



## **Question: What should I serve to non-vegans when I am hosting a party as a vegan/vegetarian?**

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Many vegans know the feeling of being the odd one out at any social gathering. You may be accustomed to the feeling of being the black sheep chomping on carrots among a herd of dainty white sheep scarfing down hamburgers. Mumbling to the party host about vegan options – before you even RSVP – in that awkward exchange with your host is all too familiar. And at that this point, you can probably find the melody to the harmony of groans that accompany your frequently asked, “Does this contain any animal ingredients?”

But what if the roles were reversed and you no longer had to feel like others had to go out of their way to help you on your quest to accommodate animals? What if you were the one in charge? What if you were the server or the host? That would be awesome, right?

Not quite. As vegans, we know that eating with non-vegans is not as simple as an egg-less pie. So, when you are given the responsibility to not only eat with non-vegans but to decide what will be eaten as well, things can get a bit hairy.

Should you serve everyone a vegan meal, even if you are the only vegan? Debra Wasserman, co-director of the Vegetarian Resource Group says, “Yes, I always do.” She points out that it “all depends on what you are serving.” As an example, she told me about the Chinese themed menu for her son’s Bar Mitzvah. Typical, commonly loved Chinese dishes like Lo-Mein were served, as well as vegan Japanese sushi. When the kids licked their chops after dining on orange seitan stir-fry, Debra knew she didn’t have to worry about anyone crying for beef and broccoli. To top it off, they had a local vegan bakery cater the event with a smorgasbord of mini vegan desserts; that way, the kids could sample a variety of vegan treats ranging from cookies to cupcakes. All in all, the party was a success without any animals harmed in the process.

Debra explains that her rule of thumb to vegan hosting is to consider your guests. If you know that you’ll be serving adventurous folk, impress them with your meatless culinary skills (or expertise in the art of vegan boxed dinners) by introducing them to marinated tofu or curried tempeh – don’t hold back! “If

you're feeding a pickier eater, give them Italian." Give them something they know like pasta with marinara sauce to easily satisfy without having to open up your heavy vegan recipe book.

However, there can also be the dilemma of feeding very conservative guests that just will not eat without their meat (aka my family). What do you do when your guests who turn up their noses at the sight of veggie obsessed vegans think nutritional yeast belongs in cake and want to throw holy water on anyone who speaks of seitan? Vegans tend to be strong willed people who are firm in their beliefs; we can and will debate/brawl to stand by our animal rights activism. But even so, we are caring people. We want to make the world a better place. So, sometimes that means respecting others' decisions even when we do not agree with them.

Samantha Gendler, senior editor of the Vegetarian Journal, can attest to this. As she lives with and has friends that are not vegetarians, she says she has learned to compromise when it comes to serving cuisine. "I wouldn't say it's a decision on my end; it's my partner's decision. I've chosen to live with someone who has different food values than I do, and that means being open to compromise."

When asked what to serve both omnivorous and herbivorous guests, Samantha said, "I serve vegan food. However, I live with my partner who also shares a role in hosting and he buys things that are not vegetarian." She points out that this does not mean that anyone is left out or unaccommodated. "For example, we have done 'make your own pizza' nights where the dough is vegan and I offer an array of vegan toppings including vegan cheese. He might also have animal-based cheese available for people who are interested." Having customizable dishes such as these at your next fiesta are a great way to add some extra fun and socialization while giving everybody the freedom to mix-and-match to their liking. Pizza, of course, isn't the only option when it comes to this; create your own taco, salad, wraps, rice bowls, or even pasta are all other great examples of themes for customizable cuisine at your party.

But what if you're low on time or don't have the cash to prepare a plethora of food for numerous guests? It's simple, have a potluck! With a potluck you can serve your favorite vegan dishes and your guests can bring in their comfort foods as well. You can even suggest a theme for the dishes to make it easier for guests to bring accidentally vegan items. It is probably best to inform your guests of your veganism so that they may be more inclined to bring a meat free dish as well. Another suggestion, set up two tables: one for vegan dishes, and the other for non-vegan items. Everyone gets lucky with a potluck.

So in sum, enjoy your opportunity to serve your favorite, exotic vegan dishes to your explorative guests, but if you're serving a pickier eater, give them something they're more familiar with like PB&J, pasta, rice,

fruit salad, etc. If you have time to plan, get a variety of ingredients and serve a customizable entrée like burritos. If you don't want to settle with a single entrée or are low on time, have a potluck!