

How to Cook a Feast for Your Vegetarian Friends

In April, *Couples Who Cook* prepared and very much enjoyed a vegetarian dinner at Rachel & Craig's home. Thanks to Rachel and Craig being vegetarians themselves, we had a lot of guidance to putting together this menu – and although it's possible that some people were a little nervous about having an entirely vegetarian evening, the meal turned out to be spectacular – each dish being tastier and more enjoyable than the next.

Rachel was very proud that we didn't rely on the old meatless standbys such as pasta, rice, quiche, stir fry, etc. We really tried to create an exciting gourmet meal – that just happened to be vegetarian. As it turned out – except for the Parmigiana di Melanzane and the Smoked Gruyere Vegetable Gratin – this menu is actually vegan as well! So we are pleased to share our menu and recipes with you and hope that you will try out a few of the dishes. Bon appetit!

Appetizers

Artichoke Olive Dip with Fennel Crudités – makes about 1½ cups

Can be prepared in 45 minutes or less but requires additional unattended time.

Ingredients

a 14-to-16 ounce can whole artichoke hearts, rinsed well, drained, and patted dry

¼ cup olive oil

1 garlic clove, minced and mashed to a paste with ¼ tsp salt

½ cup brine-cured green olives such as *picholine*, pitted and chopped

3 Tbs finely chopped fresh parsley leaves

Garnish: fresh parsley sprigs

2 medium fennel bulbs (sometimes called anise), stalks trimmed flush with bulbs and bulbs cut lengthwise into strips or triangles for dipping

Preparation

In a food processor purée artichoke hearts with oil until very smooth, about 2 minutes. Transfer purée to a bowl and stir in garlic paste, olives, and salt and pepper to taste. Chill dip, covered, at least 4 hours and up to 24 hours. Before serving stir chopped parsley into dip and garnish with parsley sprigs.

Serve dip with fennel triangles.

Grapes Leaves with Bulgur and Mint – makes about 50

Ingredients

1 ½ cups whole grain quick-cooking bulgur (such as Bob's Red Mill)

2 ¼ cups chopped green onions (about 14 onions)

2 cups chopped plum tomatoes (about 14 ozs)

¾ cup chopped fresh dill

¾ cup chopped fresh mint

½ cup olive oil

¼ cup fresh lemon juice, plus 1 Tbs

1 tsp ground cumin

55 (or more) brined grape leaves from two 7-to 8-ounce jars, drained, stems cut off if needed

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Fresh dill sprigs (for garnish)

Fresh mint sprigs (for garnish)

Ingredient info: Bulgur is available at some supermarkets and at natural foods stores. Brined grape leaves are sold at some supermarkets, and at specialty foods stores and Greek markets.

Test-kitchen tip: Weighing the grape leaves down prevents them from opening up while they simmer.

Combine bulgur, green onions, tomatoes, chopped dill, chopped mint, ½ cup olive oil, 1 Tbs lemon juice, cumin, 1 ¼ tsp salt, and 1 tsp freshly ground black pepper in large bowl; toss. Let soak at room temperature at least 30 minutes and up to 1 hour.

Line bottom of large pot with 2 layers of grape leaves, covering bottom completely; set aside.

Open 1 grape leaf and lay flat, veined side down, on work surface (if leaf is small or broken, patch with 1 additional grape leaf). Place 1 Tbs bulgur filling atop center of leaf. Fold stem end of leaf up over bulgur filling, then fold in sides of leaf over filling and roll up leaf tightly, enclosing filling completely. Place on baking sheet. Repeat with remaining grape leaves and bulgur filling.

Place filled grape leaves, seam side down, in bottom of grape-leaf-lined pot, fitting snugly together and layering filled leaves atop one another as needed. Pour enough water over filled grape leaves to cover generously (about 6 cups), then pour ¼ cup lemon juice and ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil over. Place tart pan bottom atop leaves in pot; top with heavy heatproof dish or plate to weigh down. Bring liquid to simmer. Cover pot and reduce heat to very low; continue to simmer until bulgur filling is tender, 45 to 55 minutes.

