



Food for Thought: The Vegan and Vegetarian Corner

Description

A series of articles with recipes offering alternatives to consuming meat and fish

By **Penny Arsenault** and **Irwin Rapoport**

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Welcome to the first instalment of **Food for Thought**, aka **The Vegan and Vegetarian Corner**. This series will focus on how to adopt a more healthy plant-based diet, help the planet's ecosystem, and address the moral and ethical issues of consuming meat and fish.

We very much appreciate the reaction to [***Tis the season to try out some vegan dishes!***](#), the first (unofficial) article of the series. Many of you have tried out the recipes, shared the article, and sent us messages of appreciation. We could not ask for better.

In this article, Penny explains why she embraces a vegan lifestyle, and Irwin points out why he has seriously reduced his meat and fish consumption. In addition, the authors will share some of their favourite and easy-to-prepare vegan and vegetarian recipes.

This series will focus on how to adopt a more healthy plant-based diet, help the planet's ecosystem, and address the moral and ethical issues of consuming meat and fish.

We hope to demystify and simplify the plant-based lifestyle by sharing tasty and nutritious recipes using foods you already eat. In this way, we hope to encourage experimentation and friendly, intelligent discussion. So, without further ado, here are our stories.



Penny's story

Always an animal lover, I first proclaimed my vegetarianism when I was eight. But when my dad gently reminded me that salami was meat, I put the whole project on hold for quite a while.

The eight-year-old me was easily deterred. I stopped eating red meat, however, and by my twenties, I was vegetarian. People were suddenly worried about my protein intake, but I would assure them I wasn't crazy, I still ate cheese and eggs.

'Weren't all cows happy? They always looked quite content in the commercials. I knew I'd have to check the veracity of that claim.'

Then one day in our dog run, I met a vegan who asked if I was vegetarian for health or philosophical reasons. I replied that I didn't feel I could pay someone to do a job I couldn't even bear to witness. Her reply to this was from a compassionate view – a person should give up dairy first since calves were a waste product of the dairy industry. Two things simultaneously came to my mind: "Crazy vegan!" but also "Oh no!" because if it were true, my life was about to change. Weren't all cows happy? They always looked quite content in the commercials. I knew I'd have to check the veracity of that claim.

That was twelve years ago, and I am now twelve years vegan. Sometimes it just takes a spark to set a mind to wonder. Much has changed since then, but much is still the same. I hope to share some of the things I've learned.

Irwin's story

Meat and fish were staples of my mother Shirley and grandmother Sonya's cuisine, and I miss their fabulous cooking. My mom made a great spaghetti sauce, wonderful stuffed peppers, and meatballs in a red sauce that was served with rice. Steak, chicken and sole were weekly staples. As kids, every Friday night was dinner at my grandmother's house and not to be missed. She served us chicken and oven-made burgers, and other delicious dishes.

For many years we had Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur dinners at my grandparents Sonya and Jack's home in NDG. My grandmother made the best chicken and matzah ball soups – full of carrots and celery. Holiday dishes included chopped liver, brisket, and gefilte fish, and her baking was exceptional. She always made extra brownies for me and my cousin Brian, taking us aside and giving them to us secretly. My grandparents also made awesome pickles.

'The point is meat and fish were always on the family menu and, as far as I recall, vegetarianism and veganism were not discussed.'

On my mother's side of the family, my grandfather Irwin Freedman, who I never met, ran a deli on Bleury in downtown Montreal near the Imperial Theatre with my grandmother Elsie, for many years.



The point is meat and fish were always on the family menu and, as far as I recall, vegetarianism and veganism were not discussed. My grandfather Jack was a butcher and my great uncle Boris Rapoport arrived along with my great great grandfather Abraham in Canada in 1905 from Druya, Lithuania, and founded Hygrade, which was famous for its hot dogs, and between 1905 and 1921, he brought over his siblings, cousins, and parents.

