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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ COOKING

The Vegetarian Meat and Potatoes Cookbook: 275 Hearty and Healthy Meet-Free Recipes

Robin Robertson
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Vegetarians have been perceived as the Calvinists of the culinary world. Their ascetic approach to food is taken as an affront to the high partisans of meat eating. Vegetarians are not hated for what they do-benignly eat fruit, vegetables, nuts, and grains. It is what they don't do—eat flesh—that causes derision and jokes (Q: What are vegetables? A: That's what food eats). In their dietary piety, vegetarians unwittingly taunt.

The charge of asceticism bears a half measure of accuracy. Many vegetarians are content with frequent meals of plain brown rice and a steamed vegetable-for much the same reason that a second grader spreads peanut butter on white bread: a craving for uncomplicated, reassuring food, substantive in the tummy.

In this cookbook, the author, who has worked as a restaurant chef, caterer, cooking teacher, and food writer for more than twenty years, offers 275 recipes that evoke 1950s-style stews, casseroles, roasts, and pot pies-sans the meat. These dishes reflect the fact that vegetarian cooking in the U.S. has benefited from the recent influx and popularity of international foods. A sprinkling of African, Basque, Indian, and Irish influences are discovered alongside recipes founded in the cuisine of Asia, Italy, and Mexico. Soy sauce and ginger are used extensively in marinades, often with the classic meat substitutes of tofu, tempeh, and seitan. While none of the recipes requires advanced cooking skills, Robertson is deft in the use of techniques like reduction, infusion, steeping, and zesting to manufacture as much flavor as possible, always a concern with meatless cooking.

The allure of "meat and potato" comfort food lies as much in its simple preparation as it does in presentation and taste. To this end, Robertson concentrates on dishes that simmer, bake, and slowly roast their way straight to the dinner table with no last-minute finishing. Shepherd's Vegetable Pie, Country Vegetable Cassoulet, and Wild Irish Stew fit this bill. Other stalwarts like stroganoff, gratin, hash, and goulash will earn a relaxed sigh from cooks hoping to avoid their saucepans.

SETH MCEVOY (March / April 2002)

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