Remove from heat and allow grape leaves to cool in liquid to room temperature. Gently remove filled grape leaves from liquid and place on platter. *DO AHEAD: Can be made 3 days ahead. Cover and chill.*

Garnish platter with dill sprigs and mint sprigs and serve.

Tempeh Sausage Pastry Puffs – makes 18 pastries

Ingredients:

For pastry:

- 8 ozs tempeh, crumbled (purchase at Planet Organic –avoid flavoured varieties)
- 1 package of puff pastry (Pepperidge Farm brand is vegan), thawed

For marinade:

- 1 cup vegetable broth
- 3 Tbs soy sauce
- 2 Tbs lemon juice

For everything else:

- 2 Tbs olive oil
- 1 red pepper, finely chopped
- 1 small onion, finely chopped
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tsp fennel seeds, chopped
- 2 tsp dried thyme
- 2 tsp dried rosemary
- ½ tsp red pepper flakes
- Salt, to taste
- Olive oil, for brushing pastry

Preparation:

1. Whisk marinade ingredients together in a small mixing bowl. Add tempeh and let marinate for at least an hour.
2. Heat a large pan over medium heat. Sauté red pepper and onion in oil for 7 to 10 minutes, until the onion is translucent. Add garlic and spices and sauté another 3 minutes.

3. Drain the marinated tempeh and add it to pan. Turn up the heat to medium high and cook about 15 minutes, stirring often.
4. In the meantime, preheat oven to 400 F and start preparing your puff pastries. Pour a little olive oil into a cup and brush a large baking sheet with olive oil. Cut each pastry sheet into nine squares (3x3) and set them on baking sheet at least an inch apart. Brush tops of pastries with olive oil.
5. When your tempeh is ready, taste for salt and remove from heat. Top each pastry with a heaping tablespoon of tempeh mixture.
6. Bake for 18 to 20 minutes, until the pastries are nice and puffed. Serve hot.

First Course

Polenta Cakes with Garlic Sauce – serves 6-8

Greens:

bunch of spinach, torn into small pieces (other greens work well, too. I usually use kale, but opted for spinach this time)

2 cups veggie broth

½ onion - chopped fine

1 Tbs olive oil

1 Roma tomato, chopped

pepper

other seasonings as you like

1. Boil broth.
2. Add all ingredients
3. Simmer greens until tender, while you cook sauce and polenta
4. Season to taste

Sauce:

2 Tbs olive oil

9 cloves garlic, minced

½ tsp crushed red peppers flakes

1 28 oz. canned tomatoes, diced, in juice

1 Tbs chopped fresh basil (or 1 tsp. dried)

1 Tbs chopped fresh rosemary (or 1 tsp. dried)

1 Tbs chopped fresh parsley (or 1 tsp. dried)

¼ tsp salt

¼ tsp sugar

½ tsp freshly ground black pepper

1. Heat oil in skillet (large) over medium heat. Add garlic and pepper flakes. Cook about a minute.
2. Stir in all other ingredients.
3. Simmer until the juices thicken (while you cook polenta)

Polenta:

3 cups veggie broth

¼ tsp salt

1 cup corn meal

1 Tbs olive oil

1. Bring broth, salt, and garlic to a boil in sauce pan, reduce heat to simmer
2. Slowly drizzle in corn meal, whisking all the while with a wire whisk
3. Whisk continually until polenta is the consistency of mashed potatoes (several minutes)

4. Whisk in olive oil
5. Pour polenta onto a lightly greased jelly roll pan, smooth out evenly with spatula, allow to cool/harden
6. Using a biscuit cutter, cut polenta disks from the large cake; two for each diner
7. Heat a large skillet to medium high. lightly grease skillet
8. Pan fry the disks for a few minutes (until golden) on each side

Assemble:

Make bed of greens on each plate.

Top with two polenta cakes.

Finally, spoon some sauce over polenta.

