

Dating Vegans

Recipes for Relationships

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Introduction

Dating: Dating encompasses any preplanned social interaction between two people. It is usually, but not necessarily, romantic in nature.

Vegans: Vegans (pronounced VEE-guns) are people who avoid animal products for ethical, health, and environmental reasons. Their diet, derived from a variety of vegetables, grains, legumes, fruits, nuts, and seeds is a taste adventure, while their compassionate choices also extend to clothing and other products.

Recipes for Relationships: You don't have to be a vegan to date a vegan.

I gave my friend Paul a copy of my vegan cookbook *Healthy Hearty Helpings*. As he flipped through the pages he asked, "Where are the meat dishes?"

"There aren't any."

"Hmmm. What's your next book?"

"Well, I'm thinking about *Cooking Vegan for My Meat-Eating Friends*."

"Why not *Cooking Meat for My Meat-Eating Friends*?" he jested, poker-faced.

"I'm vegan. I don't know how to cook meat! When are you coming to dinner? Tonight?"

"No thanks. I'm having a PowerBar."

Paul is a rugged, healthy, confident guy who appears afraid of nothing. But perhaps he feared the unknown . . . a vegan meal.

Lots of people have never eaten a meal with a vegan, although they have eaten vegan meals any time there were only plant products on their plate. What if they had to confront their apprehension to enjoy a meal with a vegan friend? What if they actually dated a vegan or had a long-term relationship with one and had to conquer

their fear? What if they had never before thought about their food choices and now have begun to ask questions? And what if a vegan were to fall in love with a meat eater—would the relationship be doomed from the start, or could love and compassion triumph?

Dating Vegans is a unique nonfiction collection of personal stories from real people. My stories as a lifetime vegan who chooses to date nonvegan men exposed a myriad of issues while I searched for a great relationship. Food choices and discussions enhanced my dating instead of hindering the time together. Questions arose for both vegans and nonvegans to ponder and solve if the dates were to get serious. Fortunately my friends who are in successful long-term relationships of “mixed” couples (typically one person is vegan while the other is or was nonvegan) provide inspirations for people with different philosophies to find happiness together.

This book is for both vegans and nonvegans who are interested in dating each other, or for those already in a relationship with someone who maintains contradictory consumptions. Nonvegans will gain insights into the beliefs and concerns of vegans. Vegans will find ideas and strategies for patiently sharing their values. The nonvegans in this book vouch for the delicious vegan recipes which will entice both parties to enter the kitchen.

May all those who open this book embark on great culinary and romantic adventures!

Mighty Athlete Afraid of Rabbit Food

Paul Bergman

Paul Bergman was finishing his master's degree in organizational leadership at Mercyhurst College, where he worked as assistant wrestling coach. His final day in Erie, Pennsylvania, we had our first dinner. Paul and I had been friends for over a year, as he taught me to wrestle. He never wanted anything in return for his patient coaching, yet he appreciated vegan cupcakes and cookies mysteriously appearing on his desk. Paul, a typical meat eater, had never socialized with a vegan and never gave much thought to his food choices prior to our discussion. He is an independent thinker with mainstream taste buds, and his witty, well-educated, open mind made him a good challenge for my new recipe project. I decided to keep the menu as conventional as possible.

Paul's expectations of a vegan meal consisted of a fresh salad with dandelions. I resisted the urge to go foraging in his front yard for my missing ingredient. "The salad was good, really good," Paul said of the assorted baby lettuces, tomatoes, baby carrots, cucumber, and raisins that I served him. I had tossed it with a store-bought sesame-shiitake dressing. Store-bought dressing and other convenience foods can help nonvegans see veganism as a viable option. I created Paul's Portobello Potatoes for the main course, using his favorite vegetables. "The only thing missing was a side steak, but I wouldn't have had room for that," he said. "The potato was loaded!"

We discussed veganism. He was aware vegans do not use eggs, milk, and other animal products. "Wait, so the ice cream we will be having doesn't have any milk? Is it tofu?" Paul expected the non-dairy vanilla ice cream dished onto the Takedown Chocolate Brownies to be a weird concoction. "The first bite was different. After that, it tasted the way any other ice cream, strawberries, and brownie would taste. Good to the last bite!"

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Would a large, athletic guy with a healthy appetite eat vegan dinner again? “Yes, definitely!” Would this experience influence him? “Fatty meats probably aren’t the best thing. I thought more about healthy eating with vegan-style food tonight. Psychologically, I’m feeling really healthy right now. Physically, I’m a little full.”

