

UCLA Student, Trainer Publishes Vegan Thanksgiving Menu On Blog

By Marina Romanchuk-Kapralau



Fourth-year psychology student Victor Rivera published a vegan Thanksgiving menu on his blog “Vegan Power Training” to help explain the vegan lifestyle. Rivera said he got the idea for the blog after he realized that some people believe vegans can’t train for strength and do bodybuilding. (Owen Emerson/Daily Bruin senior staff)

Victor Rivera will cut his vegetarian holiday poultry, dig his spoon in vegan stuffing and treat himself to some egg and dairy-free pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving.

November is known as National Vegan Month, and fourth-year psychology student Rivera published a vegan Thanksgiving menu on his blog Vegan Power Training Saturday to help explain the vegan lifestyle. The blog was sparked by his realization that some people believe vegans can't train for strength and do bodybuilding, he said.

“Vegan Power Training” combines Rivera's two main philosophies of health and nutrition. The blog's goal, Rivera said, is to crush vegan stereotypes and educate his readers about intensive training in combination with vegan diet.

Rivera said as a personal trainer, he meets many female clients who have a fear of lifting weights and getting bulky. He is currently working on interviewing female weight lifters and having female guest posts on the blog.

For Rivera, who has been vegan for eight years, the transition from a meat to vegan diet didn't happen overnight. He went vegetarian for a month in 2008 with the intention of becoming vegan because he said he loved the idea of protecting the environment and having a healthy lifestyle.

Before the transition, Rivera said his wife, a longtime vegetarian, would say “Moo” whenever he'd eat a burger.

“My wife is a really amazing cook. Her vegan lasagna is insane, I can eat 20 pounds of it,” Rivera said.

Rivera said his wife encouraged him to start reading books, such as *Fast Food Nation*, which gives the top-down look at the meat industry from animal to worker abuse at the slaughterhouses, and *Skinny Bitch* which is a nutrition book. These books inspired him to have a compassionate lifestyle.

“Most of the people don’t want to make the link between the pain and their food,” Rivera said. “A meat-eater’s diet triples the impact on global warming compared to vegan diet.”

Veganism is more than just a plant-based diet, Rivera said.

“My goods are also cruelty-free,” he said. “I don’t have any leather belts or shoes; I don’t buy wool. It’s not just a diet, it’s a lifestyle.”

One major change for him, Rivera said, was cooking more meals, because eight years ago, the variety of vegan products offered in stores wasn’t huge, so Rivera had to look up many vegan recipes himself....

...**UCLA alumnus Jason Pierce** has known Rivera since sixth grade and said he was converted vegan by Rivera and his wife.

“Blogs such as ‘Vegan Power Training’ are important,” Pierce said. “Most people don’t know anything about vegan lifestyle, especially in combination with cardio exercises and body building.”

Pierce said Rivera is able to share his knowledge about the psychological aspect of fitness on his blog, in addition to his knowledge of physical training.

On Thanksgiving, Rivera will take a break from schoolwork and run around his house in Tarzana, chasing his 7-year-old son, while his wife makes candied yams and vegan turkey. The family will have dinner and talk to their son, who is also vegan, about National Vegan Month, Rivera said.

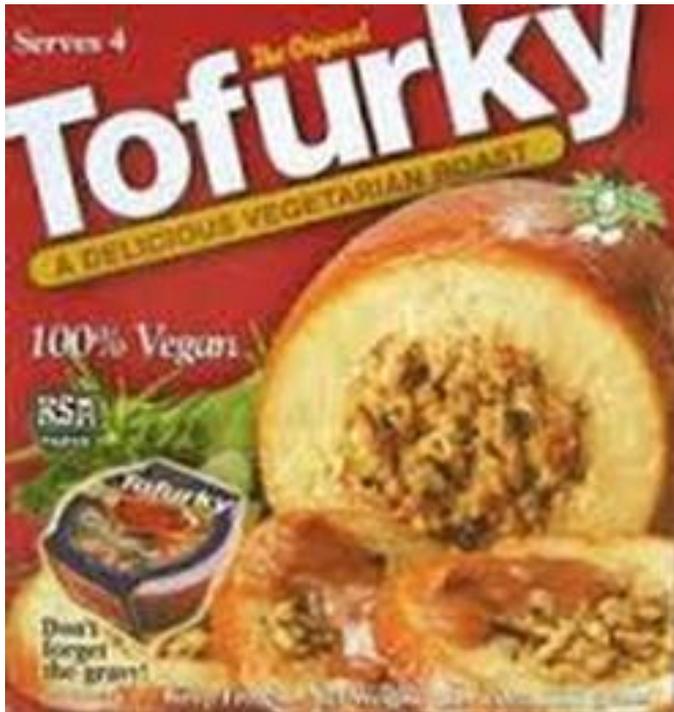
“Having National Vegan Month is important because it shows that we are no longer just some tiny smattering people,” Rivera said. “This is why I hope my ‘Vegan Thanksgiving Recipes’ post will encourage people to try something new and maybe learn they like vegan version of something even more than the standard version.”

