



# VEGAN COOKING CLASSES

## Spreading the Vegan Message to the Public

Carolyn J. Githens

For the past three years, my friend Lisa and I have been teaching a vegan cooking class, a part of the adult evening program, at a local high school. We never planned on doing this—it just happened gradually. Lisa and I had enjoyed helping our friend, Marian Little, with her vegan cooking classes throughout the years, but we only assisted in the background.

In early 2005, Marian suddenly became ill and was hospitalized, so we filled in for her at the classes. Subsequently she passed away, so we decided to continue the classes as a tribute to Marian and her desire to create a more compassionate world.

Marian's initial trepidation when a friend suggested that *she* teach a vegan cooking class eventually disappeared because she was so passionate about a cruelty-free diet. After applying at the various local high schools, she



Marian protesting the cruelty to farm animals

was hired at a few of them, and she continued to teach the classes for approximately 15 years. She also taught business courses, and

captioned for the deaf at a community college, in addition to being secretary for the local Green Party. Marian believed in making her work be what she believed in; she tirelessly strove to spread the message of a humane lifestyle that included animals, people, and the earth. She was a great inspiration to everyone around her; an example of how important it is to do what you love while also making a difference in the world.

Lisa and I believe that teaching vegan cooking classes is an effective way to reach out to the community and demonstrate the benefits of a plant-based diet. People with various eating habits learn how creative and delicious vegan food can be—not just dreary salads and overcooked vegetables. Because the students take the class for different reasons, we include a variety of recipes—for quick and easy meals and also for gourmet dishes. Unfamiliar foods like tempeh, tofu, seitan, miso, tahini, and a variety of leafy greens, are incorporated in recipes to introduce the students to different nutrient sources and flavors. In addition to typical main-meal entrees and vegetable dishes, classes include breakfast, picnic, “comfort”, and dessert foods, plus tasty fare from different cultures. We frequently take our students' ideas into consideration and include them in our plans.



Carol Githens and Lisa Melian, from right middle row, with their Spring 2008 Adult Evening Cooking Class, Gloucester City High School, NJ

Providing information on vegetarianism/veganism and related topics (such as the environment, animal rights, and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) through literature, books, DVDs, and websites is appreciated by the students. These resources offer support and recipes to the students so they will continue preparing healthy compassionate meals after the class has ended.

We feel that advertising the class as vegetarian, although it is vegan, broadens appeal for the class because unfamiliarity with veganism might scare some people away, although the description in the school brochure states that we will demonstrate how to cook without dairy and eggs. Many of the people in the class are meat-eaters, some are vegetarian or vegan, and others want to learn how to cook for someone who is veg'n (a relative or friend). Couples, mothers and daughters, and even fathers and daughters have taken the class together.

For the final session we plan something special—a big potluck dinner—an idea we maintain from the format of Marian's classes. She always enjoyed gathering people together to share great vegan food. The students (and teachers) each bring in a dish they made at home to share with the class. We encourage the

students to bring guests as a way to introduce the people in their lives to what they have learned. Frequently, former students from our classes also come to the dinner. At our last potluck, the room was so packed we had to bring in extra chairs from another room.



The Potluck Dinner

There is enormous interest in veganism at this moment in time. The public is becoming curious and realizing that a vegan diet is a healthy, compassionate, and ecological way to eat. Now is the time to take advantage of this momentum. Anyone interested in teaching a class should contact their local high schools and apply to the night school programs. You

don't need to be a licensed teacher, but you must possess an eagerness to share knowledge of vegan cooking. I have discovered that the schools are always looking for new classes to offer, and there is a strong interest in veg'n classes because of the ever increasing media focus on plant-based diets. Recently, the assistant director of the evening program told me that our cooking class was one of the most popular classes in the program, and she was hoping we would continue them in the future.

Although a lot of extra time is needed to prepare for the classes as we gather ingredients and recipes, Lisa and I feel it is certainly worth the effort. A wonderful benefit derived from giving the classes is that after the final session some students join the local vegetarian society, and they volunteer their help at its food booth or literature table at various events. Lisa and I would like to carry on Marian's mission to spread the news about cruelty-free diets to people who might not be familiar with the different types of foods that a vegan eats. Veg'n cooking classes are needed in every community—why not try it, and do your part to create a better world for all? For more information on teaching classes, contact American Vegan Society.

o

The format of our cooking class is very casual and hands-on: we discuss the recipes, elaborating on any unusual ingredients, and if necessary, demonstrate unfamiliar culinary techniques; then we break up in groups and begin making the recipes. In order to have enough time at the end of class to eat the delicious food that we have prepared, efficiency is always a priority.

