

It's fun. It's tasty. It's vegan?

Sisters Jenny Engel and Heather Goldberg subtitle their 'Spork-Fed' cookbook as 'Super fun and flavorful vegan recipes.' Here are some of their picks for holiday entertaining.

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The holiday season, with all its sweet indulgences and potluck gatherings, might seem like the wrong time to talk about a vegan cookbook — unless you're talking with sisters Jenny Engel and Heather Goldberg.

These California girls are two of the most enthusiastic spokespersons for vegan eating on the planet, and they have made their passion their business, teaching cooking classes at their West Hollywood-based Spork Foods and hosting a website, Sporkonline.

Now they have a new cookbook, "Spork-Fed: Super Fun and Flavorful Vegan Recipes from the Sisters of Spork Foods" (St. Lynn's Press), the third way of spreading their message of vegan cuisine for everyone.

The "Spork" in the title refers to that combination fork-and-spoon utensil, but it was chosen for different reasons.

"We wanted to take the serious nature out of vegan cuisine so we named it after a funny kitchen tool," they said.

In keeping with that sensibility, the "Spork-Fed" cookbook packed with personality, evident in notes before each recipe.

For example, the one for Broccoli in a Pecan Brown "Butter" Brandy Sauce reads: "Broccoli isn't actually baby broccoli, so let's not treat it that way! This hybrid of Chinese cabbage and kale is all grown up. So get it drunk, get it buttery and then get it in your mouth."

The recipe also happens to be gluten free as are many in the cookbook.

Most recipes come with informative "For Your Smarts" and "For Your Parts" notes, the former providing culinary tips or history and the latter offering nutritional information in a breezy manner that will bolster your resolve to eat healthfully, if not totally vegan.

"About 85 percent of the people who come to our classes aren't even vegan," observed Heather. "They're people who want to eat better and enjoy something healthy that tastes amazing."

Taste, in fact, was the main criteria in choosing the 75 recipes (with 73 appetizing, full-color photos to illustrate them) in the cookbook.

"We picked out recipes that have tested well with all people, vegans, vegetarians and carnivores," Jenny said during a lively three-way telephone interview earlier this month.

In light of this season of celebrating with food, we asked the sisters to pick out recipes that would be great for entertaining or to take to a potluck buffet.

Jenny's first choice was Pear, Fig and Sage Tarts with a Roasted Garlic Aioli. "It's easy to put together and the ingredients aren't 'hit-you-over-the-head' vegan," she said.

"The phrase we hear over and over is that if vegan food tasted this good all the time, we'd all be vegan," Heather added.

Heather's choice for a potluck contribution was a dessert, Crunchy Peanut Butter Bon Bons, which are described in the cookbook as providing a candy bar experience.

If your assignment is a main dish, however, she recommended the Creamy Baked Macaroni and Cheese with a Spelt Bread Crumb Topping. It has all the flavor and none of the fat-related guilt of the non-vegan version.

To help vegan newcomers put together a breakfast, lunch, brunch or dinner, the cookbook includes four pages of suggested menus.

"These themed menus teach people how to balance carbohydrates, proteins and vegetables, because if you don't, you won't be satiated," Heather said. "We teach that in our live classes."

There also is a list of pantry items to keep on hand, like Earth Balance, a non-dairy butter, or Follow Your



Pear, Fig and Sage Tarts with a Roasted Garlic Aioli, above, can be made small to be served as an appetizer or hors d'oeuvre or made larger and served as an entree. The Baked Macaroni and Cheese with a Spelt Bread Crumb Topping, at right, is a vegan version, which means no animal products, like cheese. The flavor comes from nutritional yeast, which also packs a healthy dose of vitamin B-12. The Crunchy Peanut Butter Bonbons, top photo, are a one-bite dessert that delivers a candy bar experience.

Photos courtesy of 'Spork-Fed'



Heart vegan mayonnaise and cheeses.

