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# Festive food for one and all

## How to care for vegetarian and vegan visitors this festive season



BY GORDON CRAIGIE

ONE OF THE GREAT highlights of the festive season is entertaining family and friends for Christmas dinner. As you start planning your perfect traditional meal, thoughts naturally turn to turkey and all the trimmings. But what if you've invited vegetarian guests? Do you know how to properly care for their needs when they visit?

If you're expecting a vegetarian or vegan visitor this festive season, your first and most important piece of research is to find out what kind of vegetarian is coming to dine with you.

According to the Vegetarian Society ([vegsoc.org](http://vegsoc.org)), there are four main types:

- Lacto-ovo-vegetarians**, who eat both dairy products and eggs; this is the most common type of vegetarian diet.
- Lacto-vegetarians**, who eat dairy products but not eggs.
- Ovo-vegetarians**, who eat eggs but not dairy products.
- Vegans**, who do not eat dairy products,



### THE COSTCO CONNECTION

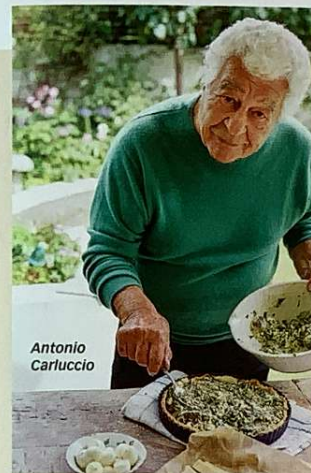
Entertaining this festive season? You'll find a wide variety of vegetarian- and vegan-friendly food and drinks, as well as a wealth of cookbooks, including Antonio Carluccio's latest book, *Vegetables*, at your local Costco warehouse.

forward to a traditional Christmas dinner, with the obvious replacement of the turkey with, say, a Quorn, soya or tofu product. Others go out of their way to avoid simple meat substitutions, and this requires more thought.

Dundee-based Emily Dewhurst, the owner of cookbook publisher Kitchen Press ([kitchenpress.co.uk](http://kitchenpress.co.uk)), tells *The Connection*, "My vegetarian husband loves all the trimmings of Christmas dinner—roasts, Brussels [sprouts], red cabbage, the works—so every year we make a big vegetable and bean stew pie topped with puff pastry for his end of the table. We do the roast potatoes in olive oil and rosemary, rather than goose fat, and will usually roast up a load of squash and red peppers as well. For dessert, I always make sure to use vegetarian suet in the Christmas pudding and the mince pies."

Professionals face the same issues. Italian TV chef Antonio Carluccio ([antonio-carluccio.com](http://antonio-carluccio.com)) says, "I always ask my guests if they have a special dietary requirement. It's easy nowadays to adapt traditional recipes by substituting vegetable oils for animal fats, and, as long as you understand the flavours you're trying to achieve, you can replace the meat with Quorn or textured soya protein, for example. But also look to other food cultures, such as Indian, for flavours and spices."

New Zealand-born Kirsten Gilmour, owner and head chef at the award-winning Mountain Café in Aviemore ([mountaincafe-aviemore.co.uk](http://mountaincafe-aviemore.co.uk)), agrees. "It's pretty simple really," she says. "Cut out all dairy, animal products and honey. Don't overthink it; just



Antonio Carluccio

LAURA EDWARDS

### TORTA PASQUALINA (SWISS CHARD AND ARTICHOKE TART)

- 90 ml (6 tablespoons) extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for greasing
- 12 small raw artichoke hearts, halved
- 1 small onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 8.5 g (1 tablespoon) salted capers, rinsed
- 1 small bunch of fresh flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- 1 kg (2¼ pounds) Swiss chard leaves (not stalks), or spinach
- 250 g (9 ounces, or 1 cup) fresh ricotta cheese
- 5 medium eggs, divided
- 60 g (2¼ ounces) Parmesan cheese, freshly grated

swap these products with ingredients that will work instead. Try a soya spread instead of butter, olive oil instead of cooking with butter, a fresh salsa instead of a sauce or hummus instead of mayo. To replace proteins, I usually add a mixture of nuts, legumes and pulses."

