

What to Feed a Vegan

(and other special diets)

A survival guide for omnivore cooks







Kristen McQuillin, mediatinker.com

As the holidays roll around, friends and families gather to celebrate the season but with a new emphasis on healthy eating, you may find yourself with a table full of guests who have dietary preferences and restrictions that are incompatible.

What to do? You want to be a good hostess and ensure that everyone goes home happy, healthy, and well-fed. How can you make sure that the vegan and the no-carb dieter both enjoy their meal?

It's tricky, but not impossible. My set of friends range from omnivores to vegans, lacto-ovo vegetarians, no-carb, no-fat, and gluten-free eaters and I usually manage to throw a decent party. The next few days will help you get a feel for who eats what, how you can plan menus around these differences, and recipes that suit a combination of eaters.

An Overview of Who's Who

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Vegetables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fruit	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Starches	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	*
Proteins	*	*	✓	✓	*	✓
Fats	*	*	✓	✓	✗	✓
Sweets	✗	✓	✓	✗	*	*

✓ safe to serve * case-by-case ✗ do not serve

What's vegan?

A vegan is a vegetarian who eats only plant-based foods. They do not eat meat, poultry or seafood. Vegans also don't eat honey, milk, or eggs. No animal products at all.

What's lacto-ovo?

Lacto-ovo vegetarians eat plant-based foods and also dairy, eggs, and other animal products that don't kill the animals, like honey. Vegetarians do not eat meat, poultry or seafood.

What's omnivore?

Omnivores eat just about everything: plants, animals and minerals (but only the tasty ones). Omnivores are easy to cook for but sometimes they have restrictions, too, such as the next three categories.

What's no-carb?







People on carbohydrate restricted diets avoid starchy foods like bread, pasta and potatoes, and also sugary foods including many fruits.

What's no-fat?

No- or low-fat diets exclude oils, butter, eggs, and fatty meats. How much fat is acceptable depends upon the diner's individual restrictions.

What's gluten-free?

Gluten free diets exclude wheat and all of its cousins: barley, rye, semolina, spelt, triticale. Oats don't have any gluten, but they are often contaminated with wheat, so many gluten intolerant people avoid them.

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Vegetables						
Leafy greens	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Corn	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓
Onions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tomatoes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Broccoli	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Other vegetables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fruit						
Bananas	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Apples & Pears	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Stone Fruits	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Citrus	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Berries	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Starches						
Rice	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Couscous	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Spaghetti	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Egg Noodles	✗	✓	✓	✗	*	✗
Bread	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Corn tortillas	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Potatoes	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Barley, Oats, Wheat	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Protein						
Meat	✗	✗	✓	✓	*	✓
Beans & soy (tofu)	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓
Eggs	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Poultry	✗	✗	✓	✓	*	✓
Seafood	✗	✗	✓	✓	*	✓
Nuts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Dairy						
Milk	✗	✓	✓	✓	*	✓
Butter	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Cheese	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Ice Cream	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Fats						
Olive oil	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Margarine	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Lard	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Sweets						
Sugar	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Honey	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Gelatin	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cake & Cookies	✗	✓	✓	✗	*	✗
Marshmallows	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Chocolate	✗	✓	✓	✗	*	✓
Fruit Pie	✗	✓	✓	✗	*	✗

✓ safe to serve * case-by-case ✗ do not serve

A note on the foods listed in this chart and others throughout this booklet. I am talking about the recipes your great-grandmother would have made, not manufactured foods that use plastics, chemicals or cheap fillers to declare themselves “X free!”. In my chart, milk has fat; pasta is made of wheat; cakes and cookies are baked with butter, sugar and eggs. Of course you can find specially formulated substitutes to suit your guests’ needs, but I’m not considering those in this chart.

Menu Planning

When hosting a meal for people who eat differently than you do, it is wise to consider what you have in common and focus on that. The chart above can help and charts on the next few pages will give detailed menu plans and general ideas for a variety of meals.

