

What better way to honor Earth Day than to win over friends and loved ones to the delights of plant-based eating? Here's how to start your own veg dining club

the new

# SUPPER CLUB



The author, center, kicks off the club with friends in Hermosa Beach, Calif.



Liesl Maggiore, flexitarian (above); Debbie Fogel, veg sympathizer (left)

**I've been incubating the idea** of a veg supper club for several years. As a vegetarian for more than two decades, I've faced many challenges in breaking bread with friends and family who didn't embrace my plant-based lifestyle. Hosting a dinner party is hard work. When you add to that the anticipated questions—"What do you mean there isn't any meat?" "How do you get enough protein?" and "Tofu is really gross, right?"—it's no wonder that though I fantasized about countless dinner parties, I actually held only a few.

But that was then and this is now. More and more people are paying respectful attention to the benefits of a plant-based diet. Meatless Mondays have become de rigueur at restaurants worldwide, and Tofu Thursdays are popular in the blogosphere. Gail Simmons, food critic and judge on Bravo TV's *Top Chef*, recently proclaimed, "The year of the vegetables is upon us!" Since people are opening their minds to the idea of vegetarian eating, I decided now would be the perfect time to throw open my pantry, kitchen, and dining room to veg-curious friends and family.

The idea is simple: enlist a few friends, pick a mutually convenient day, and divvy up cooking assignments. For best results, follow my simple steps to supper club success.





## MY INAUGURAL 4-STAR MENU

I built this menu using four-star spring recipes from the VT Web site. To get all these recipes, plus more party menu ideas, visit [vegetariantimes.com/supperclub](http://vegetariantimes.com/supperclub).

- Three Citrus Basil Cocktails or mocktails
- Indian Spinach Dip with fresh veggie sticks
- Radicchio, Radish, and Fennel Salad
- Spicy Grilled Tofu
- Sweet Potato Wedges with Cider Reduction
- Ice Cream–Strawberry Strata



Professional chef Kaumudi Marathe and daughter Keya Marathe-Bajaj are self-described flexitarians.



Vegetarian Laura Dove (foreground) and aspiring vegetarian Shannon Salmon



Five-year-old Stellan Swanlund is a lifelong vegetarian.



### No. 1 | Don't Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

Start with a core of four to six friends who share a passion or interest in plant-based dining. Include both vegetarians and veg-curious omnivores to make for a well-rounded group. While you're at it, bring in at least one or two seasoned cooks. For me, finding friends who were up for the idea was much easier than it would have been just a couple of years ago. Most people I know are still not completely vegetarian,

but nearly all of them eat plenty of plant-based meals and are interested in expanding their veg horizons.

### No. 2 | Make It Potluck

Rather than preparing the entire menu yourself, invite each guest to prepare one dish to bring to the communal meal. Potluck dinners were invented with the express purpose of sharing food and friendship—everyone shares in the work and the expense.

### No. 3 | Pick a Theme, Any Theme

Day of the Mushroom (April 16), National Salad Month (May), foods starting with the letter N. For my kickoff dinner, I put together a spring-themed menu of four-star seasonal recipes from [vegetariantimes.com](http://vegetariantimes.com). Another option would

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## The New Supper Club

be to agree on a theme, and invite each member of the club to choose an appropriate recipe in an assigned category (appetizer, salad, entrée, etc.). Go with whatever theme sparks the greatest interest among the group.

### No. 4 | Choose the Menu

While old-school potlucks are more come-as-you-are and bring-what-you-want, the modern approach involves a little bit of planning yet leaves plenty of room for creativity. Consider your friends' culinary abilities and inclinations when choosing the recipes. Keep in mind personal likes, dislikes, allergies, etc., and if you know someone prefers cooking over baking, plan accordingly. On the other hand, a supper club can be a great opportunity to coax someone out of their comfort zone.

### No. 5 | Get the Word Out

The host will act as team leader, but a supper club is a collaborative effort, and communication is key. While more than a dozen potluck and dinner party invitation templates are available on evite.com, you can use sites such as signupgenius.com and luckypotluck.com to keep fellow potluckers in the loop on everything from menu and recipe sign-ups to head count and driving directions.

### No. 6 | Show and Tell

If you're the host and you've selected the menu, plan to print out at least one copy of each recipe for everyone to look over at some point during or after dinner. (If guests select their own recipe contributions, ask them to bring copies to share, and invite them to talk about their recipe choices and cooking experience.)

### No. 7 | Set the Stage

Create a comfortable, welcoming space for guests—whether you set the dinner table for a sit-down feast or arrange a buffet around the coffee table. You'll also want to have plates, cutlery, glasses, and napkins, plus a few extra platters or bowls and serving utensils for anyone who didn't bring their recipe ready-to-serve. For a smaller group of four to six people, one recipe per course works great. When your club grows, you can prorate the recipes accordingly (e.g., double up on the entrée; assign another appetizer, side dish, and a second oh-no-you-didn't dessert to new members).

### No. 8 | Alcohol Protocol

The host can provide water and a nonalcoholic drink, but cocktails and wine should be a participatory sport. Let the menu be the guide to what guests contribute to the drinks portion of the evening. And don't forget the ice!

### No. 9 | That Was Great ... Let's Do It Again

Take 15 minutes or so while basking in the afterglow of a great first meal to discuss plans for future get-togethers. Once a month, dinner, the occasional brunch/lunch? Pick a mutually convenient day and time for the next event, identify the next host, and pass along any party-planning wisdom you've gained.

With social media technology available to everyone, there's no time like the present to get in touch with your inner social butterfly and help feed our collective need for community. A supper club is the perfect setting to expand your culinary experiences, inspire one another, and exchange ideas for living the best plant-based *vida loca* you can. 🍃



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### Cashew Coconut Drop Recipe

1 1/2 cups rolled oats  
1/2 cup Once Again Cashew Butter  
1/4 cup cashews, chopped (Once Again)  
1/2 cup Once Again Honey  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
1 egg  
1/2 cup water (optional)

Preheat oven to 350°. Blend ingredients in mixer bowl. Drop from teaspoon on lined baking sheet. Bake for 12 minutes or until browned.

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