

# Making Ripples

by Amanda Bancroft

It's time to break out the grill and enjoy picnics, barbeques, fireworks and family vacations! Outdoor meals can be fun, with lounge chairs, sweet tea and pasta salad; they can also be frustrating if your BBQ suddenly sprouts a vegan guest! Accommodating vegans is an act of service not only for the guests, but for the planet. Every meatless meal option makes a bit of difference in fighting climate change (even if you're not the one eating those meals), and the tofu pups do add up. But how can you accomplish the seemingly insurmountable feat of providing animal-free options for vegans, vegetarians, the lactose intolerant, or folks allergic to eggs?

It may be easier than you think. First, don't worry, because much of what people eat is already vegan. Name any fruit, vegetable, seed, nut butter, or grain, and you've already got something vegan. Carrot and celery sticks or apple slices are common. Watermelon is a staple of summer. You may have enjoyed many a melon without thinking, "Hey, I'm eating vegan stuff!" I haven't met too many potato chips that contain animal products, but some do. Fresh green salads usually don't have meat (just hold the bacon bits).

Next, it's helpful to know what is not vegan. Anything that comes from an animal is not vegan, including milk, cheese, eggs, meat, bones, broth, fish sauce, horse hooves in gelatin, you get the idea. Honey is a confusing one. Lately, some vegans are eating honey to boost populations of pollinators, but some vegans don't eat it. The tough part is knowing what's inside multi-ingredient foods – for example, there are eggs baked into bread products like hamburger and hot dog buns. Check labels on everything, just to be safe.

Popular items like popcorn (pun intended) are usually safe, and if you put the seasonings on the side, people can choose what flavor they prefer or what adheres to their diet. It's amazing how many shakers of seasonings are available! It may open a whole new world of enjoyment for you, too.

While we're talking corn, it's tons of fun to roast your own corn-on-the-cob or baked potatoes. Again, butter and seasonings can be placed on the table as options. Another fun build-your-own idea is nachos. Spread out a buffet of tasty toppings to go along with vegan corn chips as the base. My most recent discovery at such an event was "cilantro pesto," and dang it's good!

If you have more time and are willing to pay a little extra, there are substitutions available for almost everything. Making pasta salad? Use a vegan mayonnaise (Follow Your Heart "Vegenaise" is creamy and comes in a variety of awesome flavors). Serving coffee? Offer vegan creamer. Grilling hamburgers and hotdogs? There are excellent vegan patties to replicate beef or chicken, and tofu pups that look and taste like the real thing (with vegan buns to accompany each). Some people will prefer you to cook their meatless option on a separate part of the grill, so be polite and do so.

What if you're the lucky host who has multiple guests who are vegetarian, gluten-free, vegan, or allergic to the top eight most common allergenic foods (eggs, dairy, wheat, fish, shellfish, peanuts, tree nuts, and soy)? Fear not! A go-to dish that all of these people can eat is hummus or guacamole dips, with your choice of dippers (carrot sticks or corn chips, for example). You can make it from scratch using a recipe, or buy a container of guac or hummus from a store. Check the label anyway, but it will almost always be free of gluten, animal products, and the top eight allergens.

BBQs are a ton of fun, even for vegans (if we have a little empathy for them). Most people, at some point in their life, will either be forced to adopt a restricted diet for medical reasons or choose to change it to make a difference for one reason or another. May you receive the same tolerance you offer to others this summer.

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