

catering for your vegetarian guests

A dinner party dilemma that presents itself from time to time is when a guest you invite advises that they are vegetarian. Should you plan a meat-free meal and deprive your carnivorous guests? Or do you cook two separate meals and try to please everyone?

Firstly, let's look at what being a vegetarian means: A vegetarian excludes all animal flesh from their diet, including poultry, game, fish and seafood. There are several variants of this. The stricter vegetarian, known as a vegan, abstains from eating any animal products, including eggs, dairy products and even honey. It is important to know if your guests are vegetarian or a vegan. Some vegetarians do include fish in their diet. A vegetarian's motive for choosing vegetarianism could be related to ethics, religion, culture, health or personal taste.

My experience shows that the majority of vegetarians do not expect, and indeed would feel embarrassed, if the entire menu was based around their dietary needs. Unless your non-meat-eating guests are strict vegans with strong ethical views around animal rights, they are generally quite accepting of others consuming meat-based meals.

The perfect solution to keeping everyone happy (including the host), is to ensure that there is something for everyone included in the menu. Choose a meat-free entrée, such as a vegetable soup, a vegetarian risotto or pasta dish, or a salad with optional addition of meat or seafood for the non-vegetarians.

For the main course, I would suggest cooking whatever you would normally cook for your meat-eating guests, with ample vegetarian accompaniments that everyone can enjoy. For example, include a large platter of char-grilled vegetables, a tasty staple such as rice, cous cous or potatoes, and plenty of fresh bread. A simple extra you can prepare for your vegetarian guests is grilled mushrooms with melted cheese (use soy cheese if your guests are vegan). Mushrooms are often known as "meat for vegetarians".

Dessert is an easy choice, although do ensure that dairy or honey aren't included in the ingredients if your guests are vegan.

A buffet is a good option, particularly for a larger crowd, as you can prepare a variety of different dishes, meat-based and vegetarian, and your guests can pick and choose what they like.

life's a feast's menus include an ample selection of dishes suitable for vegetarians and vegans.



A vegetable soup is a good choice for an entrée