RECIPES

There are lots of turkey replacements out there, but here is Trader Joe's version:



Here is Tofurky's Version, which I've found at Whole Foods:



Vegan Biscuits Recipe



I don't know about you, but I need my biscuits on T-Day! Here's one way to make them

1 2/3 unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/3 tsp salt
2/3 cup nondairy milk
1/3 cup canola oil or non-hydrogenated vegan butter

Preheat the oven to 375 Degrees. Next, lightly grease a baking/cookie sheet. Then, in a large bowl, mix together the dry ingredients (flour, baking powder, and salt) until fully mixed. Next, add the milk and oil and stir just until the dry ingredients are moist. It should be very sticky and thick, not smooth like pancake batter. Use one teaspoon to form walnut-sized scoops of batter and another spoon to scrape the batter onto a cookie sheet, leaving some space between the biscuits.

Bake the biscuits for about 7-8 minutes, until they are lightly brown underneath.

Vegan Gravy



I personally pour gravy all over my tofurky, mashed potatoes, stuffing, biscuits, and face. Here is a modified version of [Veg Web's vegan gravy recipe](#):

8 tablespoons vegetable oil
3-6 cloves of garlic, squashed and minced
3 slices of yellow onion, chopped
8 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2 tablespoons nutritional yeast
4 tablespoons Bragg's Liquid Aminos, low sodium soy sauce or tamari sauce
2 1/2 cups water or vegetable broth (to start)
1/2 teaspoon ground sage (dry)
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
6 sliced mushrooms (optional)

In a medium saucepan heat oil on a medium or medium-low heat.

Add garlic and onion and cook until slightly tender and almost transparent.

Add the flour, yeast and soy (or tamari) to make it pasty. Be careful not to let it burn. GRADUALLY add the water, stirring constantly. With frequent stirring, bring the gravy to a boil and allow it to thicken.

Add sage, pepper, mushrooms, red wine (or red wine vinegar) and balsamic vinegar.

If the gravy is too thin (unlikely) add a small amount of cornstarch which has been dissolved in some cold water. (Dissolving the cornstarch in water first will prevent lumps.)

You can add more water to the gravy if you want a lighter gravy for certain dishes. The flavor is very strong and can easily handle the extra liquid. It's even better if you let it sit in the fridge overnight and gently reheat it. This is great over a lentil loaf, bisquits, potatoes!" (via vegweb.com, which has some amazing recipes!)

Vegan Stuffing



And last but not least, vegan stuffing. We really enjoy lots of the Minimalist Baker's recipes, so here is [her version of vegan stuffing](#):

Ingredients:

- 1 large loaf wholegrain bread or 2 small baguettes, cubed & set out to dry overnight (~9 cups loosely packed)
- 3/4 cup uncooked green lentils
- 3 Tbsp olive oil or vegan butter (I used a mix of both)
- 1/2 cup white onions, diced
- 3/4 cup celery, diced
- salt & pepper
- 3 - 3 1/2 cups vegetable broth (+ more for cooking lentils)
- [1 flax egg](#) (1 Tbsp flaxseed meal + 2.5 Tbsp water)
- 3/4 tsp dried sage, or 1 1/4 tsp fresh sage, chopped

Instructions:

