

Celeb Kitchen

Dawn Jackson Blatner, author of *The Flexitarian Diet*, on diet, health and what she calls K.I.S.S. cooking...

As a registered dietitian I read lots of research on food and health and one thing became clear: a plant-based vegetarian diet is one of the best things you can do for your health and waistline. So, I became a vegetarian and counselled my patients to try it as well. However, my patients and I would find it difficult to follow a vegetarian diet 100 percent of the time, especially with social events, so I developed a flexitarian approach that allows people to live a flexibly vegetarian lifestyle. A flexitarian is someone who eats a mostly plant-based vegetarian diet but, when special circumstances or cravings call for it, meat and poultry can find a place in the plan too. I personally am a flexitarian and this eating movement is quickly gaining popularity because it allows you to enjoy the benefits of a vegetarian lifestyle without giving up meat completely.

Becoming flexitarian is simple - you just start trying vegetarian recipes. A beginner aims to have two meatless days per week, an advanced flexitarian has 3-4 meatless days per week, and an expert has five or more meatless days per week. For people who are already vegetarian, another goal is to try new and different foods and recipes to keep eating fresh and exciting. There are so many tasty plant foods and vegetarian recipe combinations that it is one of the most flavourful and fun ways to eat!

Health and convenience are very important to me but taste is the top priority! I follow what I call the KISS principle of cooking – Keep it Simple and Seasonal! Seasonal foods are at their peak flavour and optimal nutrition; we tend to naturally crave seasonal foods! There are over 100 recipes in *The Flexitarian Diet* (£13.99, McGraw Hill) and it is hard to pick a favourite but I do love the award-winning Fried Rice with Asparagus and Almonds. Sauté roasted sesame oil, crushed garlic, grated fresh ginger and chopped asparagus over medium heat for five minutes. Add cooked brown rice and chickpeas and sauté for five minutes. Top with chopped almonds, green onions and rice vinegar.



I only cook vegetarian food whether I am alone, with my husband, or am expecting a houseful of guests. When it comes to vegetarian entertaining I find everyone is excited to try new vegetarian fare. Vegetarian foods can have very global flavours so you can offer a wide variety of choices that can please anyone's taste buds.

It is estimated in the US that 8 in 10 restaurants have a vegetarian option and it is becoming easier and easier to find good vegetarian food at all types of restaurants. I've been to vegetarian restaurants all over the world and my favourite is in London – tibits vegetarian restaurant is the best. Vegetarians and meat-eaters alike love the wide variety of delicious plant-based gourmet foods and the ambience couldn't be any more welcoming, modern and trendy.

If I was deserted on an island I'd be sure to have kale with me. Kale is a beautiful and nutritious leafy green veggie that contains so many antioxidants, bone-builders, and blood builders it would give me the strength to survive! I try to eat kale every week either simply chopped and sautéed in olive oil, garlic, salt, pepper and cayenne or left raw and finely sliced with homemade honey mustard vinaigrette. My number one indulgence is vegan red velvet cupcakes and veggie pizza. I eat them when I want but just watch the portions.

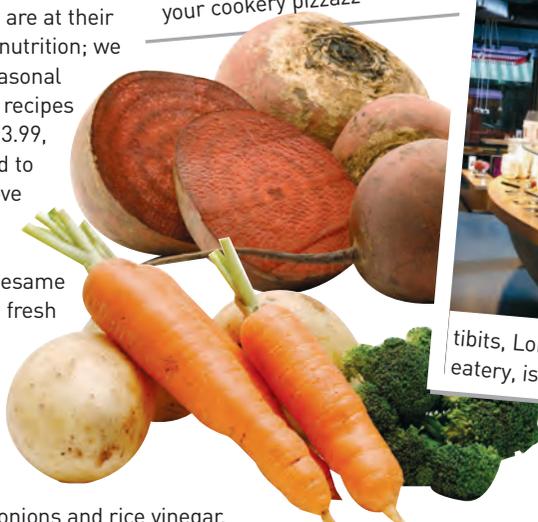


Try using umami foods to give your cookery pizzazz



The most important thing I've discovered about vegetarian cooking is to push myself to try

a new recipe every week. Having fun in the kitchen with plant-based foods keeps eating delicious and exciting. Another top tip is to add "umami" flavour to your meals. Umami is the 5th taste (bitter, salty, sweet, sour are the others) and means savoury or meaty in Japanese. Typically umami comes from meats but vegetarian sources include mushrooms, tomatoes, aged cheese, potatoes, soybeans, and seaweed. Adding vegetarian umami flavour makes meals taste great and also reduces meaty cravings.



tibits, London's trendy meat-free eatery, is Dawn's favourite restaurant