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For this challenge, I worked with my friend Alana to create our very own vegan menu! She normally eats lots of fruit and grains but not many vegetables, and is a heavy carnivore. In my household, I eat a lot of grains, vegetables and fish, but not meat - I consider myself pescetarian. I actually work at a plant-based cafe (although I do not make the food), so for our breakfast I was inspired by what we sell in our cafe!

The challenging part was coming up with ways to make our food plant-based with what was in my house. We wanted to challenge ourselves by not going out to buy more food (which failed a little bit) but instead using what we had. The only specifically “vegan” things we had were vegan yogurt, cream cheese, and almond milk. Still, we came up with some great recipes! We tried as hard as we could to avoid the easy way out by just putting some leaves in a bowl and calling it vegan (even though that is a valid, delicious meal!), although for lunch that’s kind of what we ended up doing - as the challenge description says, vegan food does not always have to be overly complicated!

Now...welcome to our cafe!

Breakfast

Pumpkin Brown Sugar Muffins



Our first vegan feat was quite difficult. We planned out this cooking day to be on a Sunday because neither of us had any homework, work, etc, to tend to, so we could spend all day cooking. This one meal ended up taking us almost three hours to make, not an exaggeration! Making this plant-based became kind of confusing. We made one batch of muffins, attempting to replicate non-vegan ones sold at Starbucks, but they failed. They don’t look too bad in the picture but they tasted really strange and had an awful texture. We came to the conclusion that we used too much molasses - this sparked a discussion in which

we researched and learned that molasses is actually not entirely vegan as it is indirectly a result of the exploitation of animals.



We decided to forfeit molasses in our second batch and also take a new approach.

Just look how beautiful they turned out! They were so delicious, my little brother and mom also tried them, and Alana and I had a cup of autumnal harvest tea with them - the perfect fall breakfast.

Recipe

$\frac{2}{3}$ can pumpkin puree (more/less depending on the flavor you want)

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup vegetable oil

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup almond milk

1 cup brown sugar + 1 tbsp for topping

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups of flour (we blended oatmeal to make oat flour because we didn't have regular flour, and it was perfect!)

1 tbsp baking powder

2 tsp cinnamon

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ginger

1 tsp pumpkin pie spice (I don't think this actually added anything, it was just in my pantry already)

To make the frosting, we just stirred a small amount of almond milk, vanilla extract, and powdered sugar together...we used all the vegan cream cheese in the failed batch before.



Lunch

Chickpea Salad

The preparation for this went much smoother and faster. We just gathered lettuce, cucumber, tomato, vegan yogurt, lemon, canned chickpeas, frozen corn, and black pepper. Some of this produce (lettuce and tomato) was organic - keeping to our principles of maintaining a responsible food footprint! My

mom always keeps chickpeas in our house, and the vegan yogurt was courtesy of my older sister who is vegan.



First, we chopped our vegetables. Then, we made dressing - 2 tbsp vegan yogurt, a sprinkle of pepper, and a lot of cucumber, finely chopped. My mom always makes dressing like this so this idea was hers (although she adds mint and lemon juice as well, but we didn't have mint).

These salads were good! It didn't feel different from our normal diets.



While planning out our epic dinner, we snacked on fruit (apples, kiwi, and strawberry). We didn't feel the need to prepare anything for our snacks because we usually eat unprepared fruit, nuts, chips, etc anyways.

Look at the vibrant colors of these fall apples! It's currently their season for harvest here in California.



Now...dinner time!

We were cooking at my house, which is near a very cool international grocery store. We decided to make a great big meal of falafel and cabbage rolls to eat along with what my mom was preparing, with my dad when he got home from work.

I come from two Mediterranean parents so I was inspired by regular household meals. My mom helped us a lot when we were making this.

We headed to the grocery store to buy some specific items- just look at this beautifully arranged aisle of soup.