1. The night before, cube your bread and set it in a large bowl to dry out - you want it to be the texture of day old bread - noticeably dry but not rock hard.
2. The day of, if you haven't already cooked your lentils, do so now by thoroughly rinsing 3/4 cup lentils in cold water, then adding to a small saucepan with 1 1/2 cups veggie broth or water.
3. Cook over medium-high heat until a low boil is achieved, and then lower to a simmer and continue cooking uncovered for 20-30 minutes. Set aside.
4. Preheat oven to 350 degrees and line a 9x13 pan (or comparable sized dish) with foil or spray with nonstick spray. Also prepare flax egg and set aside.
5. Sauté onion and celery in the olive oil or vegan butter and season with a bit of salt and pepper. Cook until fragrant and translucent - about 5 minutes. Set aside.
6. To the bowl of bread, pour most of the broth then add the remaining ingredients (sage, cooked veggies, flax egg, and lentils) and mix with a wooden spoon. The key is to make sure it is about the consistency of a meatloaf. If it's too dry,

add more broth and mix again. If it's gotten too wet, add more bread.

7. Transfer to the prepared pan and cover with foil. Bake at 350 for 45 minutes, then remove the top layer of foil so the top can brown. Increase heat to 400 degrees and bake for another 10-15 minutes, or until the top is well browned and crisp.
8. Remove from oven and let cool slightly before serving. Leftovers reheat well in the microwave or oven, though best when fresh.
9. This dish would be awesome with [vegan mashed potatoes](#) and my [vegan mushroom gravy](#)! (Courtesy of: <http://minimalistbaker.com/simple-vegan-stuffing/>)

(Be sure to head to <http://minimalistbaker.com>, as she has lots of other amazing recipes!)

Vegan Pumpkin Pie!!



And what Thanksgiving meal would be complete without dessert? My personal favorite is pumpkin pie, and here is a great recipe we've used from ["Oh She Glows."](#) Check it out!

Ingredients for the crust:

- 1 cup whole grain spelt flour
- 1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup dry sugar (Natural cane sugar, brown sugar, or Sucanat)
- 2 tbsp ground flax seed
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- 1/2 cup almond milk
- 1/2 cup coconut oil, melted OR Earth Balance, melted

Ingredients for the filling:

- 2 & 1/4 cup canned pumpkin (not pumpkin pie filling)
- 1/2 cup natural cane sugar or brown sugar
- 1/4 cup full-fat coconut cream (or almond milk), softened
- 1 tbsp Earth Balance, softened
- 1/4 cup pure maple syrup
- 3 tbsp arrowroot powder (or cornstarch)
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp ground ginger
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- pinch of ground cloves

Instructions:

- Crust (1): Preheat oven to 425F and grab 9-inch pie dish. In a large bowl or stand mixer, mix dry crust ingredients. Pour in milk and melted coconut oil. With an electric mixer, mix just until the dough forms into a few lumps. Do not overmix. The dough should be moist, but not too sticky. If it's too sticky work in a tiny bit of flour when rolling.

- Crust (2): On a non-stick mat or lightly floured surface, roll out dough until it's a couple inches wider than the pie dish. Place pie dish on top of dough and trim the edges leaving 1-inch around the edge. Gently roll the dough onto the rolling pin and then unroll over top of dish or just flip the baking mat over with the dish on top. Tuck the edges of the dough under and then crimp/flute the edge using your fingers (see photos below). Poke 12 fork holes into base and pre-bake the crust for 7 minutes at 425F, no pie weights required. Roll out remaining dough and cut shapes with cookie cutters. Cover dough shapes with plastic wrap.
- Filling: In a small bowl or mug, whisk together the maple syrup and arrowroot powder (or cornstarch). In a large bowl, whisk together all ingredients, adjusting spices to taste.
- To bake: Scoop the filling into crust and smooth. Add cut-outs on top. Bake for 45 mins at 350F. Remove and cover crust edges with tinfoil or crust shield. Bake for another 15 mins. Place on cooling rack for 1 hour. Transfer to fridge to set for a minimum of 3 hours or overnight. (this is very important!)
- Tips and tricks: 1) The dough should NOT be chilled, but rolled immediately. 2) Using full-fat coconut cream (from the top of the can) yields in a richer and creamier filling (I couldn't detect the coconut taste much), but feel free to use almond milk. 3) The pie must set in the fridge for a minimum of 3 hours before serving. The longer it chills for, the more it firms up." (<http://ohsheglows.com>)