

Vegetarians aren't only for Christmas!

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 any vegetarian guests? The first and most important piece of research is to find out what kind of vegetarian they are.

According to The Vegetarian Society, there are four main types:

- *Lacto-ovo-vegetarians* eat both dairy products and eggs; this is the most common type of vegetarian diet
- *Lacto-vegetarians* eat dairy products but not eggs
- *Ovo-vegetarians* eat eggs but not dairy products
- *Vegans* do not eat dairy products, eggs, or any products which are derived from animals

Some people would also claim

The first and most important piece of research is to find out what kind of vegetarian they are

variations on these definitions, which are 'not-really-vegetarian-at-all', like pescetarian (eat fish) or flexitarian (change their mind from day-to-day!). But, bearing in mind that many vegetarians dread seeing the single, solitary *vegetarian option* on a restaurant menu, as it assumes they will eat or like anything at all *except* meat or fish, then figuring out what your guests *can* eat, and what they *like* to eat, should be your first priority.

In fact, many vegetarians look 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 then requires more thought. Emily Dewhurst, owner of Dundee-based publisher *Kitchen Press* told *iScot Magazine*, "My vegetarian husband loves all the trimmings of Christmas dinner - roasts, brussels, 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. My biggest tip is, don't stress! Just 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."

Vegetarian



Kirsten Gilmour, owner and chef at the award-winning *Mountain Café* in Aviemore adds, "It's pretty simple really. Cut out all dairy, animal products and honey, for vegans. Don't overthink it; just 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 animal proteins I usually add a mixture of nuts, legumes and pulses. I often use honey when roasting vegetables such as carrots & beetroot but, if it is an issue, use maple syrup instead. Also, 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, don't mess with it too much."

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 & Onion' may not be. This



Some wines may be unsuitable for strict vegetarians

relates 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 will be a strict no-no for others and certainly for vegans. Similarly, did you know that some wines may be unsuitable for strict vegetarians? This is due to the filtering process (fish finings) and may also be worth checking with your guests. Oh, and desserts containing gelatin... probably best to avoid, though if you're cooking from scratch then non-animal alternatives are available.

Forewarned is forearmed so a little bit of prior research will let you know what kind of questions you should ask your vegetarian guests in advance. That way you can ensure that everyone has a relaxed and enjoyable Christmas dinner, which is memorable for all the right reasons. As Kirsten says, "Taking lovely fresh ingredients and creating a simple, no fuss dish that everyone will love is the best thing ever."