While meat is a family tradition, so are **gout** and **cardiac issues**. There are serious cardiac issues on my mother's side of the family – with my grandfather dying in his forties and my two uncles, Morty and Lawrence, experiencing serious heart issues. Cancer is also a problem on the Freedman side. On my father's side of the family, many of us have inherited gout.

I enjoy the taste of meat and fish but don't crave it. I had my first gout attack about thirty years ago and due to that, I eat less meat and drink less alcohol. At best, I eat meat once or twice a week, and the amounts are limited. I rarely have fish or seafood, though I enjoy octopus, squid, tuna and salmon. I have limited my tuna intake due to mercury content, which is a concern. Though I occasionally consume octopus and squid, I know they are fascinating, intelligent creatures and it gives me pause. I'm also aware that cows, pigs, chickens, and turkeys are also very intelligent, with active social lives and a wide range of feelings and emotions.

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Thus, I consume less meat, fish, and eggs, not only due to health concerns but also for moral, ethical, and environmental reasons. I could easily have meat and fish daily, but I choose not to. My enjoyment of life has not diminished for it. I am not vegan yet, but I am fully aware of how animals suffer to provide food for our tables. Destructive fishing practices on an industrial scale have already decimated more than fifty percent of the world's commercial fishing stocks. In massive cattle feedlots and horrific industrial breeding facilities, far too many animals are suffering and most people choose to ignore this.

We are playing dangerous games with genetics to raise more livestock for consumption and we shouldn't forget that nearly eighty percent of antibiotics in North America are utilized to rear livestock. This contributes greatly to antibiotic resistance and should worry all of us.

Here is a video on veganism that addresses many moral and ethical issues:

Check out this [link](#) from the **Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine** on making the switch to a more fruit and vegetable-based diet:

Here are links to articles from **The Economist** that addresses the consumption of livestock and fish and the environmental impacts:

[***If everyone were vegan, only a quarter of current farmland would be needed***](#)

[***How much would giving up meat help the environment?***](#)

[***Data point: Stop eating meat to save the planet?***](#)

Irwin's recipes

Much of the food you already eat is vegan! Yummy tomato or cucumber sandwiches, roast veggies, salads, stir-fries – many are so easy to prepare.



Though Irwin is not vegan, here are some of his favourite, easy dishes that happen to be entirely plant-based.

Vegetable Stir-fry



Vegetable Stir-fry – Image: [Ryan Kwok](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Ingredients

- Sliced onions
- Olive oil
- Garlic salt, pepper to taste
- Broccoli
- Mushrooms
- Sliced red, green, orange, or yellow peppers
- Sliced celery
- Snow peas
- Other vegetables handy
- Soy sauce and hot sauce (optional)
- Cooked rice or noodles
- Toasted sesame seeds for topping (optional)

Preparation

- Sauté onions with a bit of olive oil in a large frying pan with a cover
- Add other vegetables
- Add garlic salt, pepper (and other spices if you wish)
- When the vegetables are almost done, add rice and mix everything up
- Add soy sauce or hot sauce if using.



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- Cover the frying pan and leave at medium heat for five minutes
 - Stir to ensure the ingredients are infused with flavours
 - Serve and enjoy!

Garden Salad



Garden Salad – Image: Jill Wellington, Pexels

Ingredients

- Lettuces (romaine, Boston, iceberg, etc.)
- Tomatoes
- Cucumbers
- Peppers – red, green, and yellow
- Add other veggies on hand, as well as fruit like apples and berries.

Preparation

- Wash ingredients.
- Cut and slice ingredients and place in a bowl.

Vinaigrette

- Olive oil
- Balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Mix and toss into salad.

Roasted Carrots, Potatoes and Onions



Roasted Carrots, Potatoes and Onions – Image:
Dmitriy Zub, Pexels

Ingredients

- Carrots
- Potatoes
- Onions
- A drizzle of olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Pieces of cut garlic
- Other spices like oregano, thyme, or rosemary

Preparation

- Slice veggies and place them in a container that can be closed.
- Add olive oil, spices, and garlic.
- Shake and then spread in a pan.
- Place the pan in the oven and cook for about thirty minutes at 425 degrees.
- Check to see if the veggies are ready and then serve.