When people embark on a vegan diet, she noted, "They just try to substitute things, like soy steaks and potatoes for meat and potatoes."

Adopting — and adapting to — a vegan diet is "a mind-set change," she added, but one rewarded with a whole new variety of textures, colors and flavors.

The women said their mind set changed during their college years, although Jenny was vegetarian in high school. Heather was the first vegan, after working for a decade in a non-profit environmental organization. Jenny went on to train at the Natural Gourmet Institute in New York City.

They suggest trying to eat vegan one day a week "and see how it feels."

"We never feel the need to go take a nap after eating," Heather noted in a reference to the infamous post-Thanksgiving dinner syndrome.

"Food is supposed to give you energy," and that's what she, Jenny and many of their students have experienced.

"It happens pretty fast," she added. "Give it a shot."

Here are the recipes with cookbook notes from the sisters.

"This little flavor threesome is really something to talk about," the Spork sisters write. "Take the tarts to a party as an appetizer or make them larger and figs in 3 separate bowls. Coat pear slices in lemon juice to

PEAR, FIG AND SAGE TARTS WITH A ROASTED GARLIC AIOLI

Yields 10 to 12 tarts

Roasted Garlic Aioli Ingredients:
6 cloves garlic
Dash neutral-tasting high-heat oil

1 cup vegan mayonnaise
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1 teaspoon agave nectar
¼ teaspoon sea salt, plus dash
¼ teaspoon finely ground black pepper, plus dash

Tart ingredients:
2 D'anjou pears, cut into ½-inch pieces
10 to 12 leaves fresh sage, finely chopped
5 to 6 dry Black Mission figs, sliced
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
1 to 2 sheets frozen puff pastry, thawed

For the roasted garlic: Preheat oven to 350°F. Slice off base of bulb with a large chef's knife. Place bulb, cut side down, in an oiled, heat-proof baking dish and sprinkle with sea salt and black pepper. Roast for about 25 to 30 minutes, or until cloves are soft. Set aside.

For the aioli: Remove roasted garlic cloves from pan. Place in cutting board and smooth with flat side of a chef's knife, creating a paste. Transfer to a large bowl and add mayonnaise, lemon juice, agave, sea salt and black pepper. Whisk until uniform. Set aside.

For the filling: place sliced pears, sage and figs in 3 separate bowls. Coat pear slices in lemon juice to

prevent browning. Set aside.

Cut thawed puff pastry into 2- or 3-inch squares.

On each square, place about 1 teaspoon garlic aioli, a pinch of sage and 1 piece each of fig and pear, reserving about 2 tablespoons aioli for serving. Bring up corners to center of square. Carefully squeeze to seal puff pastry. Repeat for all squares.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat, or coat with cooking spray.

Place each tart on the baking sheet, about ½ inch apart and bake for 18 to 20 minutes, or until tarts are lightly browned.

To serve, top each tart with about ½ teaspoon aioli. Garnish with fresh chopped sage for presentation.

"This mac 'n' cheese is one of our most popular dishes! It goes over well with everyone, not only vegans and has even converted a few non-vegans on the spot. For a really cute presentation, bake it in individual, brightly colored ramekins, and give each of your guests their own scoop of heaven."

CREAMY BAKED MACARONI AND CHEESE WITH A SPELT BREAD CRUMB TOPPING

Serves 4 to 6

6 to 8 cups water for boiling, salted
12 ounces quinoa or spelt elbow macaroni

Sauce ingredients:
1/3 cup non-dairy butter
1/3 cup unbleached all-purpose



flour
2½ cups unsweetened almond or soy milk
2/3 cup nutritional yeast flakes
½ teaspoon sea salt
½ teaspoon finely ground black pepper
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 tablespoon light miso paste
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons mustard, stone ground or German
½ cup homemade bread crumbs (Recipe follows.)

Preheat oven to 350°F. Bring salted water to a boil in a large (6-quart) pot. Add macaroni and cook as described on package, about 7 to 9 minutes.

