



Happy Thanksvegan Organic Food Ideas (A Holiday Survival Guide!)

So as much as we all love our families (riiiight....?!), and the wonderful holiday celebrating yummy food, Thanksgiving can be a very trying time for the newly minted vegan or vegetarian! Not only is there the usual family drama to deal with for the holiday - disappointing unmet expectations of perfect cozy family gatherings (since when has that ever happened!), travel logistics gone haywire, and exploding ovens or other mayhem :); but then add a new strange diet to the mix, with a person who is not quite sure how to navigate through the maze of tempting familiar favorites. You know, Dad's traditional stuffing recipe that MUST have the sausage cooked together with it, the creamy mashed potatoes that simply can't be made without milk and butter, or perhaps the overly accommodating family who embraces the tofurkey in a peace treaty effort, only to be sorely disappointed when it tastes nothing like turkey! (I do NOT recommend the tofurkey approach by the way! There is no meat substitute, and really, do you want to replicate meat anyway!?)

So what's a self-respecting, strong will-powered (or not) vegan or vegetarian to do? How to make the holiday as "normal" as possible, enjoy some time with family and friends, and not feel deprived of the favorite classic comfort foods or start World War 3 by asking for a slight alteration of the 3rd generation pumpkin pie recipe?

As a now 5+ year veteran of Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays with family and friends as a vegetarian and vegan (and then organic in past few years also), I hope I can share some tips to help you along the way!

1. Thanksgiving is about giving thanks, right? So be grateful that we have such an abundance of food that we can afford to be worried about such things as what to eat is really a luxury to start with! I am grateful for the big bag of organic white rice I have on hand, and have learned that it really is more about your mind than your tongue and stomach when it comes to nurturing your body. Sea salt and hot perfectly cooked white rice is such comfort food and so simple! I am not saying to eat rice only for Thanksgiving, but rather to be grateful that we have the choice of what to eat at all! And that we have organic vegan food to eat!
2. Stick with your favorites and just adjust slightly to make them vegan/vegetarian. This way, you won't feel deprived of traditional favorites, and your family won't freak out because they can't serve mashed potatoes or pumpkin pie! See below for a few simple adjustments to make your favorite dishes vegan/vegetarian easily.



3. Be creative and flexible about what you eat. Sometimes it isn't about the exact food that you are eating (turkey, stuffing, etc.) but more about the ritual of preparing it and the annual tradition of making a special meal together with your family that we need/savor more than the dish itself. So don't make it about the food, but about the experience, if you can! For example, a big pot of rice and beans, hearty chili, or a favorite casserole dish can be a great substitute for a turkey main dish, moreso than a faux turkey substitute like tofurkey. Or try a big loaf of hearty, crusty, organic whole grain bread that everyone can tear into, with organic olive/coconut/sesame oil, sea salt & favorite spices to dip into (rosemary, basil, oregano, black pepper, cumin, etc.).

4. If all else fails, go to a restaurant! That way, everyone can eat what they want without worrying about offending the cook! Eat at home before you go out and save your feast for later when you are in your own kitchen again. Or ask the hostess if you can bring in your own organic fruit, nuts, tea bags (just order hot water), or other small simple things and just eat a snack there (bring some to share with your family and waitress, they will appreciate it!).

Simple Adjustments to Make Your Favorite Holiday Dishes Vegan/Vegetarian

- **Turkey/Ham/Main Meat Dish** - Substitute your favorite hearty main dish for this, do not, I repeat, do not attempt to replicate turkey or other meat! I have never been impressed with meat substitutes and find that they are all the more depressing on holidays! If you love lasagna (it can be made vegan!), rice and beans, split pea soup, or tomato and basil sauce with homemade pasta, make it vegan and organic, then truly savor it! Or you can just eat dessert for dinner, that is the best part of the meal anyway, right!? Or use my suggestion from above for a big crusty loaf of bread with dipping oils and spices and enjoy a hearty satisfying chewy dish. The carbs in it are also very calming and will help boost serotonin levels and moods!
- **Bread Stuffing** - so in my family, the word "stovetop" refers to the top of the stove, premade stuffing warrants dirty looks at best! And I am grateful for that, I do love homemade stuffing almost as much as pie! But it is the process of making it that can be tricky for folks, and I understand! However it can be done and is worth it! Use organic olive or sesame oil instead of butter on the bread, and pull some to the side before any meat is added in or it is stuffed into the turkey.



