

CHEF'S CORNER



To Be or Not to Be VEGAN

by Chef Amber Balshaw, Preferred Sonoma Caterers

Years ago, people were vegetarian, now the trend is moving towards Vegan. But what exactly is vegan? This diet choice does not consume any animal product or anything produced by an animal (eggs, milk, cheese) I have even come across some that will not eat honey (produced by bees). When you hear this you may be quick to think that there is nothing left but lettuce for them to eat. But truly there are some great menu options out there.

When planning menus for vegan events it is important to consider how to make it a balanced meal. In a balanced meal you need Carbohydrates, Fats and Proteins. The first two are easy but protein can be more difficult. I usually start with it. Some of my favorite ways to get protein are in beans, nuts and grains. One of the best grains out there is quinoa. This Peruvian grain contains all of your essential amino acids. It can be used as a hot dish in a pilaf or is great as a cold grain in a light salad.

Black beans are another one of my favorites. I feel that along with a balanced meal it is important to feel sated, that full feeling. We make a black bean cake that has a great filling feeling. Served with a cool avocado salsa is a great main course.

Black Bean Cake Recipe

- 2 x 14 oz cans black beans, drained well
- 2 cloves garlic, ground
- 1 tsp cumin
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ¼ cup Masa

Place well drained black beans in a mixing bowl, using a potato masher begin mashing and add seasonings. Do not over mash, it should be chunky and not soupy. Stir in the masa, which should thicken to be handleable (more masa might be needed for wetter beans). Form in to patties and chill 30 to 45 minutes. Finish by sautéing on both sides in canola oil

Avocado Salsa (a chunky guacamole)

- 1 avocado, medium firm, diced
- 1 roma tomato, diced

- 2 Tbl chopped cilantro
- ½ mango diced
- ½ lime, juice
- Salt and pepper

Combine all ingredients (feel free to add additional items), then chill well. Serve over warm black bean cakes.

When it comes to carbohydrates you need to think just outside the box. Pasta contains eggs, mashed potatoes contain milk, mac and cheese- you just can't go

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there. One of our favorites is risotto. Yes classic risotto contains cheese, but do the cooking method long and slow, and the creaminess comes from the rice and makes a great dish. Last year we had a wedding and did this green pea risotto that was a total hit. With a bright green hue from the pea puree and a roasted vegetable stock. No one will ever know.

Green Pea Risotto

- 1 cup Arborio rice
- ½ small onion, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, diced
- ½ tsp thyme, dried
- 1 cup white wine
- 4 cups vegetable stock, heated (several good ones are available commercially)
- 2 Tbl olive oil
- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas, pureed (a bit extra for garnish)
- Salt and pepper to taste

In a heavy bottom pot heat the olive oil on a medium heat, and sauté the onions and garlic till translucent. Add

the Arborio rice and sauté for 3 to 4 minutes until the rice is glossy and well covered. Begin adding the white wine, stirring gently; when the wine has been absorbed to a wet sand look then add your first cup of stock. The rice should be simmering and not boiling rapidly. Each addition of stock should take about 5 minutes. Continue adding the next 2 cups of stock slowly, stirring continuously. Test rice for doneness; the kernel should be firm but not crunchy. If still to firm add the last cup of stock. Just before serving test for flavor and add pea puree. Garnish with a few whole peas.

To change your personal recipes to vegan, look if you can substitute olive oil for butter and vegetable stock for chicken or beef. When making a soup, think of adding beans in place of the meat. Don't be afraid of vegan cooking. Don't think of it as meatless; think of it as a chance to try a new recipe.



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