

Entertaining for Non-vegetarians

by

Chef Jason Wyrick

You've got guests. They eat meat. You don't. And the stress hits. What to serve? What to serve!? Will everyone be happy? Will they nod and smile politely and then go out for a steak after the dinner? Maybe they won't even nod and smile politely. The terror. I know. I've been there, especially when I first became vegetarian. However, with over a decade of being vegetarian and several years experience being a vegan chef, I've learned a few things about serving meat-eaters.



Serve hearty food. A smoked portabella mushroom with a sundried tomato tapenade or a smoked portabella roulade is way more appealing than a bean sprout and avocado wrap. Not that I have anything against those, but I know my meat eating friends would do the wrap a nod and a smile and then run out to the nearest Burger King as soon as they made their escape from my dining table. Serving a hearty dish, that is to say, one that has a deep, dark, rich taste and a filling quality like the portabella mushroom example above, will leave your guests satisfied and addresses one of the primary concerns

meat eaters have when dining at a vegetarian table.

Be bold! I sometimes liken eating meat to having a strobe light flashed in one's face. It's hard to notice the contours of light and shadow in a room in such an intense environment and likewise with taste, it's hard to notice the subtlety of flavor that many vegetarian meals carry. Choose something that's going to cut through the "strobe light effect" and make your diners jump out of their seats with surprise, delight, and ecstasy. Using chili peppers is a wonderful way to accomplish this, as are caramelized onions, roasted garlic, cumin, fresh peppercorns, smoked paprika, dark herbs like thyme, oregano, and marjoram, and salt, since meats are generally well salted, and that means your meat eating diners will be accustomed to saltiness.

Avoid meat substitutes (especially tofu,) unless the recipe is amazing. Vegetarian cuisine is certainly good enough to stand on its own, and when a mock meat is used, particularly tofu, it usually doesn't taste as good to the meat eaters. These styles of food often leave guests thinking that perhaps you do, in fact, miss eating meat! Fortunately, if you've got a bold, hearty food at the table, you won't need the meat substitute at all. I have discovered a couple caveat recipes, however, like my barbecued shredded seitan, which is always a winner. I think a large part of that has to do with the fact that it is disguised in an incredible barbecue sauce. Regardless, some recipes like that simply bust the rule.

I have included a list of sample recipes (chipped porcini sandwich, roasted red pepper beer beans, smoked portabella roulade, chipotle aioli potatoes, sweet potato satay, shorba Addas, and shredded seitan barbecue sandwiches to name a few) you can use at www.veganculinaryexperience.com/IVURecipes.htm to help you plan your next dining experience with your meat eating friends. Eat healthy, eat compassionately, and eat well!



Chef Jason Wyrick is the editor and executive chef of The Vegan Culinary Experience (www.veganculinaryexperience.com), a free vegan culinary magazine designed by professional vegan chefs. He operates a successful vegan catering and culinary instruction company in the United States and has taught alongside doctors Neal Barnard, John McDougall, and Gabriel Cousens and is the first vegan instructor to teach in the Le Cordon Bleu program. You can reach Chef Wyrick at ChefJason@veganculinaryexperience.com.