



THE POWER OF PLANTS:

Adventures in Plant-Based Nutrition



By Emma Levez Larocque, RHN

BEING VEGAN IN A SMALL TOWN



For me, being vegan is first about compassion. So one of the ways I have supported my inspiration is by visiting animal sanctuaries when I get the chance, like Farm Sanctuary in California, summer, 2015.

One of the most important things about transitioning to a vegan lifestyle successfully is having a support system. New vegans almost always have lots of questions – about how to eat healthfully, ideas for alternatives, recipes, cooking tips, product advice, and more. It's a huge learning curve that can seem even bigger, and somewhat frustrating, if you live in a small town where vegan restaurants are non-existent, access to vegan products may be limited, and other vegans may be hard to find.

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aving said that, it's by no means impossible, and speaking from experience (I live in a small town on the coast of BC with a population of less than 25,000 people), it can actually be a very exciting opportunity to share this healthy, compassionate lifestyle with others who may not have yet been exposed to a "real live vegan" – I honestly was actually called that once!

So if you are living in a small town, and you're feeling isolated as a vegan, here are a few tips for survival, and ways to tap into that all-important network in sometimes unexpected places.

1. Use your online community

If you don't have a local meet-up group, or other vegans who can help to support you through your transition, it's extra important for you to do your research and learn how to eat healthfully as a vegan. A plant-based diet can be one of the healthiest diets out there, but you need to do your research and make sure you know what you need for optimal nutrition. This is a crucial part of sticking with veganism – if it's not healthy, it's not sustainable. There are many great websites out there – look up nutritionfacts.org and the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine to get started, or join communities like the Vegan Mainstream Cookbook Club

for cooking ideas. Explore some vegan cooking blogs (there are hundreds!), Facebook groups (just search for "vegan") or Pinterest pages. Get involved, and find your fit. Some pages/groups will speak to you and others won't, so if you don't find the right fit at first, keep looking. If you have a specific health issue you can often find a forum of people who have that same concern and may be able to help you through their own experiences (e.g. the McDougall Friends Facebook page). Before long you will feel like a vegan expert and you will be ready to support others in your community through their transition!

2. Start a Vegan Potluck

Even when it feels like you are the only vegan in town, that may not be the case. If you open your home and host a vegan potluck, you may be surprised at how many people show up. We host a monthly potluck in my town, and it has grown and grown, and now we regularly get 25+ people. Many people who attend are not vegan, but they are all interested in plant-based food. It is always an excellent meal, and even more than the food I think people value the chance to get together with people who have similar values. We have even seen some of the participants go vegan over the time the potlucks have been in existence. Sharing food is a great way to plant seeds, and help to create your own local vegan community.



3. Discover – and re-discover – your best inspiration

When you feel isolated as a vegan it can be hard to stay motivated to stick to the lifestyle. That's why the two former actions are important – and also why it's crucial to remember why you went vegan in the first place. If it was the animals who inspired you, try to get involved in some animal advocacy work; if it's the environmental reasons that drive you, help to educate others about the impact that leaving animal products off your plate can have on climate change. If you're unaware of any the reasons – compassion, environment, social justice and health, learn as much as you can – the more you learn, the easier it will be to stay inspired.

As a Registered Holistic Nutritionist, I encourage people to

view their health holistically. That means improving nutrition, absolutely. But of equal importance is physical activity, stress management (often through meditation, yoga or mindfulness), and social and emotional wellness. I believe that all of these different aspects of wellness need to be functioning properly in order for a person to be fully happy, and taking the time to find ways to be a successful vegan in your own community is key to facilitating a sustainable lifestyle and supporting you in the journey you have chosen.



Emma Levez Larocque is a Registered Holistic Nutritionist and a Certified Plant-Based Chef. She has been vegan for 7 years, and veg for more than 20. She is passionate about sharing the benefits of plant-based eating and living with others, and working to make the planet a kinder, more compassionate place for all who share it.

Marinated Forbidden Rice Salad with Roasted Squash and Tamari-Roasted Almonds

Main Ingredients:

- 3 cups cooked black forbidden rice (you could easily sub another rice here, like brown basmati)
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 3-4 green onions, chopped
- 1 1/2 -2 cups butternut squash, diced and roasted
- 1/4 – 1/2 cup almonds, tamari roasted

Marinade Ingredients:

- 1 1/2 tbsp. walnut oil
- 1 tbsp. maple syrup
- 2 tbsp. white wine vinegar
- 3 tbsp. orange juice
- 2 tbsp. water
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper

Directions:

1. Cook rice and roast squash and almonds

- **SQUASH:** cut into cubes, toss with 1 tsp or so olive oil and salt and pepper to taste and roast in oven, uncovered, at 375 F for about 30-35 minutes – check to see when it is soft and starting to caramelize on the edges
- **ALMONDS:** roast whole almonds uncovered in the oven at 375 F for about 20 minutes, turning occasionally. When they are fragrant and starting to brown, remove them from the oven and sprinkle a little bit of tamari – about 1 tsp – over them (you need to do this while they are still hot), stirring immediately until the tamari has dried up). Set aside.

2. Chop green onions and peppers and set aside.



3. Prepare your marinade by mixing all ingredients together and stirring well. Put onions and peppers into the marinade first, and let them sit for several minutes. Then add your rice, and mix everything together well. Add the squash and mix gently (don't over-mix or stir too much – the squash will be quite soft and you don't want to mush it into the salad). Finally, add the almonds. Mix most of them in and save a few to garnish the top of the salad.

Try not to eat it before you get to the potluck!

Tips:

You can make this up to a day ahead; sitting in the marinade will blend the flavor of this salad nicely.

If you do make it ahead of time, be sure to give it a good stir to bring up the marinade from the bottom, which will sink to the bottom over time.