- You’re gluten-free and your friends are vegan. Excellent, you can all eat rice and vegetables. That sounds like a stir-fry to me.
- You’re vegan and your friends are no-fat eaters. How about pasta primavera or a grilled vegetable sandwich?
- You’re an omnivore and your guests don’t eat carbs. Sounds like a great excuse for a roast chicken and vegetables (but skip the potatoes, please).
- You’re no-carb and your guests are both vegan and no-fat eaters. This might be a little tricky... what do you have in common? Looks like only vegetables. Better serve soup and salad.

So it’s certainly possible to cook delicious meals for a mixed crowd. But I will offer a few words of caution:

In general, it’s best not to replace an original or whole food with a formulated version unless you are absolutely sure your guests will accept it. For example, there are no vegan cheeses that are remotely like cheeses non-vegans eat. Vegans may love them, but they are not really very cheese-like to anyone who eats the real thing. Serving them will only make your guests wonder how you can stand being vegan.

It is also bad form to foist your preferred specialty foods on your guests. Omnivores know it’s rude to slip bacon into a casserole being served to vegetarians. Vegans understand that serving flaxseed lasagna is probably not going to go over really well with the omnivores. If you want to introduce your friends to the more esoteric aspects of your dietary plan, warn them first.

On the other hand, trying to cook something from your guests’ special diet could be disastrous. It’s better to stick with your comfort zone when cooking for guests. A vegan roasting a turkey is likely to foul it up; an omnivore making eggless cookies may find the road (and the results) a little rocky. Remember to find the common denominator among your diets and work with that.

Lunches and Casual Meals

It can be a challenge to come up with a meal that satisfies omnivores, vegans, and other guests with special diets. And the more diversity you have in the guest list, the more creative you will have to be.

But there are two similar options perfect for lunches or casual dinners - Build Your Own Burrito/Taco or a Salad Bar. By offering a variety of ingredients buffet style, you allow guests to take their diets into their own hands and choose what they can eat.

But you have to figure out what to offer to give everyone enough to eat. Burritos with meat and cheese filling, lettuce and tomatoes will leave your vegans guests a little hungry. Only serving flour tortillas will give the gluten-free guests nothing to wrap the filling in! No-carb folks will appreciate the “taco salad” they can create.

Here are some ideas for ingredients to include and which guest can eat what. As always, the ingredient listed are in their most natural forms, not variations manufactured for “no-fat” or “no-carb”. Please read labels when purchasing packaged foods – many contain hidden sources of gluten, fat or animal byproducts.

Taco Bar

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Corn tortillas	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Flour tortillas	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Lettuce	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tomato	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Onions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black olives	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jalapeño peppers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Guacamole	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Spicy meat	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Spicy beans	✓	✓	✓	✗	*	✓
Cheese	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Sour cream	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓

Salad Bar

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Leafy greens	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tomatoes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Onions	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bell peppers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mushrooms	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrots	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zucchini	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Broccoli	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shredded cheese	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Olives	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓
Walnuts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Sunflower seeds	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Croûtons	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Bacon bits	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bread rolls	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Salad dressings	*	*	✓	*	✗	*

Another delicious option, if the weather is cooperative, is food grilled on the barbecue. Vegetarians will enjoy grilled vegetables and of course the meat-eaters will be happy with the meaty bits. Because everything is cooked separately, there's no meat-veg overlap, though it might be best to grill the vegetables first to avoid charred meat bits from clinging to the peppers and onions. Again, please read labels on any manufactured foods you buy - especially sauces and dressings - to avoid hidden gluten, fat and animal products.

Mixed Grill







	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Chicken breast	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lamb chops	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Hamburgers	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Salmon	✗	✗	✓	✓	*	✓
Bell peppers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Onion	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Whole garlic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mushrooms	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Zucchini	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eggplant	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Potatoes (in foil)	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Corn	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓

The Holiday Feast

If you're reading this series as a holiday host, maybe you're panicked about how to make a tofu turkey, or what to do about stuffing for your no-gluten guests. Don't worry. The spread at a holiday meal is a wide and varied as a taco bar, and even though each holiday dish is composed of many pieces, you can adjust recipes to suit your guests.







Adjusting recipes often means simplifying them by doing things like not buttering the vegetables or excluding ham pieces from the potato casserole. Some recipes can be adjusted by substitution (replacing butter with vegetable oil for example), or by changing the cooking method from sauteed to steamed.

