



DVD Review: Vegetarian Cooking with Compassionate Cooks

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Reviewed by Dan Balogh

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Colleen Patrick-Goudreau is passionate about animals, about the environment, and about food – vegan food. In fact, she’s so passionate that she started Compassionate Cooks, a nonprofit organization that is “dedicated to empowering people to make informed food choices and to debunk myths about vegetarianism through cooking classes, nutrition workshops, and supermarket tours.” For those who’d like to experiment with veganism this is awesome, right? Well yeah ... for folks who live in or near Oakland, where Compassionate Cooks is based. The rest of us are left relying on the Food Network to show us the vegan way, naively hoping that one of the dozens of carnivorous cooks on that channel will (every now and then) find it in their hearts to prepare a dish that is totally free of animal products. Get real! Isn’t the Food Network one of the reasons there are so many vegetarian myths to debunk? Doesn’t their constant barrage of meat-heavy meals only strengthen America’s nutritional ignorance?

So what do we do? Easy – we buy the new \$20 DVD called “Vegetarian Cooking with Compassionate Cooks” which features Colleen, along with her friend Alka Chandna, preparing no less than six vegan dishes in 70 minutes flat. But with one word of warning – do not watch this video on an empty stomach! If you absolutely must, at least ensure that adequate food is within reach. Twenty minutes into this video your stomach will be growling so loud it may drown out the deafening crackle of the frying onions that become part of the Harvest Stuffed Acorn Squash; or the popping of the cumin and coriander seeds which make their way into the Hearty Three-Bean Chili; or the sizzling tofu which becomes part of the Tofu & Vegetable Stir Fry with Peanut Sauce. And now my stomach is growling so loud I can hardly hear myself typing.

In the midst of preparing all of these dishes (as well as two desserts – Chocolate Chip Cookies and Magic Chocolate Cake), Colleen and Alka intersperse facts about nutrition; provide a survey of different types of grains; and offer a recommendation of various vegan products available at local supermarkets (like meat substitutes to use in your favorite meat-based recipes). At times, so much information is flying about that you’re sure to miss something – Colleen is adding ingredients while Alka is talking about phytochemicals, then Alka begins stirring while Colleen begins talking about quinoa. It’s clear that these two ladies love food (Colleen’s favorite food is quinoa ... then it’s mashed potatoes ... then it’s stuffing), and have so much information to share that there’s no time to waste. And that’s what the rewind button is for.

If that wasn’t enough, the DVD also contains a Frequently-Asked Questions segment (where Colleen and Alka address potential viewer concerns on everything from B-12 to free-range chickens), and a documentary on the history of Farm Sanctuary.

There are folks who learn best by taking classes and there are folks who do well on their own by reading books. If you'd like to try veganism and are looking for a vegan cooking class, this DVD is an ideal start for you. But even if prefer books, you still may want to check this out – no book can substitute for the enthusiasm of real live vegans having loads of fun in the kitchen, demonstrating how veganism is not a diet of denial, but one of passionate (and compassionate) celebration.

I sure hope this is the first in a series!

Dan Balogh is a frequent contributor to VegSource.com. He works as a systems engineer in the telecommunications industry. He and his wife have been vegans for several years; their kitty Lulu happily approves.