



Plenty

Yotam Ottolenghi

About:

The New Vegetarian

Back in 2006, when I was first approached by the Guardian to write a vegetarian column in their Weekend magazine, I was slightly hesitant. After all, I wasn't a vegetarian. The issue wasn't close to my heart either and I had never given it much thought. Still, I understood the reasoning behind the Guardian's approach. Ottolenghi had become famous for what we did with vegetables and grains, for the freshness and originality of our salads, and it only made sense to ask me to share this with vegetarian readers.

It took me a while, though, to get to grips with my title, The New Vegetarian, and it made some Guardian readers extremely unhappy to learn that the new vegetarian wasn't a vegetarian at all. A couple of angry letters to the editor stick in my mind and an incident where I suggested serving a salad with some barbecued lamb chops. Unfortunately, my editor missed this too. But with time the task has become more natural to me. Ottolenghi's vegetarian image was rightly based on the fact that both Sami Tamimi – the other creative force behind the company and co-author of Ottolenghi: The Cookbook – and I were brought up in Israel and Palestine and were exposed to the multitude of vegetables, pulses and grains that are celebrated in the region's different cuisines.

The food I had growing up was a huge mixture of diverse culinary cultures – European at home and Middle Eastern all around – with an abundance of easily sourced fresh ingredients. The greengrocer's where my mother does her shopping in the neighboring Arab village always reminds me of this. It sells a fantastically fresh abundance of local and seasonal fruit and veg, what I call real fruit and veg because they look real, taste real and are grown by real people – that is, Arab or Jewish farmers and not nameless farmers across the globe. It sells cucumbers, kohlrabis, figs, pomegranates, apricots, almonds and pistachios, as well as herbs from the area, local halva, olive oil and much more. Both my parents used this wealth daily to prepare real meals of real food, which is their food.

This multitude of ingredients and ways of making miracles with them have given me the perfect tools for making up dishes and turning them into recipes. This is also why vegetarian cooking didn't turn out to be a chore for me. I like meat and I like fish but I can easily cook without them. My grandmother's vinegar-marinated zucchini, or the ripe figs with sheep's cheese we used to down before dinner, are as substantial and as basic as any cut of meat I used to have.

Wasatch County Cooking Class, March 2026

Tricia Mathis, FCS/4-H Educator

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Soba noodles with eggplant and mango

This dish has become my mother's ultimate cook-to-impress fare. And she is not the only one, as I have been informed by many readers. It is the refreshing nature of the cold buckwheat noodles (see more about them in Soba noodles with wakame, page 188), the sweet sharpness of the dressing and the muskiness of mango that make it so pleasing. Serve this as a substantial starter or turn it into a light main course by adding some fried firm tofu.

Yield: 6 servings Time: 45 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup rice vinegar
- 3 tbsp sugar
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 garlic cloves, crushed
- ½ fresh red chile, finely chopped
- 1 tsp toasted sesame oil
- Grated zest and juice of 1 lime
- 1 cup sunflower oil
- 2 eggplants, cut into ¾-inch dice
- 8 to 9 oz soba noodles
- 1 large ripe mango, cut into ¾-inch dice or into ¼-inch-thick strips
- 1½ cup basil leaves, chopped (if you can get some use Thai basil, but much less of it)
- 2½ cups cilantro leaves, chopped
- ½ red onion, very thinly sliced

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small saucepan gently warm the vinegar, sugar and salt up to 1 minute, just until the sugar dissolves. Remove from the heat and add the garlic, chile and sesame oil. Allow to cool, then add the lime zest and juice.
2. Heat up the sunflower oil in a large pan and shallow-fry the eggplant in three or four batches. Once golden brown remove to a colander, sprinkle liberally with salt and leave there to drain.
3. Cook the noodles in plenty of boiling salted water, stirring occasionally. They should take 5 to 8 minutes to become tender but still al dente. Drain and rinse well under running cold water. Shake off as much of the excess water as possible, then leave to dry on a dish towel.
4. In a mixing bowl toss the noodles with the dressing, mango, eggplant, half of the herbs and the onion. You can now leave aside for 1 to 2 hours. When ready to serve add the rest of the herbs and mix well, then pile on a plate or in a bowl.

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Quinoa and grilled sourdough salad

This summery bread salad isn't much short of a whole meal. I have taken the traditional Arab fattoush, changed the bread and bulked it up with quinoa, which is the only grain I dare to use in this salad as it's very light and delicate. A lot rests here on the poor tomato. If your tomatoes are sweet and juicy you may not need as much dressing to perk them up. If they are "dry" and bland you may want to add a bit more. Leave the prepared salad to sit a little so the bread croutons can soften up – unless you want them mega-crunchy.

Yield: 4 servings Time: 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- ¼ cup quinoa
- 4 slices sourdough bread
- ⅓ cup olive oil, plus extra to brush the bread
- salt
- 4 ripe medium tomatoes
- 3 small cucumbers, unpeeled
- ½ small red onion, very thinly sliced
- 4 tbsp chopped cilantro
- 1½ tbsp chopped mint
- 2 tbsp chopped parsley
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- ¾ tbsp red wine vinegar
- 2 small garlic cloves, crushed
- black pepper

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Place the quinoa in a saucepan of boiling water and cook for 9 minutes, or until tender. Drain in a fine sieve, rinse under cold water and leave to dry.
2. Brush the bread with a little bit of olive oil and sprinkle with some salt. Lay the slices on a baking sheet and bake for about 10 minutes, turning them over halfway through. The bread should be completely dry and crisp. Remove from the oven and allow to cool down, then break by hand into different-sized pieces.
3. Cut the tomatoes into roughly ¾-inch dice and put in a mixing bowl. Cut the cucumbers into similar-size pieces and add to the tomatoes. Add all the remaining ingredients, including the quinoa and croutons, and stir gently until everything is mixed well together. Taste and adjust the seasoning.

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Sweet Potato Wedges with Lemongrass creme fraiche

My right-hand person with this book was Claudine Boulstridge. Claudine tried most of the recipes diligently and came back with criticisms, insights and general common-sensical observations. Despite her gracious nature I could always rely on her to tell me if something I'd come up with was utter rubbish. To top it all, she is also very creative. This is one of her recipes and it's wonderful.

Yield: 4 servings Time: 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

- 3 medium sweet potatoes (about 2 lbs in total)
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 1½ tsp ground coriander
- ¾ tsp fine sea salt
- 1 fresh red chile, finely diced
- 1 cup cilantro, leaves picked

Dipping Sauce

- ½ lemongrass stalk
- ¾ cup crème fraîche
- grated zest and juice of 2 limes
- 1 inch fresh ginger, peeled and grated
- ½ tsp fine sea salt

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Wash the sweet potatoes but don't peel them. Cut each lengthways in half. Cut again lengthways into quarters and then once more in the same way, so you are left in the end with eight long wedges.
2. Place them in a roasting pan that has been lined with parchment paper and brushed lightly with some of the olive oil. Brush the wedges with the remaining oil and sprinkle with a mixture of the ground coriander and salt. Roast for about 25 minutes, or until the sweet potato is tender and golden brown. Remove from the oven and allow to cool down a little. (The wedges can be eaten warm or at room temperature.)
3. To make the dipping sauce, very finely chop the lemongrass or grind finely in a spice grinder. Whisk with all of the other ingredients for the dipping sauce and set aside.
4. When ready to serve, place the wedges on a large, flat serving dish. Sprinkle with the diced chile and cilantro leaves, and serve with the sauce on the side.

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