For the sauce: Heat a medium (4-quart) pot over medium heat. Add butter and flour. Whisk together to form a paste, creating a roux. Add almond or soy milk, nutritional yeast, sea salt, black pepper, garlic, miso, lemon juice and mustard. Cook for about 7 minutes, stirring constantly, until sauce is thick and creamy.

Once macaroni is finished cooking, drain and add to pot with sauce. Mix thoroughly to coat. Place mixture in a greased 8x8-inch baking dish or 6 personal ramekins or cocottes and top with homemade bread crumbs.

Bake for about 30 to 35 minutes, or until bubbles appear in center of dish. Serve warm from the oven.

Bread crumb ingredients:

3 slices spelt bread, roughly chopped
1 tablespoon neutral-tasting high-heat oil
¼ teaspoon sea salt
¼ teaspoon finely ground black pepper
¼ teaspoon garlic powder
½ teaspoon dried oregano
½ teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon agave nectar

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place bread on a baking sheet. Drizzle with oil and sprinkle with sea salt, black pepper, garlic powder, oregano, paprika and agave. Toss to coat and bake for about 7 to 9 minutes or until crisp. Pulse bread mixture in a food processor until bread crumb consistency is reached.

CRUNCHY PEANUT BUTTER BONBONS

Yields 16 to 20 bonbons

¼ cup non-dairy butter
1 ½ cups powdered sugar
1 cup smooth peanut butter
1 cup organic, unseasoned bread crumbs
¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon sea salt
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 12-ounce package vegan dark chocolate chips
1 tablespoon neutral-tasting oil
¼ cup ground peanuts, combined with 1 teaspoon sugar and ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional topping)

In a large bowl or standing mixer, combine butter, powdered sugar, peanut butter, bread crumbs, cinnamon, sea salt and vanilla extract. Stir well, mixing until uniform.

Roll mixture into 1-inch balls and place on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat, or coat with cooking spray. Freeze until hard, about 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, create a double boiler by placing 1 to 2 inches of water in a small (2 quart) pot; bring water to a boil. Cover with a metal or heat-proof glass bowl. Add chocolate chips and warm over medium heat until melted. Stir in oil and whisk until smooth.

Remove frozen peanut butter balls from freezer and dip each bonbon into melted chocolate, using a skewer or small fork.

Place dipped bonbons back on cookie sheet to firm up. If desired, top with additional dollop of chocolate or ground peanuts with sugar and cinnamon.

Freeze until ready to serve. Let bonbons sit at room temp for 5 minutes before serving.

Found: The missing line from last week's recipe

Due to a printing error, a line was cut off the bottom of last week's food page, eliminating the oven temperature and baking time for the Hamantaschen. Here is the recipe.

HAMANTASCHEN
Cook time: 20 minutes

Makes 60
Dough: 5 cups flour
1 cup sugar

2 teaspoons baking powder
1 pinch salt
1 pound butter
5 tablespoons sour cream
2 teaspoons lemon juice
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
4 egg yolks

Filling:
1 jar apricot filling
1 jar prune filling
1 jar mohn (poppy seed) filling

Sift dry ingredients (flour, sugar, baking powder and salt) together. In mixer bowl, mix butter, sour cream, lemon juice, vanilla extract and well-beaten egg yolks. Add dry ingredients and blend to create dough. Divide dough into balls. Wrap in waxed paper and refrigerate for several hours or overnight.

Roll out dough to ¼-inch thickness. Using a round cutter, a glass or

scalloped cutter, cut circles in dough. Place ½ to 1 teaspoonful of any of the fillings in the center of each circle. Fold up sides to make a three-sided cookie and pinch corners together tightly.

Place unbaked cookies in the freezer for half an hour. Remove chilled cookies and bake in oven at 375°F for 20 minutes or until golden brown.



Hamantaschen from Atria Senior Living's 'A Dash & a Dollop' cookbook.