Soup

Fennel and Leek Soup with Fennel Greens – serves 4-6

Ingredients:

- 2 fennel bulbs, 1 to 1¼ pounds, with greens
- 6 cups vegetable broth
- 2 medium leeks, white parts plus an inch of greens, chopped
- 1 small potato, peeled and thinly sliced
- 2 Tbs olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- Salt and freshly milled pepper
- Orange slices, for garnish

Preparation:

1. Remove fennel greens. Chop ½ cup of greens and reserve.
2. Quarter the fennel bulbs (remove the core and outer layers if too tough). Thinly slice the fennel crosswise.
3. Warm oil in a soup pot and add onion, fennel, leek, potato, 1 tsp salt, and one cup of broth. Cover and stew over medium heat for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the remaining stock and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer, partially covered, until fennel is tender, 15-20 minutes more.
4. Stir in reserved fennel greens. Taste for salt. Season with pepper.
5. Serve with orange wedges, to be squeezed over each serving.

Intermezzo

Fresh Strawberry Granita – makes about 6 cups

Ingredients

- 1 cup hot water
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 Tbs fresh lemon juice
- 3 cups sliced hulled strawberries (1 pound whole berries). plus additional berries for garnish

Preparation

Stir first 3 ingredients in small bowl until sugar dissolves. Blend 3 cups strawberries in processor until smooth. Add sugar syrup and blend until combined. Pour mixture into 13x9x2-inch nonstick metal baking pan. Freeze until icy

around edges, about 25 minutes. Using fork, stir icy portions into middle of pan. Freeze until mixture is frozen, stirring edges into center every 20 to 30 minutes, about 1 ½ hours. Using fork, scrape granita into flaky crystals. Cover tightly and freeze. Scrape granita into bowls. Garnish with berries and serve. Can be made one day ahead, keep frozen.

Entrees

Parmigiana di Melanzane – serves 4-6

4 large eggplants
salt & pepper
750 ml/3 ¼ cups vegetable oil
2 Tbs olive oil
½ small onion
240 ml/1 cup passata or sieved tomatoes
2 balls Italian mozzarella (about 100 g each), thinly sliced
1 large bunch fresh basil
8 Tbs Parmesan cheese, grated

Cut the eggplant lengthways into 1 cm/1/3 inch slices. Heat the vegetable oil in a large frying pan and, working in batches, fry the slices of eggplant until golden on each side. Remove and set aside to drain on kitchen paper.

Place the olive oil and onion in a saucepan and fry gently over a medium heat until the onion starts to brown. Add the passata or sieved tomatoes, bring to a boil and simmer for 15 minutes. Season with salt and pepper and remove pan from heat.

Heat the oven to 180C/350F. Spread a large spoonful of the tomato sauce over the bottom of an ovenproof baking dish about 25 cm/10 inches long. Lay enough of the eggplant slices in the dish to cover the bottom. Spread some tomato sauce on the eggplant and top with a few slices of mozzarella. Add a few leaves of basil and sprinkle with some of the Parmesan cheese. Continue layering the eggplant, tomato sauce, mozzarella, basil, and Parmesan cheese until the dish is full – you should have at least three layers of eggplant and the top layer should be tomato sauce covered with mozzarella and basil. Bake for about 1 hour. When cooked, remove from the oven and leave to rest for 20 minutes before serving.

Note: Those of you who were there will know that we were unable to find eggplant in Edmonton – so what we did was take an acorn squash, a butternut squash, about 4-5 onions, and some big mushrooms, chop them all up in a roasting pan, throw on some olive oil, salt & fresh ground pepper and roast in the oven at about 375F for 45-60 minutes, stirring from time to time. Martin says he actually likes it better with the roasted vegetables – so the choice is yours. Also, usually I don't have the time to make my own tomato sauce – I just use a few jars of a nice organic, plain tomato sauce – again, the choice is yours!