Secretly, I beamed with pride that I had exceeded his expectations while satisfying his appetite. And I managed to eat my whole dinner without any lettuce flying out my nose during our vegan-issues conversation, which was riddled with Paul’s inadvertent, stoic humor. Paul had asked how many vegans there are in the United States. I know there are more vegans now than when I was a child; but he hungered for specifics, and my answer left him unsatisfied. We looked on the Vegetarian Resource Group website (vrg.org) and deduced that at least one percent of the population considers themselves vegan, and the number is increasing. Over three million vegans in this country, and I am the only one who has had the pleasure of sharing dinner with Paul.

Vegans date nonvegans because there are 99 times more people from which to choose. It helps to keep in mind that anyone can be a vegan, but 99 percent of the population has not made that decision yet. Dating should be sharing enjoyable picnics at the rest stops on the journey of life, not a goal to detour someone else. Dating can be fun and educational.

The American Vegan Society website (americanvegan.org) provides a basic definition of veganism that Paul found helpful. Paul had not considered that some things, such as honey, are not vegan. This inspired him to reflect that if he were unsure whether an item was acceptable, he would respectfully ask a vegan. “Meat eaters eat a lot of foods that vegans eat,” he commented. “Food is just a small part of life. There are more difficult situations to resolve than how to eat a meal together.” After our successful dinner, Paul expressed interest in trying a few “strange” vegan foods, such as more exotic whole grains. We decided to do dinner again the next time he is in town.

Dates with Meat-Eating Men

Paul might always say “I like meat” defensively, with his dimpled smirk, or he might continue to learn about veganism. Either way, we had a wonderful evening and a positive social interaction between a vegan and a nonvegan. Thank you, Paul.

Paul’s Portobello Potatoes

Yield: 3 big manly servings

When I asked Paul what his three favorite vegetables were, he replied, “Salsa.”

I wondered if he came from the kind of background where ketchup is considered a vegetable, but I gave him the benefit of the doubt. “Besides salsa, what vegetables do you like?”

“Potatoes, corn, and mushrooms,” he replied. Paul’s Portobello Potatoes uses all three of his favorite vegetables, and they’re even topped with salsa!

- 3 large russet potatoes (preferably organic), scrubbed but not peeled
- 3 Tablespoons plain soymilk
- 3 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 large red bell pepper, chopped, or 1/2 cup frozen chopped red bell pepper
- 6 baby (or 1 large) portobello mushrooms with stems, chopped
- 1/2 cup corn kernels
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1 teaspoon dried spearmint or basil
- 6 Tablespoons salsa

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.

Poke a few holes in the potatoes with a fork. Arrange the potatoes directly on the center rack of the oven. Bake for 1 hour, or until a knife can slide in easily. Let the potatoes cool until they can be easily handled.

Mighty Athlete Afraid of Rabbit Food

Slice each potato top open lengthwise. With a spoon, scoop the potato flesh into a large bowl, leaving about 1/4 inch of flesh attached to the skins so they will hold their shape.

Add the soymilk and oil to bowl of potatoes and mash together with a fork. Add the pepper, mushrooms, corn, and salt, if using, to the potatoes. Mix well. Crush the spearmint with your fingers directly over the potato mixture and mix until evenly distributed.

Carefully stuff the potato skins with the vegetable mixture, mounding it slightly. Arrange the potatoes in a baking dish. Bake for 20 minutes. Top each potato with 2 tablespoons of salsa before serving.

Takedown Chocolate Brownies

Yield: 12 brownies

Paul disclosed his love of chocolate brownies and enjoyed his role as official taste tester for my new recipe. Although he was quite pleased with the third version of the recipe, he encouraged further changes. I played his game for five more batches before attaining perfection and he agreed to join me for a complete meal. These brownies are especially good served with vanilla nondairy ice cream and strawberries.

- 1 large sweet potato or medium yam, chopped
- 1 cup vanilla (or plain) soymilk
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil
- 1 1/2 cups raw cane sugar crystals
- 1 1/2 cups unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2/3 cup whole wheat pastry flour
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 3/4 cup vegan chocolate chips

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly oil a 9 x 13-inch baking pan.

Dates with Meat-Eating Men

Put the sweet potato in a medium saucepan, add 1 cup water, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to simmer for 30 minutes, or until the sweet potato is tender and a knife can slide in easily. Drain and cool.

Meanwhile, combine the sugar, cocoa powder, flour, and baking soda in a large bowl. Scoop the sweet potato flesh from the skin into a medium bowl, and mash it. Add the soymilk and oil and mix well.

Add the sweet potato mixture to the cocoa mixture and stir until evenly combined. Fold in the chocolate chips. Pour into the prepared baking pan. Bake for 35 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted about 1 inch from the edge comes out clean. Cool, cut into approximately 3-inch square brownies, and serve.



Paul Bergman