Opinion
EarthBeat



Mushroom stroganoff, lentil meat tacos, and vegan raspberry cheesecake (Elizabeth Varga)



by Elizabeth Varga

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

March 25, 2023

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

Many Catholics fast from meat on Fridays during Lent to take on a more penitential posture. For them, choosing meatless meals is a way to remember Jesus' death on a Friday and unite themselves to his and others' suffering through sacrifice.

Yet sometimes this practice of giving up meat takes a peculiar turn, and while abstaining from meat that comes from land animals, people choose to indulge in elaborate seafood dishes. To me, this misses the penitential point.

The church asks Catholics to fast from meat specifically, because meat is often — at least historically — considered a celebratory food. Therefore, abstinence from meat, including fancy seafood, is a way to practice simplicity. Some Catholics choose the simplicity of meatless meals also as a way to care for creation, since animal agriculture is one of the most significant contributors to climate change due to the greenhouse gas emissions and deforestation associated with it.

And still, eating simply does not have to mean giving up on flavor or only eating bland and boring foods that lack the nutrition our bodies need!

Advertisement

As a vegan Catholic, I want to eat plant-based meals during Lent that serve as a way to abstain and fast prayerfully. So I take an approach to cooking that is simple and modest during this time of year.

But vegan recipes can also be incredibly indulgent and celebratory — when Lent is over, and the church is feasting, I continue to abstain from meat and other animal-based products, but focus on more delicious and abundant recipes.

This can be hard to imagine for those who aren't used to meatless meal planning, but I promise, whether you wish for a penitential fast or a celebratory feast, a plant-based meal can provide what you're looking for.

Here are seven recipes from my website that keep it simple during Lent. And five recipes that are more indulgent, for the season of feasting that follows.



Split pea soup, mushroom wild rice soup, and vegan orzo soup (Elizabeth Varga)

Seven simple plant-based recipes for Lent

Split pea soup is traditionally made with ham, but this vegan version is just as flavorful without the meat. A bag of split peas is usually inexpensive. Add a few vegetables, herbs and spices to create an easy-to-make plant-based version of this classic soup. With tender split peas, aromatic herbs and sweet, smoky undertones, this vegan split pea soup is a delicious and healthy dish.

Mushrooms and wild rice cook together in this mushroom wild rice soup made with pantry staples. The soup is not bright or vibrant but it is nourishing and filling. The umami flavors of the mushrooms and spices create a hearty dish.

Vegan orzo soup is the plant-based version of classic chicken lemon orzo soup. Replacing the meat with chickpeas and adding vegetables transforms this soup into a Lenten Friday-friendly dish with extra veggies. The orzo pasta absorbs a large portion of the cooking liquid, so the soup takes on a thick texture.

This mushroom stroganoff is a plant-based version of traditional Russian beef stroganoff. It swaps out meat for mushrooms, so there's still a savory, umami flavor. The entire dish is ready in about 30 minutes.



Pistachio broccoli pasta, red lentil curry, and vegan sliders (Elizabeth Varga)

Simple plant-based recipes don't need to be void of color. This beautiful pistachio broccoli pasta is full of bright green broccoli and pistachios. Cook up a quick and simple pistachio pasta sauce, add broccoli for some micronutrients and use a bean-based pasta for protein. It's a complete meal in 30 minutes.

Red lentil curry is one of my favorite quick and simple dishes. Curry powder has a strong flavor, giving any dish a punch, but the cooking itself is simple. And it's easy to fill your plate with vegetables, protein and fiber — all the components of a healthy meal, in one pan.

Lentils are one of the ultimate "simple" plant-based foods. They have protein and fiber, so they can easily replace the meat in something like a taco. They are simple

to cook and have a mellow flavor. This lentil taco meat is made by cooking dry lentils and mashing them slightly to create a ground beef texture. Then, add taco seasoning and a few other ingredients to create a traditional taco. Serve and enjoy just like 'regular' tacos.

Five indulgent plant-based recipes to feast on

A classic party food — serve these vegan sliders at your next get-together. These sliders are made with black beans, mushrooms and walnuts for a savory patty that's loaded with flavor. You can also turn these sliders into burgers for a hearty dinner.



Sweet potato nachos, strawberry margarita mocktails, and carrot cake (Elizabeth Varga)

Sweet potato nachos loaded with all the fixings: tomatoes, onions, beans and jalapenos, plus a flavorful walnut taco meat and thick, creamy, homemade vegan queso.

Strawberry margarita mocktails make a fun addition to taco Tuesday. A delicious drink that the whole family can enjoy. These strawberry margaritas are cold and fresh with tons of bright flavor.

It wouldn't be a proper feast without one of the most decadent foods: cheesecake. And even though this one contains no dairy, it is still ultrarich, thick and creamy. This beautiful vegan raspberry cheesecake would make an elegant Easter dessert.

Another Easter favorite: carrot cake. Celebratory foods like cakes and cupcakes can be completely plant-based and still delicious! This cake is made with whole food ingredients like maple syrup, oat flour and nut butter. It's flavorful, moist and so easy!