Here's a more specific list of what we purchased -

- Canned tomato soup
- Onion
- Cabbage

- Fresh mint

Falafel Recipe

1 cup dried chickpeas
½ cup chopped onion
1 cup chopped parsley
1 cup chopped cilantro
3 garlic cloves
1 tsp of each: cumin, salt, black pepper, baking soda
Oil to fry

Step 1: Drain and rinse chickpeas after letting them soak in water for at least 3 hours. Put in a food processor along with everything except the baking soda.

Step 2: Move to a bowl and add the baking soda. Refrigerate the mixture for 20-40 minutes.

Step 3: Shape the mixture and fry it.

Stuffed Cabbage Rolls Recipe

A head of cabbage
⅓ cup Uncooked white rice
⅔ cup water
¼ cup chopped onion
¼ teaspoon black pepper
1 can tomato soup

Step 1: make rice

Step 2; boil cabbage leaves

Step 3: mix 2 tbsp tomato soup, onion, pepper in a separate bowl with the rice and divide the mixture evenly among each cabbage leaf.

Step 4: cover a pan with the cabbage rolls in it, and pour the rest of the soup over. Let simmer for 30 minutes.



After hours of hard work in the kitchen, this is how our dinner came out. We also added hummus, a side of the cucumber dressing we made for our salads earlier (with mint this time), fruit, a bowl of salad, and pita bread (which we were very pleased to find out was plant-based!).

The cabbage rolls were interesting to my parents (my friend had never had them before) because they usually have meat in them. The falafel was amazing. We made little sandwiches using the pita bread, lettuce, hummus, and falafel. My parents also really enjoyed this meal. We used lots

of onion to make our dinner - a EWG Clean Fifteen item! Onion really brings out the flavor in vegan food.

Reflection

My friend and I will answer each question separately.

- 1) Was it easier or harder than you thought to go without animal products for these meals?
- 2) How does your mind/body feel after three consecutive plant-based meals?

- 3) Do you think you will continue to enjoy more plant-based meals, make one day a week exclusively plant-based, or even consider adopting a plant-based, vegetarian or vegan diet? Why or why not?

Alana: 1) It was easier. The pumpkin muffins were my favorite and I will probably make them again.

2) Really tired of cooking. I like how much quality check is involved in eating a plant-based diet. You know exactly what you're eating.

3) For breakfast, yes. I think breakfast is the easiest meal to eat vegan everyday - almond milk in your coffee, vegan yogurt bowls, fresh fruit. Those are all very easy to transition to, I already eat like that for breakfast.

Me: 1) It was about the same. I didn't expect it to be extremely difficult or easy because of doing PGC and reading about it beforehand. The cooking was easier than I thought it would be.

2) I feel pretty good! The dinner was very filling. I heard that eating plant-based food would lack protein but I feel very sustained.

3) Maybe once a day, I will make a meal that's vegan. I am currently a pescetarian. I used to focus on trying to become vegetarian but my family eats too much fish for it to work out. I will continue to make small changes in my diet to become more plant-based, such as fresh fruit with every meal.

What an amazing experience! Plant-based lifestyles help reduce the greenhouse gas emissions associated with meat production - a great feat in the fight against climate change.

Plant-Based Menu

Being vegan is more than just eating salad! Come check out the vegan menu my friend & I made! Go green!



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After a whole day of hard work in the kitchen, my friend Alana and I made these three amazing meals. It was a very rewarding experience.

- Feedback we received -
- vegan cream cheese for frosting on muffins instead of what we did (sadly we used all of it on our failed batch)
 - buy plant-based meat for the cabbage rolls, recommended from my mom who makes cabbage rolls often

Plant-based eating reduces soil degradation and greenhouse gas emissions associated with meat production. Alana & I felt this was a good experience and taught us how we can transition to a more permanent plant-based lifestyle. We had the most trouble coming up with vegan dinner ideas, and the least for breakfast. Not everyone can cook in the kitchen all day, but I think 2-3 meals a week is a feasible goal!

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