Traditional Feast

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-garb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Roast meat/fowl	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scalloped potatoes	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Candied yams with marshmallows	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Bread stuffing cooked in bird	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Pan gravy	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Buttered carrots	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Jellied cranberry sauce	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Green beans w/ mushroom soup	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Bread rolls	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗

Many of the dishes in this menu can be enjoyed by only a few types of eaters. And the vegan guests are going to leave hungry or have to compromise their diets. How can we modify this menu to allow more people to eat dinner?

Modified Feast

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 gluten-free
Roast meat/fowl	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Boiled potatoes with parsley	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Baked yams	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Bread stuffing cooked separately	*	✓	✓	✗	*	✗
Pan gravy	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Steamed carrots	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cranberry relish	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Green beans with almonds	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bread rolls	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗







Now everyone has at least five dishes to dig into.

Some Dessert Options

It doesn't seem like a party without some sort of dessert, but this is probably the most difficult course to create harmony in.

Typical baked goods of all types are out of bounds for vegan, no-carb, no-fat and gluten-free diets because of butter, sugar, flour and eggs. Custards are ok for gluten-free folks, but not no-carb, no-fat or vegan diets.







Traditional Dessert Spread

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Custard pie	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Fruit pie	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Cookies	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Cheesecake	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Fruitcake	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Layer cake	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Crème brulee	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Jell-O	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	✓
Ice cream	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Whipped cream	✗	✓	✓	*	✗	✓
Chocolates	*	✓	✓	✗	*	*

So you can see that there is no one dessert to suit everyone and for some of these diets, the options are limited unless recipes are modified to exclude the unwelcome ingredients. But in baking that can be tricky, so here's a chance to get your guests involved. If someone offers to bring something, suggest they bring a sweet dessert. Nearly everyone on a special diet has a favorite after-dinner treat, so you're likely to get an interesting range.

If you want to serve a dessert course just in case promised desserts don't turn up, how about a Continental twist: fruit and cheese? Just like the taco or salad bar, this allows everyone to choose their own.

Continental Dessert Spread


	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Assorted cheeses	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Apples & pears	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓
Dried fruits	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Fresh berries	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Mixed nuts	✓	✓	✓	✓	*	✓
Whipped cream	✗	✓	✓	*	✗	✓
Chocolates	*	✓	✓	✗	*	*

Breakfasts

If you have holiday house guests, you'll have to tackle breakfasts. Unless you are a morning person, you may not have the energy to supply a huge spread of options.





Vegans are likely to eat fruit and unbuttered toast (though nut butters and vegetable spreads are good for vegans); no-carb & gluten-free people will prefer cheese omelets and sausage without toast on the side.

The only commonality among everyone is coffee and tea, so brew up a pot and then have a look at the options in the chart below to see what's going to work for your groggy group.

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Cereal	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Toast	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Pancakes	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
French toast	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Danish/coffee cake	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Grits, plain	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Eggs (any way)	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Bacon	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Ham	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Sausage	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Grapefruit	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Fruit salad	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Yogurt	✗	✓	✓	✓	*	✓
Milk	✗	✓	✓	✓	*	✓
Fruit juice	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Vegetable juice	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓
Coffee/tea	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Cocktails and Snacks

Cocktails and snacks are another easy buffet assortment situation. Here are some suggestions:

	 Vegan	 Lacto-Ovo	 Omnivore	 Low/no-carb	 Low/no-fat	 Gluten-free
Vegetable sticks	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Crackers	*	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
French bread	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Potato chips	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Tortilla chips	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Pretzels	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Assorted cheeses	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Tapenade	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Hummus	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Red pepper spread	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Crab dip	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
French onion dip	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Spinach dip	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Salami	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Ham	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓
Mixed nuts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Olives & pickles	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Beer	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗
Wine	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	✓
Liquors	✓	✓	✓	*	✓	*

On Being a Good Guest

And lest you think I am picking on the cooks & hosts here and putting all the burden of a successful meal on them, guests have their duties, too.

Be a tolerant and appreciative diner. It is horrible behavior to have a snit or be militant at the dinner table. Your fellow diners are not likely to be converted to your diet by discussion of slaughterhouses, weight loss or health issues. Let them find their own best eating habits.

