

Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

Going against the grain is tough enough without having to miss out on treats during the holidays. With a few basics, tricks, and homemade goodies, being vegan this season can be envied not abhorred. Whether you're cooking for a vegan guest or are vegan yourself, the key is to consider every dish as a whole made up of its ingredients in the same way that a painting may have many colors. When we cook, we're adding these various parts together in a beautiful piece of artwork for the tongue.

Let's start with the basics: many of our holiday foods and main ingredients are already vegan, right? Mashed potatoes, vegetable dishes, apple or pumpkin pie, salads, cranberry sauce, and sweet potatoes are all vegan until you add animal products, because fruits, vegetables, and grains are naturally vegan. Sometimes, like roasted corn with seasoning and oil, you may not need any substitutions. But in most cases, vegan substitutions will be necessary. And in the case of store bought products like cranberry sauce which may contain gelatin, you may have to buy a completely different product or start from scratch, which can be fun and healthy if you have some extra time.

The safest route to go, if substitutions are not yet your thing, is to purchase products (even full meals) which are labeled with a V or say vegan on the packaging – they even offer holiday roasts like Tofurky and gravy! If you'd like to try substitutions, however, it's easier than it looks. In most major grocery store chains and of course in specialty food stores, the vegan butter will be next to the dairy butter, the vegan "meat" will be next to the meat, the vegan milk next to the dairy milk and so on. Or just ask for help and someone will direct you. This makes it straightforward to cook vegan meals at home.

I'm not even a vegan, but I've found it easy to use Earth Balance butter, Veganaise mayo, Almond Breeze milk, Ripple coffee creamer and various yummy egg substitutes like pumpkin, bananas, or applesauce when baking. I use these due to health restrictions but partly because I prefer their taste. Most substitutions, like vegan cheese, come in a variety of flavors produced using different plants, so, you'll need to taste test as many as possible to find out which you really enjoy or which produces the best results in your recipes.

Remember that most recipes begin with their vegan main ingredients, and plenty of holiday dishes are just coincidentally vegan – like roasted acorn squash bowls filled with caramelized baked beans! A quick online search for vegan holiday recipes will blow you away with options, but if you're converting a family favorite, you'll want to research quantities for substitutions specific to your recipe. Bon Appétit!

Amanda Bancroft is a writer, artist, and naturalist building an off-grid cottage for land conservation on Kessler Mountain. She and her husband Ryan blog about their adventures and offer a solar-hosted online educational center on how to make a difference with everyday choices at: www.RipplesBlog.org.