

Christmas is the time for overdoing it – but not necessarily on the nosh. Eating veggie already avoids the usual nasties and these simple recipes show you how to have a fabulous festive feast, full of flavour but free of guilt!

'Tis the season



Vegetables a la Grecque (serves 6-8)

<i>Marinade:</i>	<i>4 cloves garlic, crushed</i>
<i>½ tsp black peppercorns</i>	<i>125ml cider vinegar</i>
<i>2 bay leaves</i>	<i>1 tsp salt</i>
<i>1 large fresh rosemary sprig</i>	<i>Plus: vegetables of your choice</i>
<i>2 large fresh thyme sprigs</i>	<i>(cauliflower, artichokes,</i>
<i>500ml dry white wine</i>	<i>red peppers etc. 6 to 8</i>
<i>500ml water</i>	<i>cups worth)</i>

- 1 Tie all the fresh herbs together with a piece of kitchen string and place them in a saucepan together with all the other marinade ingredients. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer covered for 15 minutes.
- 2 In the meantime, slice and chop the vegetables you have chosen.
- 3 Blanch each vegetable in the marinade until just tender. Remove it to a platter with a slotted spoon. Begin with blander vegetables and end with the strongest flavoured ones. Thinly sliced potatoes and carrots take about 12 minutes to cook, while mushrooms, peppers, mangetout and courgette only take 3-4 minutes.
- 4 Strain any remaining marinade over the cooked vegetables and serve warm or chill for later. Serve with crusty wholemeal bread.

Christmas Squash (serves 4)

2 small squashes (eg acorn or small butternut squash)
3 cloves garlic
olive oil
1 large sprig of fresh rosemary
salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the filling:

a little olive oil
1 onion, finely chopped
10g dried mushrooms (porcini or mixed dried mushrooms)
70g long grain rice
20g wild rice
500ml vegetable stock
½ tsp chopped rosemary
2 tsp dried cranberries
1 tbsp pine nuts
1 heaped tbsp fresh thyme leaves, chopped

- 1 Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas mark 6.
- 2 Cut the squashes in half, remove all seeds with a spoon and brush lightly with olive oil. Quarter the garlic cloves and place some in the hollows and dot the rest around the edges of each squash half. Add the rosemary needles and season with a little salt and freshly ground pepper. Place in a roasting dish and roast for 45 minutes until the flesh is soft.
- 3 While the squashes roast, prepare the filling. Sauté the onion until translucent and add the wild rice and vegetable stock. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Add the dried mushrooms, long grain rice, rosemary and dried cranberries. Bring to the boil once more, then cover and simmer over a very low heat until the stock is absorbed and the rice is soft (about 20 minutes). Stir in the pine nuts and chopped thyme.
- 4 Divide this filling between the four squash halves and return to the oven for 5 minutes. Delicious served with Roasted Red Pepper Sauce (right), new potatoes and a big bowl of mixed salad.

Starter from Moosewood Restaurant Low-Fat Favourites. Other recipes, Chava Eichner. Photography: Chava Eichner

Season to be jolly!



Roasted Red Pepper Sauce

(serves 4)

<i>a little olive oil</i>	<i>1 tsp mixed dried herbs</i>
<i>1 onion, chopped</i>	<i>1 tsp soy sauce</i>
<i>2 red peppers</i>	<i>100ml vegetable stock</i>
<i>1 clove garlic, crushed</i>	<i>1 tsp balsamic vinegar</i>
<i>pinch sugar</i>	<i>pinch of chilli powder</i>
<i>½ tin of chopped tomatoes</i>	<i>(optional)</i>

- 1 Roast the peppers for one hour at 200°C/gas mark 6. Turn them a couple of times until the skins are blackened all over. Place the peppers in a sealed bag or covered saucepan while they cool down- the released steam loosens the skin and makes it easier to peel. Remove the skins, cut the peppers in half and discard the seeds. Chop roughly and set aside.
- 2 Sauté the onion in a little olive oil until softened. Add the chopped tomatoes and red peppers, then stir in the sugar, herbs, soy sauce, chilli powder (if used), balsamic vinegar and vegetable stock. Simmer over a medium heat for 20-25 minutes.
- 3 Use a hand blender or food processor and process until the sauce is smooth.

Tropical Jelly with Peach and Raspberry Coulis (serves 4)

<i>For the jelly:</i>	<i>1 large kiwi fruit</i>
<i>500ml white grape or apple juice</i>	<i>125g white seedless grapes</i>
<i>1 sachet of Vege-gel (eg Supercooks, from most supermarkets)</i>	<i>For the coulis:</i>
<i>½ tin mandarin segments</i>	<i>½ tin peach halves in fruit juice</i>
	<i>50g frozen raspberries</i>

- 1 Peel the kiwi and cut it into small pieces and halve the grapes. Divide the kiwi, grapes and mandarin segments between four bowls. Porcelain bowls are best if you want to turn the jellies out for serving.
- 2 Follow the Vege-gel instructions to make the jelly with the juice. Add a little sugar or natural sweetener if you want.
- 3 Pour the warmed juice over the fruit and let the jellies sit in a cool place. Once they have cooled down chill them in the fridge for one hour.
- 4 To make the fruit coulis, blend the peach halves with a hand blender and set the puree aside. Then liquidise the frozen raspberries with a little of the peach juice. Both fruit purees are naturally sweet but you can add a little sugar to taste.

