



THE POWER OF PLANTS:

Adventures in Plant-Based Nutrition



By Emma Levez Larocque, RHN

Cooking Tips for Easy Vegan Eating



One of the biggest complaints I get from people who are newly transitioning to a plant-based or vegan lifestyle is that they feel they spend a lot more time in the kitchen preparing and cooking food. This may be true, especially at first, since learning how to do anything takes some time in the beginning. But there are definitely a few tips and tricks that can help to make things easier from the get-go.

1) Learn how to cut vegetables quickly

This is a big one because vegetables are obviously a big part of what you are going to be eating. So there are a few tips here that will make your life easier:

- Make sure you have at least one really good, really sharp knife (this reduces the risk of cutting yourself, and it makes your life a lot easier – and more fun too!) To find one, go to a good knife store and try some out. Find a helpful salesperson, and take the opportunity to hold a variety of knives to see which one feels most comfortable to you. While you're at it, get yourself some sharpening tools and some advice on how to use them too so you can keep that knife sharp!
- Make sure you have a good cutting board. I prefer a board made of pressed wood, which doesn't warp, is easy to clean, and my knife doesn't slip on it. Wood blocks and bamboo are other great choices. (Plastic not so much, for many reasons, not the least of which is it will be hard on your new favorite knife). When you are chopping, secure your cutting board to the counter by placing a damp cloth underneath the board so it doesn't slip around while you are working.
- Batch cut if you can! Depending on what you are cutting, can you line them up and cut a bunch at once? Yes, it is important to make your pieces roughly the same size for the sake of even cooking, so prepare them properly (e.g. with carrots, make sure the sticks you are going to cut into cubes are roughly the same size), and away you go.

If you're still finding this part intimidating, and you're more inclined to reach for the pre-cut fresh

or frozen veggies so that you can literally dump them out of the bag and into your soup pot (or whatever), go for it! There are no rules here...if you find a convenient option that makes it possible for you to eat a healthier diet, do it!

2) Think twice about peeling

Many people automatically peel vegetables because that's what they've always done. However, challenge yourself to question that – can you get away with a good wash and scrub instead? There are a couple of good reasons for this:

- First, many vegetable peels are very nutrient-rich – for example, sweet potato peels contain 10x the antioxidants that the flesh of the vegetable does! So if you can incorporate the peel into your meal, you should. **Note, if you are buying non-organic produce, you will want to peel it so you are not consuming the pesticides that may be concentrated in the peel.*
- Second, it saves a WHOLE BUNCH of time! Sometimes you want to peel for the sake of presentation, and that's ok too, but sometimes (especially when the veggies are going to be cooked, it doesn't make much difference to the end appearance, so just consider whether it's really necessary since NOT peeling saves a whole step.

3) Be organized

In cooking school one of the first things you learn is "Mise en place" – to have everything in its place. This really makes a huge difference in making things go more easily and quickly in the kitchen. Ensuring that you have all the tools and ingredients that you need at the ready creates a calm atmosphere that lends itself to a much more pleasant cooking experience (and some would say more calming energy in the end food result too!) So,

- Clear a good-sized counter space and set up your cutting board and knife so that you know you have plenty of space (and you're not shoving things out of the way to make cutting space for yourself).



- Take time to read through the recipe, or think about what you are going to be doing – this will help you to organize yourself in your mind, and that sets the tone for the whole experience.
- Gather all the measuring cups, pots, knives, spoons, spatulas and other implements you'll need to cook your meal, including appliances like a food processor or high-speed blender, and place them on your counter within easy reach. This way you won't have to be running around the kitchen or realizing that the tool you are looking for and need RIGHT NOW is in the dishwasher, still needing to be washed.
- Gather all your ingredients, including spices, so that you know you have everything you need. Clean everything and do any necessary chopping before you start cooking – and you'll feel like you are on a cooking show! Boy, this is easy!
- Set up a compost bowl. Once again, having everything close to where you are working alleviates the need to be crossing back and forth across the kitchen, and helps to keep your workstation tidy and organized.

Putting these suggestions into practice is a good idea for anyone who wants to become more efficient in the kitchen, and the more you do it, the more it will become second nature. Before you know it, you'll be telling someone you know that vegan cooking is really not so hard! Happy, healthy cooking.



Emma Levez Larocque is a Registered Holistic Nutritionist and a Certified Plant-Based Chef. She has been vegan for 7 years, and veg for more than 20. She is passionate about sharing the benefits of plant-based eating and living with others, and working to make the planet a kinder, more compassionate place for all who share it.

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Tempeh Breakfast Scramble

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I am always searching for new and exciting breakfast options as I find it the most difficult meal of the day to get excited about. I have to admit that I haven't always loved tempeh. The first time I bought it, I followed the directions on the package..."heat and serve" and I thought, "Wow! This is not a vegan food I will ever like." However, I have since learned to prepare tempeh – it's not hard, but it's definitely about more than heating and serving. This tempeh breakfast scramble has become a weekend favorite!

Ingredients:

- 1 onion, diced
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 sweet potato, cubed into small pieces (1/4 inch)
- 1 pkg 225g smoked tempeh, crumbled
- 1/2 tbsp chile powder
- juice of 1/2 lemon
- 1 1/2 tbsp bragg's liquid aminos/tamari
- 1/4 cup rehydrated sundried tomatoes, with reserved liquid
- 1 1/2 c cauliflower, chopped into small pieces
- 3/4 c broccoli, cut into bite-sized florets
- 1 orange pepper, cubed
- 1/4 c kalamata olives, chopped

Directions:

1) Water sauté onion until translucent (medium heat).



mix well. Cook for a few minutes, until sweet potato has started to soften, adding a little water, or reserved tomato liquid if necessary to keep things from drying out.

3) Add crumbled tempeh and tomatoes and toss again.

4) Add chile powder, lemon juice, cauliflower and tamari, turn down the heat and cover and cook for a few minutes to let sweet potato and cauliflower soften (it's key to cut the potato and cauliflower small enough so they don't need TOO long to cook in this stage – 5-10 minutes should do it).

5) Add broccoli and olives about 5 minutes into the steam and cook just until green – just a couple of minutes – don't overcook! (you can also add the peppers at this point; I wait to add them until the very end because I prefer them pretty much raw.