Think carefully too about the nibbles and snacks you offer guests, and make sure any non-vegetarian choices are clearly signposted. A strange quirk of our food labelling systems is that some brands of "smoky bacon" flavour crisps, for example, may be vegetarian (having never even been wafted past a pig, smoked or otherwise), whereas "cheese and onion" may not be. This is due to the type of cheese used or, more precisely, the type of rennet used in the cheese production. Whilst this may not upset some vegetarians, it

Freshly grated nutmeg  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste  
1 kg (2¼ pounds) shortcrust pastry  
12 quail eggs, boiled for 3 minutes and shelled

Heat the olive oil in a large lidded pan. Add the artichoke hearts, onion, capers, parsley and a little water, and braise, covered, until tender, for about 10 to 15 minutes. Drain.

Blanch the Swiss chard leaves in salted water for a few minutes, then drain. When cool enough to handle, squeeze out the water and chop the leaves coarsely.

Mix the Swiss chard with the ricotta, 4 beaten eggs, the Parmesan cheese, a few grates of nutmeg and some salt and pepper to taste. Add the artichoke mixture and mix well together. Preheat the oven to 200 C (400 F/gas 6). On a lightly floured surface, roll out the pastry to 5-mm (¼-inch) thickness. Grease a fluted 27-cm (10½-inch) loose-bottomed tart tin with a little olive oil, then line with the pastry. Cut off any surplus, which you will need for the lattice. Line the pastry in the tin with baking paper and baking beans, then blind-bake for 10 minutes. Remove the beans and baking paper, and cook for 5 minutes more to crisp the base. Cut the remaining pastry into thin strips.

Pour the filling into the pastry-lined tart tin, push in the quail eggs and cover with a lattice of pastry strips. Brush these with 1 beaten egg, then bake for 35 minutes. Serve hot or cold. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Adapted from *Vegetables* by Antonio Carluccio (Quadrille Publishing Ltd, 2016)

will be a strict no-no for others, and definitely off limits for vegans.

Similarly, some wines may be unsuitable for vegetarians. This is because some wine is made with animal-derived products in the filtering process. So this detail, too, is worth checking. Also, it's best to avoid desserts containing gelatine unless you're cooking from scratch and use non-animal alternatives.

With a little culinary detective work beforehand, you can ensure that everyone has a relaxed and enjoyable Christmas dinner that is memorable for all the right reasons. As Gilmour says, "Taking lovely fresh ingredients and creating a simple, no-fuss dish that everyone will love is the best thing ever." **C**



Kirsten Gilmour

Gordon Craigie is a Dundee-based freelance writer.



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### CHEFS' TOP MEAL TIPS

#### ANTONIO CARLUCCIO

- My personal little Christmas breakfast indulgence is *Uova in Tegame con Tartufo Nero* (Baked Eggs with Black Truffle).
- A good Christmas main course would be something like *Lasagna di Bietole* (Beetroot Lasagne), minus the smoked ham, or perhaps *Parmigiana di Zucchini o Melanzane* (Baked Courgette or Aubergine with Cheese).
- Why not prepare a big selection of dishes rather than one main meal? Try *Cipolle Ripiene* (Stuffed Onions), *Peperoni Farciti* (Stuffed Peppers), *Zucchini Ripiene* (Stuffed Courgettes) and *Melanzane Ripiene* (Stuffed Aubergines).
- To counteract that slightly sickened feeling caused by overindulging in sweet treats, prepare a big bowl of *Insalata di Rinforno* (Pickled Christmas Salad) for guests to nibble on. This typical savoury Neapolitan dish helps to offset your sweet overindulgence.
- Never overestimate your cooking capacity. Be humble; choose simplicity, but simplicity with the best ingredients.



BARRY REEVES

#### EMILY DEWHURST

Don't stress!

Steer clear of using animal fats in any of the dishes so vegetarian guests can eat everything bar the turkey, and focus on making one big festive dish for the vegetarian centrepiece.

#### KIRSTEN GILMOUR

- Always check if vegetarians or vegans are OK with honey. I often use honey when roasting vegetables such as carrots and beetroot, but, if it's an issue, I use maple syrup instead.
- Most vegetarians and vegans I know would not be happy for their food to be cooked in the same oven as a big steaming turkey, so I would usually make theirs first and reheat later or plan to cook it separately. Taste does travel through food, and it's only fair to recognise this.
- My Christmas meal suggestion for vegetarian or vegan guests would be a caramelised red onion, spiced apple, red pepper and roasted carrot filo pie, served with crispy new potatoes with olives, sage and lemon, cooked in coconut oil; and a wilted kale, spinach, pecan, mint and pomegranate salad.
- Food does not need to be complicated and daunting; just keep it real, and don't mess with it too much.