- **Mashed Potatoes** - can be made oh so creamy with lots (and I mean lots!) of organic coconut oil, turmeric spice if you like (is orange spice used to make curry - makes it taste buttery), and sea salt. Add organic rice milk or soy creamer (unsweetened) to make it even creamier. If your family won't have it, then pull out some plain cooked potatoes from the pot and make your own mashed potatoes.
- **Creamed corn** - use organic rice or soymilk instead of milk and coconut oil instead of butter
- **Green bean casserole** - this is my baby sister's all time favorite, and a dish she prides herself on being able to make herself :) She is not the cook in the family, though she has learned a lot of great new recipes from her travels overseas I am sure! Use organic soy yogurt or plain organic silken tofu instead of the cream of mushroom soup, along with fresh or dried sauteed mushrooms added to the green beans before cooking in the oven. Thicken with cooked pureed rice or other grain or some coconut or chickpea flour if you like.
- **Yams/Sweet potatoes** - one of my all time favorites, though I am not sure why people feel the need to add marshmallows on top!? You can make yours equally decadent with this recipe idea! Slice the yams/sweet potatoes crosswise into thin slices (no need to peel, just wash off well), boil in filtered water for 10 minutes until soft, let cool a bit, remove from cooking juice (can drink like tea, yummy!). Add organic cinnamon, coconut/sesame oil, raisins/chopped dates/figs if desired, raw nuts/seeds if desired, sea salt. So yummy!
- **Macaroni & cheese** - you can actually make an amazing organic vegan mac & cheese really easily, and it is high protein, flavorful, and satisfyingly rich! Cook organic red lentils (takes about 10 minutes), add organic quinoa or other pasta towards end of cooking, let cook till al dente. Turn off heat, stir in organic ground flaxseed (optional), lots of coconut/sesame/olive oil, sea salt, organic rice/soy/almond/coconut milk or soy creamer (unsweetened), & cumin seed if desired. Let sit a few minutes to absorb water and flavors, enjoy! Thicken with a little more flaxseed or pour off extra broth (drink like soup if you want!)
- **Cranberry Sauce** - this is usually already vegan/vegetarian, but maybe hard to find organic, especially if folks like the kind that comes out of the can in the same shape as a can! :) Make your own very easily with fresh organic cranberries, maple syrup or raisins/chopped dried figs/dates/apricots, orange rind, sea salt. Just rinse and sort berries, boil then simmer 5 minutes till they pop open, turn off heat, add seasonings, & let sit few minutes to absorb liquid. Enjoy!



- **Bread/Rolls** - it can be very difficult to find organic, vegan (and especially gluten-free) bread if you are going that route. See Section 1 - file 4 for how to make your own quick / flatbread or do my simple no bake approach. Use organic quick oats, oil, sea salt, flax/sesame seeds if you like/ Add boiling filtered water to oats, just enough to make like a dough texture, let sit a few minutes, then add rest of ingredients. Is like instant custom bread! :) Oats are naturally gluten free, though if you are super sensitive, best to get gluten free oats, since they may have been grown by wheat field.
- **Gravy** - this one is a tough one to replicate! Choose your own favorite spice (cumin, turmeric, garam masala, rosemary are some of my favorites) and mix with lots of organic olive/sesame/coconut oil and sea salt. Helps at least make it a bit more flavorful! Add organic ricemilk/soymilk (unsweetened) if you like for more texture and thickness, like a cream sauce.
- **Butter** - try organic olive/coconut/sesame oil. When it is cooler, the coconut oil becomes a solid, and you can spread it like butter, is very rich and satisfying (and good for your brain!)
- **Eggnog, coffee, coffee creamer** - Organic Valley brand Original Flavor soy creamer tastes alot like eggnog, is super rich and creamy, yummy! Warm up and add sprinkles of cinnamon and nutmeg on top for a truly yummy treat! Can use this creamer in your coffee or tea also, is super rich and flavorful. Also, for an organic herbal, naturally decaf coffee, try Teecinno's organic herbal "coffee" (www.teecinno.com), so good! just add hot water and make a cup of instant coffee. Add soy creamer and cinnamon for extra flavor.
- **Pumpkin pie** - use organic soy creamer instead of milk, ground flaxseed and coconut/sesame oil instead of eggs. Make the crust with coconut oil, flaxseed, flour, sea salt, and water. Or use quick oats + boiling filtered water, oil, sea salt and make a pressed-in crust in the pie plate (see **Bread** above for details), save some time and effort!
- **Apple/fruit pie** - use organic coconut oil instead of butter when you dot apples/fruit, make crust as above
- **Whipped cream** - chill and whisk coconut cream (canned) or organic soy creamer or soy/coconut yogurt, then blend with coconut/almond/rice milk, and cooked white/brown rice or oatmeal. Adjust liquid and grains to get right texture. Add vanilla and maple syrup if you like.
- **Ice cream** - I don't think the Native Americans served this at the first Thanksgiving long ago :) But if you are intent on having ice cream with your pie (you are a lucky soul to have that luxury even!), make your own with frozen bananas (peel and cut into thirds, then freeze in ziploc baggies). When ready to make ice cream, put a few



in the blender with organic soy creamer/almond/coconut/rice milk, maple syrup if you want more sweetness, sea salt - yum!

Wow, I didn't think I could write so much on this but am looking forward to trying some of these out more this year! Hope this helps, let me know of other ideas you may have as well! Best wishes for a wonderful holiday, and happy celebrating!

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