop-bought cooked tofu, such as Cauldron Marinated Tofu, and vegan mayonnaise for something different and satisfying.

Other simple sandwich fillings include:

Ploughmans – sliced hard vegan cheese such as Violife Original Sliced, with tomato, lettuce, and sandwich pickle.

Florida salad – vegan cream cheese with apricots, pineapple, and sunflower seeds.

Creamy avocado – hummus, sliced avocado, and cucumber.

Eastern delight – hummus, shop-bought falafel, cucumber, and grated carrot.

Taste of India – shop-bought onion bhaji or vegetable pakora with crispy onions and mango chutney.

Mexican magic – guacamole, onion, tomato, and sliced vegan ready-to-eat sausages, such as VBites.

Filling fungi – mushroom pâté with gherkins and red onion.

Mains

Tofu stir-fry

You may only have a few vegan or vegetarian lunch club members. If so, this super simple, nutritious stir-fry is a great option and can be made in under half-an-hour.

Time to prepare 10 minutes

Time to cook 15 minutes

Serves 2

- 2 tbsp cashew nuts
- 3 tbsp sesame seeds
- 175g/generous 6oz firm tofu, well-drained and cut into cubes
- 1 tsp cornflour
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 tbsp rice syrup
- 2 cloves of garlic, sliced
- 5cm piece of ginger, sliced
- 4 spring onions or 1 red onion, thinly sliced
- 2 fresh red chillies, sliced
- ½ head of broccoli, cut into florets
- ½ red pepper, sliced
- 4 baby sweetcorn, sliced lengthways
- 80g/scant 3oz sweetcorn
- Juice of ½ a lime
- Soy sauce

1 Set a frying pan or wok over a high heat. Add the cashews, then 30 seconds later add the sesame seeds. Toss for a further 30 seconds until golden, then tip into a bowl and set aside.



2 Place the tofu pieces in a bowl and dust with the cornflour and a pinch of salt and pepper.

3 Add the oil to the pan or wok and place back on a medium-high heat.

4 Fry the tofu until golden and crisp. Scoop it out of the pan with a slotted spoon and set aside on a plate lined with kitchen paper. While it's still warm, drizzle with rice syrup and scatter over the nuts and seeds.

5 Return the pan to a medium heat and add the garlic, ginger, spring onions or red onion, and chillies. Stir-fry for 30 seconds, or until the garlic turns golden.

6 Add the vegetables and stir-fry for a further 4 minutes. Squeeze in the lime juice and add a splash of soy sauce.

7 Tip the vegetables into bowls and top with the crispy tofu. Serve with rice, noodles, or quinoa.

Chef's tip: If serving with noodles, check that they don't contain egg.

Aubergine bake

Time to prepare 10 minutes

Time to cook 45–50 minutes

Serves 12

- 8 aubergines, cut into 5mm–1cm thick slices
- 4 tbsp vegetable oil
- 3 tbsp coconut oil
- 4 large onions, chopped
- 6 garlic cloves, crushed
- 2 tbsp black mustard seeds
- 1 tbsp fenugreek seeds
- 2 tbsp garam masala
- ½ tsp chilli powder
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 4 x 400g/14oz cans chopped tomatoes
- 400ml coconut milk
- Sugar, to taste
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 4 tbsp flaked almonds

1 Heat oven to 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6. Generously brush each aubergine slice with vegetable oil and place in a single layer on a baking tray. Cook on a low shelf for 10 minutes, then turn over and cook for a further 5–10 minutes until golden. Reduce the oven to 160°C/315°F/gas mark 2.5.

2 Heat the coconut oil in a large, heavy-based frying pan and add the onions. Cover and sweat on a low heat for about 5 minutes until softened.

3 Add the garlic, mustard seeds, fenugreek seeds, garam masala, chilli powder, cumin, and ground coriander. Cook for a few seconds until it starts to smell aromatic.

4 Pour the chopped tomatoes and coconut milk into the spiced onions and stir well. Check the seasoning and add a little sugar, salt, and pepper to taste.

5 Spoon a third of the tomato sauce on the bottom of a 2.2 litre ovenproof dish. Layer with half the aubergine slices. Spoon over a further third of tomato sauce, then add the remaining aubergine slices, and finish with the rest of the sauce. Sprinkle over the flaked almonds and bake for 25–30 minutes.



Shepherd's pie

Time to prepare 15 minutes

Time to cook 1 hour 30 minutes

Serves 10

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 3 clove garlic, minced
- 2 x 400g can chopped tomatoes
- 750ml/1.3 pints vegetable stock
- 200g/7oz dried brown or green lentils
- 2 tsp dried basil or mixed herbs
- 1 tsp salt
- 600g/1lb 5oz sliced chestnut mushrooms
- 2kg floury potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 75ml plant-based milk
- 2 tbsp margarine, such as Vitalite
- 2 spring onions, thinly sliced
- 175g/generous 6oz vegan cheddar cheese, grated, such as Violife

1 In a large pan, heat half of the oil over a medium-high heat and fry the onion, celery, and garlic until softened (about 5 minutes).

