



# Festive food for all

## Feeding vegetarian and vegan guests

BY GORDON CRAIGIE

ONE OF THE GREAT highlights of the season is entertaining family and friends. As you start planning your perfect traditional meal, thoughts naturally turn to turkey and all the trimmings. But what if you've invited vegetarian guests? Do you know how to properly care for their needs when they visit?

If you're expecting a vegetarian or vegan visitor, your first and most important piece of research is to find out what kind of vegetarian is coming to dine.

According to the Vegetarian Society (vegsoc.org), there are four main types:

**Ovo-lacto** vegetarians, who eat both dairy products and eggs; this is the most common type of vegetarian diet.

**Lacto** vegetarians, who eat dairy products but not eggs.

**Ovo** vegetarians, who eat eggs but not dairy products.

**Vegans**, who do not eat dairy products, eggs or any other products that are derived from animals.

Variations include pescatarians (those who eat fish but not other types of meat) and flexitarians (those who simply eat less meat). Figuring out what your guests can eat, and what they like to eat, should be your first priority.

Some vegetarians look forward to a traditional Christmas dinner, with the

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obvious replacement of the turkey with, say, a soy or tofu product. Others go out of their way to avoid simple meat substitutions, and this requires more thought.

Dundee, Scotland-based Emily Dewhurst, the owner of cookbook publisher Kitchen Press, tells *The Connection*, "My vegetarian husband loves all the trimmings of Christmas dinner—roasted vegetables, Brussels [sprouts], red cabbage, the works—so every year we make a big vegetable and bean stew pie topped with puff pastry for his end of the table. We do the roast potatoes in olive oil and rosemary, rather than [animal] fat, and will usually roast up a load of squash and red peppers as well."

Professionals face the same issues. Italian TV chef Antonio Carluccio says, "I always ask my guests if they have a special dietary requirement. It's easy nowadays to adapt traditional recipes by substituting vegetable oils for animal fats, and, as long as you understand the flavors you're trying to achieve, you can replace the meat with textured soy protein, for example. But also

look to other food cultures, such as Indian, for flavors and spices."

New Zealand-born Kirsten Gilmour, owner and head chef at the award-winning Mountain Café in Aviemore, Scotland, agrees. "It's pretty simple really," she says. "Cut out all dairy, animal products and honey. Don't overthink it; just swap these products with ingredients that will work instead. Try a soy spread instead of butter, olive oil instead of cooking with butter, a fresh salsa instead of a sauce, or hummus instead of mayo. To replace proteins, I usually add a mixture of nuts and legumes."

Think carefully too about the nibbles and snacks you offer guests, and make sure any non-vegetarian choices are clearly signposted.

Similarly, some wines may be unsuitable for vegetarians. This is because some wine is made with animal-derived products in the filtering process. So this detail, too, is worth checking. Also, it's best to avoid desserts containing gelatin unless you're cooking from scratch and use non-animal alternatives.

With a little culinary detective work beforehand, you can ensure that everyone has a relaxed and enjoyable dinner (holiday or anytime) that is memorable for all the right reasons. As Gilmour says, "Taking lovely fresh ingredients and creating a simple, no-fuss dish that everyone will love is the best thing ever." **C**

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