Smoked Gruyere Vegetable Gratin – serves 4-6

Ingredients:

- Butter for the dish
- 3-4 cups of vegetables*, cut into 1-inch pieces
- ½ cup fresh bread crumbs
- 3 Tbs butter
- 1 cup milk
- ½ small onion or 2 large shallots, finely diced

- ½ - 1 cup grated smoked Gruyere cheese (use more cheese if you use more veggies)
- 2 eggs, separated
- Salt and freshly milled pepper
- Pinch grated nutmeg

Preparation:

1. Preheat the oven to 375 F. Lightly butter an 8x10 gratin dish.
2. Steam or parboil the vegetables until barley tender when pierced with knife. Drain, rinse under cold water, then finely chop them.
3. Lightly brown the bread crumbs in 2 Tbs butter in a small sauce pan, then stir in the milk. When it's hot to the touch, turn off the heat.
4. Meanwhile, cook the onion in the remaining butter in a small skillet over medium heat until translucent, about 3 minutes.
5. Combine the onion, vegetables, and bread crumb mixture in a bowl then stir in the cheese and egg yolks. Season with salt and pepper to taste and nutmeg.
6. Beat the egg whites until stiff then fold them into the mixture.
7. Pour the mixture into a prepared dish and bake until puffed and browned, about 25 minutes.

**You can use a variety of vegetables. Craig usually makes this with root veggies (turnips, parsnips, sweet potatoes, carrots, etc.); this makes a really nice flavor combination with the smoked cheese. But you can use anything you wish: broccoli, asparagus, cauliflower, squash, celery, etc. Think about what would go nicely together. Just a note: I probably wouldn't use bell peppers in this.*

Spiced Citrus Tofu with Mango Salsa – serves 6-8

2 packages of firm or extra-firm tofu (NOT silken tofu), drained (you can find tofu in the organic refrigerated section, near produce section, in most grocery stores.)

Marinade:

- 1 cup orange juice
- ½ cup lime juice
- ½ cup lemon juice
- ½ cup olive oil
- 4 Tbs of minced shallot
- 4 cloves of garlic, crushed
- 1 Tbs of sea salt
- 2 tsp of red chili flakes

Whisk together ingredients. Slice tofu into ½ inch thick slices and place in dish. Pour marinade over tofu. Cover and refrigerate overnight or at least 4 hours, flipping the tofu over halfway through. (I did it the night before and flipped the tofu over in the morning. It had a full 24 hours of marinade, 12 hours on each side.)

Preheat oven to 400 F. Bake, uncovered for about 30 minutes. Switch oven to broil and broil it for 6 minutes on each side.

For the Mango Salsa:

- 2 mangos, peeled and diced small
- 1 small red onion finely diced
- ½ red bell pepper, finely diced

1 small jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced
2 to 3 Tbs freshly squeezed lime juice, or to taste
salt, to taste

Place ingredients in small bowl and mix. (Next time I'll do this the night before as well so the flavours can really mix, and I might add another jalapeño!)

Tarragon-Scented Artichoke & Wild Mushroom Strudel – serves 4-6

Ingredients:

- 1 Tbs olive oil, plus more for brushing
- 3 shallots, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 8 oz cremini (preferred) mushrooms, chopped
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 8 oz extra-firm tofu, drained and crumbled
- One 9 oz package of frozen artichoke hearts, cooked according to package directions, drained, and coarsely chopped (I have never found frozen artichoke hearts. If you cannot either, use canned or jarred. Just be sure it is not marinated. Drain and chop.)
- 2 Tbs chopped fresh tarragon leaves
- One package of phyllo pastry, thawed overnight in the refrigerator
- 1 cup double mushroom sauce (follows)*

Preparation:

1. Heat 1 Tbs of olive oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add the shallots and garlic and cook, stirring, until tender, about 5 minutes. Add the mushrooms and salt and pepper to taste. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms release their liquid. Continue cooking until the liquid has evaporated, about 5 minutes. Set aside to cool.
2. Place tofu in large bowl. Add the artichokes, tarragon, and mushroom mixture. Season with salt and pepper to taste and stir well to combine. Set aside.
3. Preheat oven to 350 F. Lightly oil a large baking sheet. Remove six phyllo sheets from the package. Tightly seal the remaining sheets and reserve for another use. Place 1 sheet on a flat work surface with long side facing you and lightly brush with olive oil. Lay another sheet on top and brush with olive oil. Repeat layering with the remaining sheets.
4. Spoon the artichoke-mushroom mixture evenly on top of the phyllo sheets, leaving a 3-inch border around the edges. Fold the short ends over the filling then roll lengthwise into a cylinder to encase the filling. Place the strudel seam side down on the prepared baking sheet and brush with oil.
5. Bake until hot inside and golden brown outside, 30-40 minutes. While the strudel bakes, prepare mushroom sauce.
6. Spoon sauce onto each plate and top with a slice of strudel.