We use a home economics room at the school where most of the equipment is provided, except a few miscellaneous items such as food processors and blenders, that we bring from home. We teachers shop for the ingredients for which the students pay a fee at the first class session. The session is two hours and we usually make about three or four recipes, depending on their complexity.

We use Marian's old cookbooks which have paper clips marking her favorite recipes. Lisa and I cherish these reminders of her.

o

## Millet “Mashed Potatoes”

(Yield: 10-12 servings)

2 cups millet  
6 cups water  
4 cups cauliflower pieces  
½ tsp. black pepper (optional)  
2 Tbsp. soy margarine  
(or unrefined corn oil)  
1½ tsp. sea salt (optional)  
⅛ tsp. nutmeg (optional)

Wash and drain millet. Place all ingredients (except the optional seasonings) in a large pot and bring to a simmer over high heat. Lower heat, cover, and continue cooking until millet mixture is soft—about 20 minutes. Check periodically to make sure mixture does not stick to the bottom of the pot and burn. Mash, or blend in a food processor for about 30 seconds. Add the optional seasonings, and serve hot.

From the book, *Friendly Foods* by Brother Ron Pickarski, OFM.

## Pumpkin Pancakes

(Yield: 24 pancakes)

### Dry Ingredients:

2 cups whole wheat flour  
3 Tbsp. brown sugar  
2 tsp. baking powder  
1 tsp. baking soda  
1 tsp. allspice  
1 tsp. cinnamon  
½ tsp. ginger

### Wet Ingredients:

1½ cups soy milk  
1 cup canned pumpkin (not pumpkin pie filling)  
1 banana  
2 Tbsp. vegetable oil  
2 Tbsp. vinegar  
¼ tsp. vanilla

Mix dry ingredients in bowl. Combine wet ingredients in another large bowl. Add dry to wet ingredients. Oil and heat skillet; drop ¼ cup of batter on it. Fry pancakes 2-3 minutes on first side (until bubbles appear); flip and fry other side until golden brown.

Adapted from [www.allrecipes.com](http://www.allrecipes.com) by Debbie Palaez.

## Mushroom Miso Sauce (Yield: 3 cups)

¼ cup whole wheat pastry flour  
⅓ cup nutritional yeast flakes  
¼ cup brown rice miso\*  
½ cup hot water  
1 Tbsp. olive oil  
1 small onion, finely chopped  
1 cup thinly sliced mushrooms  
2 cups water

Put flour in a small dry frying pan over medium heat and toast, stirring often, until it has darkened evenly to a light brown. Transfer to a medium bowl.

In a small bowl, stir nutritional yeast, miso, and hot water together.

In a medium saucepan, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add onion and cook until softened. Add the mushrooms and cook,

stirring, until lightly browned—about five minutes.

Meanwhile, add the 2 cups water to browned flour and whisk until combined.

Whisk flour mixture into mushrooms, and simmer, whisking often, until mixture is thickened, one to two minutes. Stir in nutritional yeast and miso mixture. Bring just to a simmer, then remove from heat. Serve hot.

This recipe goes well with the Millet “Mashed Potatoes”.

From the book, *May All Be Fed: Diet for a New World* by John Robbins.

\*Miso is a fermented soybean paste used to flavor dishes. ○



*Cooking is an essential life skill—as vital, if not more so, than job skills. Yet, many people today are unmotivated by cooking, and amused by their inability to do*

*much more than boil water.*

*When first embarking on a vegan diet, I read plenty of medical advice strongly recommending a “well-planned” vegan diet as though it required research and careful counting on a daily basis. It sounded difficult, as if the alternative omnivorous diet would easily guarantee good nutrition without any need to be so “well-planned.” Armed with a half-dozen books written by doctors and nutritionists, I nonetheless began the research and “planning.”*

*Then in January I came across information for a vegan cooking class—a great opportunity to put theory into practice!*

*I expected to learn recipes and cooking skills—such as cutting an onion without crying; but I acquired much more. I found many more like-minded people with various interests in health, cooking, environmental concerns, and compassion for animals. Not only did I learn many delicious recipes, but I also discovered unknown resources, discussed nutrition articles, and shared ideas for improving the healthiness and palate appeal of a “well-planned” vegan diet while still enjoying the guilty pleasures of chocolate cake and cookies!*

*Now when I think about the meaning of “well-planned,” I realize it is nothing more than putting the most essential life skill into practice. In comparing my meals with others, I also can now see that planning even half of my diet still makes me healthier than the omnivores who don’t plan any meals at all.*

Mary Helen Grigonis—  
a student from the class

**To submit information about your cooking class or for a listing of Vegan Cooking Classes, please visit [www.americanvegan.org](http://www.americanvegan.org).**