

A Tour of Vegetarian Cookbooks

by Judy Rittenhouse

“We eat meat when we eat out, but we never cook it at home” (oft-stated Adventist credo).

Being a vegetarian is like being a socialist — after you declare yourself, you must indicate a subspecies: Fabian or Trotskyite, vegan or fruitarian. Among vegetarians, what counts as being vegetarian will vary depending on the subspecies. (Not everyone would say with us that hot-fudge sundaes, for instance, are vegetarian.) So it is well to say at the start that in this short overview of vegetarian recipes, the recipes will include dairy products. A further limitation comes about because most people who become vegetarians need a dish to fill the hole left in the middle of the meal after flesh foods have been renounced — the entrée cavity. Therefore, our overview will concentrate on entrées, which will fill the protein gap.

A survey of our friends' kitchens reveals that three vegetarian recipe books appear to be the most popular. They are considered the best and used the most because the proportion of delicious food that can be made from these books is indeed wonderfully high. They are the *Diet for a Small Planet* books, the *Vegetarian Epicure I and II*, and *An Apple a*

Day, produced by the Loma Linda Women's Auxiliary.

The *Small Planet* series includes the titles, *Recipes for a Small Planet* (by Ellen Bachman Ewald, 1975) and *Menus for a Small Planet* (now out of print). These books have popularized the concept of protein complementarity, by which essential amino acids missing in some protein ingredients are supplied by amino acids in other ingredients within the same dish. Thereby the protein pieces fit together. A familiar result is the legume and grain (beans and rice) diet which has characterized cooking in poorer nations for centuries.

With third-world precedents for the protein scheme, *Small Planet* recipes often have a foreign flavor, but they have essentially been Americanized. They tend to be substantial foods, both due to their components and because protein is filling. The flavor combinations in the recipes are sometimes surprising (pineapple juice in the cheese-garbanzo loaf), often subtle, and usually widely appealing.

Diet for a Small Planet, by F. M. Lappe, is a survey of the world's crises in food and population. It offers the hope of a vegetarian alternative made possible by protein complementarity. The recipes in the three books overlap so that one kitchen doesn't require all three. They are from Ballantine Books.

The *Vegetarian Epicure*, volumes I and II, by Anna Thomas, is so widely popular that it must be included. Both volumes con-

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tain recipes of subtlety and sophistication. Many epicures enjoy these books for their foreign, especially Indian, flavor. The cold Russian pie in volume I also springs to mind. Volume I appeared in 1972, the first widely circulated vegetarian cookbook to convince skeptical meateaters that “no meat” doesn’t mean “no good.” Both volumes will be solving wedding gift dilemmas for years to come. (Volume I is from Vintage Books; volume II, Knopf, 1978.)

According to our informal survey, *An Apple a Day* is the most popular cookbook written by Adventists. Traditional, dinner-after-church Adventist cooking is characterized by meat analogs, of course, as well as unexpected combinations such as peanut butter with Chow Mein noodles and mayonnaise ice cream. Somehow the truest Adventist food combines the heft of Jewish cooking with the American flavoring of a Baptist potluck. Sometimes the exotic touch of a former missionary seasons vegeburger into ground lamb. This combination of influences creates such good cooking that the most indifferent backslider might reconsider.

Since their names are attached, the women of the Loma Linda Auxiliary must have parted with their best recipes when they created *An Apple a Day*. The book’s sales testify to the high percentage of excellent recipes in the volume. With no advertising beyond word-of-mouth and the Auxiliary’s own newsletter, *An Apple a Day* has sold 105,000 copies through its twelve printings since 1967. Mailed by volunteers to Adventist Book Centers, the book has returned profits averaging \$14,000 a year for the Auxiliary’s missions projects. It is refreshing to hear of a grass-roots effort so wonderfully successful.

But that is by the way. Rely on *An Apple a Day* for many great recipes. Not every one, of course; but the croissant recipe is excellent, and the French hot chocolate is the best we’ve ever tried.

An Apple a Day does not make a big point of avoiding processed foods, high-fats and sugars. Since many Americans are more conscious of these factors in their diets than they were in 1967, the Auxiliary now contemplates *An Apple a Day*, volume II, with

better nutrition criteria for recipe selection. Nutritional analysis will be supplied for each dish. It will be interesting to see if the dishes created from volume II will taste as good as those in volume I, which used much richer ingredients. It will also be encouraging if, in the intervening 13 years, the Loma Linda women have started using one another’s first names instead of calling each other Mrs. Wilbur Whoever.

A small, little-known volume that is rich in good taste is the *International Vegetarian Cookbook* by Sonia Richmond (Arco, 1965). The recipes call for interesting combinations of ingredients, with heavy emphasis on cheeses. The memory of Richmond’s Balkan spaghetti, in fact, has so crazed vegetarians cycling in England that they have cooked the sauce on a gas ring and mixed it with the pasta in their hotel sink. This illustrates the simplified preparations in this book. The exposition is also simple, in spite of what one might expect upon reading the author’s dedication to her yoga students.