***Double Mushroom Sauce - yields about 2 cups**

Ingredients:

- ½ cup dried porcini mushrooms (can be found at Italian Centre), soaked in 1 cup of very hot water for 20 minutes

- 1 Tbs olive oil
- 3 shallots, minced
- 1 cup crimini mushrooms, sliced
- 1½ cups mushroom broth (or vegetable broth) – you can find mushroom bouillon cubes at Italian Centre or Planet Organic. Really enhances the flavor, a triple layer of mushroom flavour.
- 1 Tbs tamari or other dark soy sauce
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbs cornstarch dissolved in 2 Tbs broth.

Preparation:

1. Drain the porcini mushrooms, reserving the soaking liquid. Strain the liquid and set aside. Chop the porcini mushrooms.
2. Heat the olive oil in a medium-size saucepan over medium heat. Add the shallots, cover, and cook until softened, about five minutes. Add all the mushrooms and cook for 2 minutes. Stir in the broth, soy sauce, and reserved mushroom soaking liquid, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil then reduce heat to low. Whisk in the cornstarch mixture and cook, stirring, until thickened, about 2-3 minutes. Serve hot.

Salad

Herb, Red Onion & Quinoa Salad with Preserved Lemon – serves 6

1 cup Quinoa
 1 small red onion
 peel of 1 preserved lemon* finely chopped, or finely grated peel of 1 fresh lemon
 3 oz arugula
 large bunch of flat leaf parsley, stems removed
 small bunch of mint, chopped
 handful of chives, chopped
 freshly squeezed juice of 1 lemon
 ¼ tsp cinnamon
 4 Tbs extra virgin olive oil
 sea salt & freshly ground black pepper

Bring a medium saucepan of salted water to a boil. Rinse the quinoa in a strainer under cold running water, then add to the boiling water. Cook for 12 to 15 minutes until tender. Drain and let cool.

Slice the onion very finely, using a mandoline if you have one. Put in a bowl of ice water for 10 minutes. Drain well.

In a bowl, combine the quinoa, onion, preserved lemon peel, arugula, parsley, mint, and chives.

In a small bowl, whisk together the lemon juice, cinnamon, and 1/4 tsp each of salt and pepper. Whisk in the oil. Toss the salad and dressing together just before serving.

**Whole lemons packed in jars with salt. You eat only the peel, which contains the essential flavour of the lemon, rather than the flesh. It has an intense flavour and can really lift a dish. Available from specialty retailers. In the picture - they look like lovely, long sliver pieces of peel - would love to try it but if too much of a hassle to find, use the finely grated peel.*

Dessert

Asian Pear Tart with Toasted Almond Crust & Orange-Ginger Glaze serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- 2 cups raw almonds, toasted
- ½ cup dates, pitted
- 4 Asian pears, peeled, cored, and thinly sliced
- 1 Tbs plus 2 tsp fresh lemon juice
- ¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar
- ¼ tsp ground ginger
- 1/3 cup orange marmalade
- ½ tsp fresh ginger, peeled and minced

Preparation:

1. Preheat oven to 375 F.
2. In a food processor, coarsely grind the almonds. Add the dates and process until thoroughly combined. Press the mixture into a lightly oiled 9-inch tart pan, pie plate, or springform pan.
3. Toss the pears with 2 tsp lemon juice and arrange in the crust in a circular pattern. Sprinkle with brown sugar and ground ginger.
4. Bake on the center oven rack until the pears soften, about 30 minutes. Let cool to room temperature.
5. In a small saucepan over low heat, combine the marmalade, 1 tablespoon of lemon juice, and the fresh ginger, stirring until blended. Brush on the pear slices.

