

WHAT TO EAT?

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That question of what to eat comes up a lot around our house. Neither my wife nor I are among the world's best cooks. We cook to live, not live to cook. We like to eat, but cooking can be a chore and worse, we often find it hard to even decide what we are going to eat on a given day. This is particularly true if the weather shifts or at a seasonal change. Whatever we have been eating just kind of goes away and we don't want that, yet nothing comes to mind to replace it. And then there are the things we just don't eat.

For example, we no longer eat processed food, have not for years... almost forever. And we don't eat fast food, ever. We seldom even go out to restaurants to eat, and for a couple of reasons. For one, there are no decent restaurants where we live, and even the lousy ones are expensive. Worse, the restaurant eating experience is seldom all that wonderful for us. Sometimes we just want to get out of the house, go somewhere, and let someone else do the cooking. But more often (much more often) than not we come homing wishing we had never gone out. The food was just not 'that' good. And although we may not be gourmet cooks, even we can cook better than that.

And we no longer eat meat. We never did all that much. Well, I slip up once in a while and eat meat when I am at a restaurant or at someone's house and they serve it, but I am a total hypocrite when I do because I would never kill an animal. I have no excuse. So where does that leave us? It is mostly all about vegetables, but the trick is how to cook them.

And we do know how to cook vegetables. I designed the logo for Eden foods that is attached to this blog back in the late 1960s. I also chose a propitious (astrologically) incorporation date for Edens, which turned out to be Nov. 4, 1969. Margaret and I are well trained in macrobiotics and other forms of vegetarian cooking. We used to make our of tofu back in the early 1970s, and things like that. We are not vegan, but we like eating vegan style cooking when it is served to us. We just happen to still eat cheese, yoghurt, and things like that. But I am straying from my topic: what to eat and how to cook it.

We eat a lot of grains and beans with our vegetables. Every few days we measure out some beans and set them to soak overnight. And rice is big. For us it is mostly short-grain brown rice (the Lundberg brand), but we eat some long-grain rice, usually basmati, and once in a while (especially in the summer) we eat white rice, but not that often.

As for wheat, we eat some bread, but it is hard to find good bread where we live. Margaret eats Ezekiel bread and I like various kinds of whole wheat. Once in a while I like white bread, like a French baguette, but less and less often. We do eat some pasta, but I have yet to like whole-wheat pasta, so just any good pasta is fine by me, mostly linguini style. And we like udon and soba noodles.

As far as spices go, we use very little spice because it just kind of covers over the taste of the food too much. Sure, we use pepper (I like green peppercorns) and a little (very little) salt, usually in the form of Tamari (Shoyu) sauce. We love roasted sesame seeds with some seaweed in them (wakame) and make our own gomasio frequently. Another staple for us is tahini, which is essentially ground sesame butter. We eat it on toast, sometimes with a tiny bit of

jam. It is delicious and also very healthy for you.

As mentioned earlier, beans are big, all kinds of beans from garbanzo to azuki to anasazi, to black, to great northern, to navy, to pinto, and so forth. Also lentils, kidney, and split-peas. Perhaps our favorite way to have beans is Mexican-style brothy beans with some mild spices and cilantro. Beans and rice is a combination that is hard to beat. And I am getting around to the vegetables.

Vegetables are the main deal for us and we eat lots of them. Because of our macrobiotic training (one of the most useful things we ever learned) we know to eat root vegetables like carrots and broccoli when it is cooler and lighter veggies like zucchini and summer squash when it is warmer out. Similarly we oven-roast carrots, sweet potatoes, Brussel sprouts, etc. when it is cold and eat salads in summer weather -- that kind of thing.

There are many ways to cook veggies, but for those of you who are perhaps considering eating more vegetables. here is how I cook them. I posted this once before, but it is worth posting again.

Steamed vegetables to me are just too bland. I never cook them that way. Here is what I found works better. Check it out.

How to Cook Veggies

We chop our vegetables into some form that makes it easy to cook them relatively fast. It does not really matter what shape, but a smaller size helps. Next, we take a large flat-bottomed sauté pan with a lid. Into the sauté pan we put a small amount of oil, usually sesame oil, but sometimes olive oil if we are not going to cook too hot. We let the oil heat. And here is a secret.

When the oil is hot, I sprinkle a very, very small amount of cayenne pepper, just enough to barely see it, but of course you could put in as much as you want if you like that. My wife tells me when I have put in too much! My use of it is only to give the veggies a sense of heat. You would never know it is there if I did not tell you. When I am alone, I add more. cayenne pepper is a mucus stimulant and not an intestinal irritant like most chilies. Cayenne is actually good for you, especially your heart, or so I am told.

Anyway, into that oil laced with cayenne I throw the cut vegetables and proceed to braise them. And I mean braise, like hot for a time, just like you would braise or brown meat. You actually singe them and try to get some color on them as well without actually burning them. I push the braising as far as I can dare to. It makes a difference.

When it is getting just too hot and too scorching, I throw into the sauté pan something like a third of a cup of hot water and cover immediately. Careful of the sudden steam! From this point I am going to steam them a bit, but the cayenne pepper and braising has given them some real flavor. Keep stirring them from time to time, but keep the cover on.

I let the steaming action cook them and when mostly cooked I take the cover off and proceed to dry them out, to boil off any remaining water. I don't overcook, and pull them off the flame when they are still a teeny bit firm. And I leave the cover of the sauté pan off. If you leave it on, your veggies will turn a not-so-lovely olive drab. And I serve them at once. This turns out to be (for us) the best and most palatable way to cook vegetables. On the cooked veggies some Tamari or soy sauce is great.

What are you eating? Share your thoughts.



[Graphic: I designed this logo back in the 1960s. Eden Foods makes some of the most pure food available and their products are a staple at our home. Poster by me.]