Fruit salad – Image: Josh Sorenson, Pexels

Fruit Salad

Ingredients

- Strawberries
- Kiwi
- Pineapple
- Pitted cherries
- Melon – watermelon, honeydew, etc.
- Any other fruits available

Preparation

- Cut fruit and place in a bowl.
- Add grated ginger or fresh mint leaves for an added bit of flavour.
- Place in the fridge to chill before serving.

Penny's recipes

Caesar Salad Wannabe



Caesar Salad Wannabe – Image: Peggy Arsenault

Dressing

- 1/4 cup crushed cashews
- 1/4 cup nutritional yeast
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- Apple cider vinegar
- Garlic salt
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- Blend. Adjust ingredients to taste and texture.
- 1 large romaine lettuce
- Crispy sesame sticks or croutons
- Capers (optional)

Preparation

- Wash romaine lettuce thoroughly and spin or pat dry.
- Break into roughly two-inch strips.
- Toss with dressing in a large bowl until all pieces are coated.
- Add sesame sticks or croutons just before serving.

Mushroom Spinach Sauté



Mushroom Spinach Sauté – Image: Peggy Arsenault

Ingredients

- 3 ½ cups crimini mushrooms or other types
- 2 cups baby spinach
- 1 tsp fresh grated ginger
- 1 tbsp soy sauce or tamari
- 1 tsp olive oil
- Toasted sesame seeds (optional)

Preparation

- If using, spread sesame seeds evenly on a pan in the toaster oven. Keep a close watch on them and remove them when golden brown.
- In a skillet, over medium-low heat, add oil.
- Add sliced mushrooms and cook until softened, approximately ten minutes, until they are sautéing in their own liquid.
- Add tamari and grated ginger, stir.
- Add spinach on top. Do not mix. Cover to let the spinach wilt.
- Remove to plate.
- Top with toasted sesame seeds and serve.

Easy and Delicious Peanut Sauce



Easy and Delicious Peanut Sauce – Image: Pikist

For stir-fries, noodles or dipping

Ingredients

- 1-½ tbsp. maple syrup
- 2 tbsp tamari or soy sauce
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp nutritional yeast (optional but yummy)
- ½ tsp grated ginger
- Small clove of garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp peanut butter
- ½ tsp vinegar

Preparation

- Mix ingredients. Add water, if necessary, for a thinner sauce.
- Adjust to taste. Add more maple syrup if you like a sweeter sauce.
- Microwave for 30 seconds.
- Pour over stir-fries or on noodles.

Also makes a great sauce for spring rolls or dumplings.

Images: Garden Salad, by Jill Wellington, Pexels



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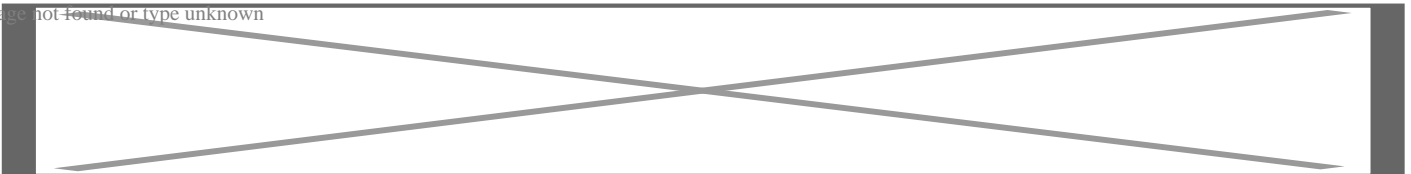


*A figure skating coach and ballet dancer, **Penny Arsenault** is a friend to cats, dogs, and all animals, dedicated to fitness and nutrition, and tireless in her optimistic pursuit of the improvement of urban gardens, and preservation of wild spaces.*



***Irwin Rapoport** is a freelance journalist with Bachelor degrees in History and Political Science from Concordia University.*

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1. Irwin Rapoport
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