Serve

Rhubarb Compote with Quick Coconut Sorbet – makes 6 servings

Ingredients

- 2 pounds fresh rhubarb, trimmed, cut into 1-inch pieces (about 7 cups)
- ½ cup currant jelly
- ½ cup sugar
- ¼ cup minced
- 2 Tbs fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp grated lemon peel
- Quick Coconut Sorbet* or 1 pint purchased coconut sorbet

Preparation

Combine first 6 ingredients in heavy pot. Bring to boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer until mixture thickens slightly, about 10 minutes. Transfer to medium bowl. Refrigerate compote until cold. (Can be made one day ahead. Cover and chill.) Spoon into bowls. Top with sorbet and serve.

*Quick Coconut Sorbet – makes about 2 cups

Ingredients

- 1 15-oz can cream of coconut (such as Coco López)*
- 1 cup ice-cold water
- ¼ tsp rum extract

Preparation

Whisk all ingredients in medium bowl. Transfer to 11x7x2-inch glass baking dish. Freeze until frozen, stirring every 30 minutes, about 3 hours. (Can be made 2 days ahead. Cover and keep frozen.)

**Available in the liquor department of most supermarkets nationwide.*

Vegan Chocolate Cake with Creamy Chocolate Frosting – serves 8

Cake:

1 2/3 cups natural large-crystal can sugar (testers preferred Sugar in the Raw)
½ cup all-purpose flour
½ cup oat flour
2 tsp baking soda
¾ tsp salt
1/3 cup Dutch-processed cocoa (testers preferred Scharffen Berger Natural Cocoa Powder)
1/3 cup natural cocoa
1 ½ oz unsweetened chocolate, chopped
1 cup hot, brewed coffee
1 cup light coconut milk
2 Tbs cider or wine vinegar
1 ½ tsp vanilla extract
¾ cup vegan butter substitute (testers preferred Spectrum Spread)

Frosting:

2 pkgs (10 oz each) vegan or other semisweet chocolate chips (testers used Tropical Source)
½ cup hot brewed coffee
4 Tbs boiling water
½ cup light coconut milk
4 oz silken tofu

Cake:

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 F. Spray two 9-inch round cake pans with non-stick cooking spray; set aside.

Process sugar in a food processor to a fine powder, 30-40 seconds. Sift sugar, flours, baking soda and salt into a large bowl, then whisk to combine.

Combine cocoas and chocolate in a large bowl and cover with hot coffee; whisk until smooth.

Combine coconut milk, vinegar and vanilla in large measuring cup. Place vegan butter substitute in a medium bowl. Add coconut milk mixture in two additions, whisking until smooth after each.

Add vegan butter-coconut milk mixture to the chocolate mixture and whisk to combine then add this mixture to dry ingredients and fold gently with rubber spatula until just incorporated and no streaks of flour remain.

Divide batter evenly between cake pans and bake until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean, 20-25 minutes, switching position of and rotating pans after 12 minutes. (If you have a convection oven - don't know if this would really be necessary - up to you.) Cool cakes in pans on wire rack to room temperature, about 2 hours.

Frosting:

Place chocolate chips in medium bowl set over a saucepan of barely simmering water. Pour hot coffee and boiling water over chips, then whisk until smooth. Whisk in coconut milk until incorporated.

Process chocolate mixture and tofu in food processor until smooth and combined, 10-15 seconds, scraping down bowl once or twice. Transfer the mixture to a medium bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Refrigerate until cool and texture resembles firm cream cheese, 1 to 1 ½ hours. (If mixture has chilled for longer and is very stiff, let stand at room temperature for 1 hour.)

Transfer cooled chocolate mixture to the bowl of standing mixer fitted with whisk attachment. Whip mixture at high speed until fluffy, mousse-like, and the mixture forms medium stiff peaks, 1 to 1 ½ minutes.

Assemble:

Invert cakes from their pans. Spread a dab of frosting in center of a cardboard round cut slightly larger than a cake. Place one cake, centered, on the cardboard round. The frosting helps hold it in place. (Don't know why you need to do this - you could just position on a regular cake plate.)

Using an icing spatula, spread about 1 cup frosting evenly onto the top of the first cake. Place the second cake on top of frosted bottom layer and spread about 1 cup frosting on top. Cover sides of cake with remaining frosting.