2 Stir in the tomatoes, stock, lentils, basil, and half of the salt. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat, cover, and simmer. Stir occasionally until the mixture is very thick and the lentils are tender (about 30 minutes). Spread into a 13 x 9 inch baking dish.



3 In a large pan, heat the remaining oil over medium-high heat and fry the mushrooms for about 10 minutes until golden brown, and so any liquid is evaporated. Spread over the lentil mixture.

4 Meanwhile, peel and cut the potatoes into 2 inch (5 cm) chunks. In a large saucepan of boiling salted water, cover and cook the potatoes for about 20 minutes until tender. Drain well, return to the dry saucepan and mash together until smooth, with plant milk, margarine, and the remaining salt. Stir in the spring onions and half of the cheese, and mix.

5 Spread the mashed potatoes over the top of the lentil mixture. Sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Bake in a preheated oven for about 30 minutes at 200°C/400°F/gas mark 6, until golden brown and bubbling.

Vegetable stew

Time to prepare 15 minutes

Time to cook 45 minutes

Serves 8

- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 3 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp tomato purée
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- ½ a large cauliflower, roughly chopped
- 750ml/1.3 pints vegetable stock
- 2 carrots, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 2 courgettes, diced
- 2 x 400g/14oz cans chopped tomatoes
- 1 tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper

1 In a large pan, heat 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Add onion, garlic, tomato purée and thyme. Cook over a low heat, stirring occasionally, until the onions are soft.

2 Add in cauliflower and 500ml/0.9 pint of the stock. Bring to a boil and cook for approximately 5 minutes, until the cauliflower is soft. Blitz with hand blender until smooth.

3 Heat remaining olive oil in another large pan and add the carrots. Cook for 2 minutes and add the red pepper. Cook until the carrots and peppers are caramelised.

4 Stir the carrots and peppers into the cauliflower purée, along with the courgettes and diced tomatoes. Bring to a boil.

5 Add the remaining stock and salt and pepper, then reduce to a simmer.

6 Cook uncovered on a medium heat for 20 minutes, until the stew has thickened.

7 Serve with potatoes, rice, pasta, or warm crusty bread.





Butter bean and butternut squash ragout

Time to prepare 10 minutes

Time to cook 35 minutes

Serves 8

- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 2 large onions, diced
- 1kg/2lb 3oz butternut squash, peeled and diced
- 8 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 2 tsp ground turmeric
- 3 tsp cumin seeds
- 1 tsp dried chilli flakes
- 2 bottles of passata (650g/1lb 4oz)
- 2 tsp caster sugar
- 250ml/0.4 pint water
- 4 x 400g/14oz cans butter beans OR chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- 1 bunch flat-leaf parsley, roughly chopped
- Small handful flaked almonds (optional)

1 Heat oil in a large pan over a medium heat and cook the onion for 10 minutes until soft, without browning.

2 Add the diced squash and garlic. Cook for 8–10 minutes until it starts softening at the edges.

3 Add the spices, coating everything well and stirring for a minute or so. Season generously, then add the passata, sugar, and the measured water. Stir, cover with a lid, reduce the heat, and cook gently for 20–25 minutes or until the squash has cooked through. Stir occasionally and add a splash of water if it begins to look a little dry

4 Remove the lid and stir well. Add the beans or chickpeas and the parsley.

5 Allow to simmer until the beans or chickpeas have heated through, then serve. Top with flaked almonds if desired.

Desserts

Rhubarb and custard bake

Time to prepare 15 minutes

Time to cook 1 hour 35 minutes

Serves 12

- 250g/8¾oz rhubarb, cut into 1 inch lengths
- 280g/scant 10oz golden caster sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla bean paste
- 250g/8¾oz vegan margarine, such as Vitalite, plus extra for greasing
- 2 tsp ground flaxseed
- 6 tbsp water
- 150g/½oz soya custard, plus extra to serve
- 250g/8¾oz self-raising flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 125g/scant 4½oz unsweetened apple sauce
- Icing sugar, to serve

1 Heat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 and put the rhubarb in a roasting tin. Sprinkle over 25g/scant 1oz of the caster sugar and add the vanilla bean paste. Shake the tin to coat the rhubarb and put in the oven for 15 minutes. Remove, drain off any liquid from the tin and leave the rhubarb to cool.

2 Reduce oven to 150°C/300°F/gas mark 2. Grease and line a rounded ovenproof dish, 2 inch deep by 9 inches across with baking parchment.

3 In a small bowl, mix the flaxseed with 6 tbsp of water and set aside for 5 minutes.

4 In a bowl, beat together the margarine, 100g/3½oz of the custard, the flour, baking powder, vanilla extract, and the remaining sugar. Once this is well combined and light and fluffy, add the apple sauce, and flaxseed mixture.

5 Put a third of the mixture in the tin and top with a third of the rhubarb. Repeat twice more, then dot teaspoons of the remaining custard on top.