That dedication might have presaged a common new-consciousness tendency to wax either spiritual or trendy about meatless food. The worst, most audacious example of this tendency that we have seen is *The Peter Max New Age Organic Vegetarian Cookbook*. This book urges the cook to “stir a little bit of yourself” into the soups. It is riddled with inspirational quotes from Kahlil Gibran and others and has the nerve to print a recipe for berries and cream under the title of “Merry Woods.” As this book is out of print, we mention it only to warn readers against new-consciousness opportunists. However, the best measure of a cookbook is the way its recipes taste, not what it does for your karma. When vegetarian cookbooks fail the cook, it is usually because they call for too few ingredients and settle for bland, uninteresting dishes. One suspects that the authors or editors of such books don’t really expect vegetarian food to taste good anyway, so they settle for dishes that are wholesome but insipid.

An unfortunate example of such a book is the New York Times *Natural Foods Cookbook*

by Jean Hewitt (NYT Quadrangle, 1971). In spite of emphasizing raw sugar and sea salt, its recipes frequently misfire or fizzle in taste and texture. One dish after another needs punching up. It's too bad that a renowned food editor like Ms. Hewitt doesn't eat at a fellowship potluck and discover what verve vegetarian food can possess.

We have cited four superior vegetarian cookbooks, but great vegetarian dishes turn up in books with recipes for both meat and no-meat foods. Almost any cookbook is likely to yield a vegetarian idea or two. One of the best ways to glean good meatless foods

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from them is to study the rather complete collection of cookbooks found in most public libraries.

Such books as *Classic Italian Cooking* and *More Classic Italian Cooking* by Marcella Hazan (Knopf, 1978) are good sources for meatless dishes. Unfortunately, like many “serious” cookbooks, these annotate most of the recipes with tales of the author's experience or descriptions of how much the reader is going to love the next dish.

Among the nonvegetarian cookbooks that have really good meatless dishes are Julia Child's several books. We served the cream of mushroom soup from *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* at a vegetarian restaurant, substituting McKay's chicken flavoring for genuine chicken stock (and adding salt in the process). That soup is a rhapsody! Julia Child is an evangelist of omelet technique, ever useful to the vegetarian, although she's not one to simplify preparation. The continental emphasis of much of her work provides a vegetarian with recipes for soufflés, aspics, and vegetable dishes.

Almost any foreign cuisine, save perhaps British, is richer in meatless food than

American cooking. Therefore, a book like *Recipes from the Regional Cooks of Mexico* by Diana Kennedy (Harper & Row, 1978) is a good source for new vegetarian dishes. This particular book emphasizes authenticity of ingredients and technique, detailing refinements from one region to another. It is best used if you have access to Mexican food and spices such as cactus paddles and squash blossoms. In any case, it has valuable instruction about vegetable stocks, an essential usually overlooked even in vegetarian cookbooks.

One book which is also helpful with stocks, however, is familiar old *Joy of Cooking* by Irma S. Rombauer and Marion Rombauer Becker (Bobbs-Merrill, 1931-1975). This unsurpassed cookbook is nearly exhaustive on every food topic. It has a huge meat and seafood section, but the luncheon and brunch recipes are rich with egg and cheese dishes, including a peerless rarebit. The book provides recipes and preparation instructions for almost every fruit and vegetable. Many Adventist cooks ignore this great secular standard, but it's worth its price, even with all its instruction on boning a chicken. And its understated, winsome prose makes enjoyable reading while one waits for the pressure cooker to come to a hiss.

Although no particular thanks is due to the Adventist health message, vegetarian diet is now receiving some acclaim in chic circles. This may be partly due to the nouvelle cuisine wave, characterized as delicious-yet-light, which emerged from Paris several years ago, or it may be the natural result of rising health consciousness among more affluent, better-educated Americans. Whatever the reason, the trendier magazines now turn their practised gastronomical talents to meatless entrées, without ever mentioning vegetarian food. *Vogue* magazine — hardly quoted for its homemaking hints — often prints most interesting vegetarian recipes, including this one from the recent past: mix together fresh, steamed green beans, cooked ziti, lots of grated parmesan, sweet butter, chopped parsley and green onions and some salt. It's absolutely wonderful with fresh tomatoes and buttered carrots on the side. Be-

hind its painted eyelids, *Vogue* has wonderful secrets for the vegetarian cook who is tired of Tuno.

Gourmet magazine, that bastion of food-as-god, is also a fine source for meatless dishes. It doesn't stress vegetarian food, but in every issue there is something new and intriguing to a person who doesn't eat meat. Those dishes, often of foreign influence, are tucked in with the flesh dishes. Four or five seasons ago the traditional Thanksgiving fixing included an apple/currant/shallot turkey dressing that is very savory and piquant.

Finally, tofu. A number of tofu (or soy cheese) cookbooks have appeared recently, recommending this "natural" processed food to the industrialized west. One of them shows some promise: *The Book of Tofu: Food for Mankind* by William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi (Ballantine Books, 1979). In addition to describing the apparatus and method

necessary to produce tofu at home, this paperback tells how to grill, deep-fry, and stuff tofu, as well as recommending preparations for eating it raw or making derivatives. It is a comprehensive book with stretches of exposition — all about how it's cooked in Japan — between the recipes. Other books on this food have lavished enthusiasm on what I considered to be insipid-tasting dishes that have no resemblance to the bean curd (tofu) in black bean sauce served in American-Chinese restaurants.

Finally, the best way to discover good vegetarian recipes is to ask a good cook for a favorite. Inquire in the kitchen at a potluck. Tell your mother to have her friends send recipes instead of pillowcases for your wedding. Or find the best cook in your congregation and offer to do his or her ironing in exchange for recipes.