Politely decline dishes that you can't eat. Usually a simple "no thanks" will suffice, or just pass the serving dish to the next person. If you are asked to explain why you are not eating Aunt Joy's cheesy sardine and rye bread casserole, do it in a way that doesn't make her feel like an idiot for not knowing you are vegan, gluten intolerant or whatever.

Praise the dishes you can eat and thank the cook if she made an extra effort to accommodate you (even if she didn't get it right).

If you are attending a pot-luck, the menu planning ideas on page 3 apply. Find the common denominator. You don't want to be the only person at the event enjoying your casserole.

If you are dining with company that you know won't accommodate your diet, eat before you get there and pick at a few things for show, if necessary. Or plan to arrive after the meal to enjoy socialising without the awkward table scenario. It is generally not OK to bring your own individually portioned meal in a plastic container and to microwave it and serve yourself.

Notifications

Is it better to let a hostess know your dietary restrictions or to do your best to find something to eat at the table? This is a difficult question to answer, as each case is different.

If you decide to let your host or hostess know in advance, help your hostess understand what your dietary restrictions are in simple language – avoid medical terms and diet jargon. Try to put the emphasis on your hostess' ease - she doesn't have to do anything different, you will just not be eating the roast/bread/cheese/whatever and wanted her not to worry. It is gracious to offer to bring a dish that everyone can enjoy and share. If she wants to know what she can make for you, have a suggestion ready that is not too time-consuming or expensive.

Enjoy Yourself

No matter whether you're a vegan staring down a plate of creamy mashed potatoes and a slab of roast beef, or a lucky gluten-free eater whose hostess cooked rice instead of pasta, be as charming, happy and fun as you can be. That will make the meal a memorable one, no matter what is on the menu.

Recipes

Spicy Mexican Beans

serves 2

suitable for vegans, vegetarians, omnivores, low/no fat and gluten-free diets

1 can beans (navy, pinto, black, etc)
1 pickled jalapeño, minced
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 onion, minced
1 tsp cumin
2 tsp chili powder
oil
salt and pepper

In a deep frying pan or pot, sautee the onions and garlic in a bit of oil until the onions are translucent. Add the beans and stir vigorously to smush them up a bit. Additional oil will make the beans creamier, but isn't strictly necessary. Mix in the spices & jalapeño. Salt and pepper to taste.

Umeboshi Sweet Potatoes

serves 2

suitable for vegans, vegetarians, omnivores, and gluten-free diets

1 satsuma imo (sweet potato)
2-3 umeboshi (Japanese pickled plums)- the soft squishy type
milk or soy milk
butter (omit for vegans)
salt
pepper

Peel the potato and chop into large hunks. Boil in salted water until soft and mashable. Drain. Use your fingers to pick the meat off the umeboshi, discarding the pits. Add to the potatoes. Mash with enough milk and/or butter to moisten the potatoes and to satisfy your cravings for fat. Salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot.

Tangy Cranberry Sauce

makes about 2 cups

suitable for vegans, vegetarians, omnivores, low/no fat and gluten-free diets

350 g (12 oz) fresh whole cranberries
1/4 c sugar
3 mikan (mandarin oranges)
1/4 c water

Wash the cranberries and remove any mushy ones. Put the cranberries, water and sugar together in a pot and bring to a simmer. Cook for about 6 minutes, until the cranberries are all split open. Juice the mikan and add the juice to the pot. Turn off the heat and allow to cool to room temperature.

In a blender or food processor, or with a handheld blender or food mill, puree the berries, allowing a few lumps for texture. Chill overnight or up to three days.

Basil Tapenade

makes about a cup

suitable for omnivores, low/no carb and gluten-free diets (plus vegans, vegetarians when anchovies are omitted)

1 cup pitted black olives
1 cup fresh basil
4 anchovy fillets (omit for vegan/vegetarian guests)
2 garlic cloves
1 Tbsp lemon juice
1/2 cup mayonnaise (or a bit less olive oil for vegans)

Blend everything except the mayo in a food processor (I use my Bamix blender). The consistency should be even and spreadable, but a little bit lumpy. Add in the mayonnaise by hand. Allow to sit for at least few hours before serving.