6 Bake in the oven for 45 minutes, then cover with foil and bake for a further 30 minutes, or until golden brown and a skewer inserted in the middle comes out clean.

7 Serve warm as a pudding with soya custard, or allow to cool completely, then sprinkle with icing sugar.





Baked apple crisp

Time to prepare 15 minutes

Time to cook 45 minutes

Serves 10

Filling

- 10 large Bramley apples
- 150g/generous 5oz brown sugar
- 3 tsp cinnamon

Topping

- 120g/4¼oz margarine, such as Vitalite
- 50g/1¾oz plain flour
- 100g/3½oz brown sugar
- 100g/3½oz oats

1 Preheat oven to 160°C/315°F/gas mark 2.5.

2 Peel and chop the apples ⅛ inch thick.

3 In a large bowl, toss the apples in sugar and cinnamon, coating well.

4 Transfer to a large ovenproof dish.

5 In a medium mixing bowl, add all the topping ingredients. Rub together with fingertips until combined. Then pour over the apple mixture.

6 Bake for 45 minutes. Allow to cool slightly before serving.

7 Serve with custard, ice cream or cream.

Pear pudding

Time to prepare 15 minutes

Time to cook 65 minutes

Serves 8

- 8 small firm Conference pears
- 200g/7oz golden caster sugar
- 2 cinnamon sticks
- 1 star anise
- 6 cloves
- 1 lemon, zest pared
- 1 orange, zest pared
- 600ml water

Sponge

- 250g/8¾oz pitted dates
- 2 tbsp flaxseeds
- 300ml unsweetened almond milk
- 200ml vegetable oil, plus extra for greasing
- 175g/generous 6oz dark muscovado sugar
- 200g/7oz self-raising flour
- 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda
- 1 tsp ground mixed spice
- ½ tsp salt

- 1** Peel the pears and remove the pips from the base. Slice into quarters.
- 2** Add the sugar, cinnamon, star anise, cloves, zests and water into a saucepan large enough to fit all the pears. Bring to the boil, then simmer until the sugar has dissolved.
- 3** Add the pears, cover with a lid or a piece of baking parchment, and poach gently for 10 minutes until a knife easily slides into a pear. Leave to cool in the liquid.

4 For the sponge: preheat oven to 180°C/160°C fan/gas 4.

5 Put the dates and flaxseeds in a saucepan and add the almond milk. Bring to a gentle simmer, then cook for 2–3 minutes until the dates are soft. Using a hand blender, blitz until smooth. Add the oil and blend again, then scrape into a bowl and set aside to cool a little.

6 Grease and line a 8 x 12 inch baking tin or casserole dish with a strip of baking parchment.

7 Put the dry ingredients into a large mixing bowl. Mix well, breaking up any lumps of sugar with your fingers. Shake the bowl a few times to encourage any remaining lumps to come to the surface.

8 Add the date and oil mixture, and stir well. Scrape the cake mixture into the tin, then insert the pears. Push them down slightly – you should be able to see the pears.

9 Bake for 35–40 minutes until the cake is cooked through. Insert a skewer to the centre to check – it should come out clean. If there is any wet cake mixture on the skewer, return the cake to the oven and bake for 5–10 minutes more, then check again.

10 Meanwhile, bring the pear poaching liquid back to the boil and simmer until reduced to a glossy syrup. When cooked, cool for 5–10 minutes, then brush all over with the syrup, saving a little extra to serve alongside. Serve with vegan ice cream.



Vegetarian for Life (VfL) is the leading authority on diet and healthy living advice for older vegans and vegetarians. We work with care establishments, and other organisations supporting older people, to ensure that they can cater well and ethically for vegans and vegetarians.

We hope that you've found this guide useful. VfL produces many other useful publications, such as **Nutrition for older vegetarians and vegans**, **Catering for older vegetarians and vegans**, **Vegan rescue pack**, **Veganising classic dishes**, and **Vegan baking**. All can be downloaded as PDFs from our website, or call the office to order a paper copy.

VfL also operates a UK List of care homes and other establishments that cater well for older vegans and vegetarians. If you're offering veg*n options at your lunch club then let us know. We'd love to provide you with a free listing to promote your lunch club to local veg*n's.

If you'd like to expand your catering knowledge, VfL has many training options. These include online British Dietetic Association accredited care caterer training, and Meat-free 101. Either course can be completed at your own pace in 2.5 hours, covering topics such as plant-based nutrition, menu planning, sourcing and cooking with meat- and dairy-alternatives, vegan fortification, and vegan baking.

VfL can also do a lunch club takeover where we come and cook a fully vegan meal for your attendees alongside your cooks and volunteers. We'll leave you with lots of recipe ideas and inspiration for future lunch clubs. Get in touch to find out more.

Last but not least, VfL runs a virtual vegan lunch club on the fourth Tuesday of every month. Open to vegans, vegetarians and meat reducers aged 65 and over, it's a great way to socialise and meet likeminded people from across the UK. Again, just drop us a line for more information.



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