

How to Put Together a Vegan Food Bag: A Guide for Food Pantries

by Anja Grommons, MA, RDN

agrommons@gmail.com

updated December 18, 2017

Contents

- Sample Vegan Food Bag
- Notes / FAQ
- Food Groups with Examples of Vegan Foods Commonly Donated to Pantries
- Other Resources
- About the Author

Sample Vegan Food Bag to Last 3-4 days (1 person):

Protein – aim for 1-2 serving(s) at each meal (9-24 servings total)

- 1 jar (16 ounces) nut-butter
- 1 container (8 ounces) nuts or seeds
- 3-4 15 oz. cans or 1 16 oz. bag dry legumes like beans, peas, or lentils
- Several servings of soyfoods (soy milk, aseptically-packaged tofu, or TVP)

Fruits & Vegetables – aim for at least 5 servings per day (total of 15-20 servings)

- 3 15 oz. cans fruit/veg
- 1-2 10 oz. bags frozen fruit/veg
- 3+ potatoes if available
- 1 12 oz. package dried fruit or 1 24 oz. package apple sauce or 6-pack of 4 oz. containers
- 1 64 oz. container 100% fruit or vegetable juice
- Fresh – as available. When abundant, can be used to substitute items above.

Grains – aim for 6-10 servings per day (total 18-40 servings total)

- 1 18 oz. canister oatmeal or 15 oz. box of 10 packs
- 1 16 oz. (or 1 lb.) box pasta or 1 14 oz. box rice/ 1 16. oz. bag rice
- 1 loaf of bread (at least 10 slices) or 1 pack of tortillas (10 ct.)

Extras – there is always room for snacks, condiments, and additional foods within a balanced diet. (More info on how to check if a packaged food is vegan below.)

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License. Feel free to copy and distribute it noncommercially, but please include my authorship information and link when you do. Also if you change the work at all, please state that you have done so. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.

Notes / FAQ

What is a vegan? A vegan is someone who abstains from the use and consumption of animal products, including meat, poultry, fish, eggs, honey, and dairy (i.e. milk, cheese, butter, ice cream, yogurt), and additives (e.g., coloring) derived from animals.

Who might want a vegan food bag? Lots of people! Including:

- “ethical vegans” concerned about animal cruelty or the environment
- “dietary vegans” concerned with health (they may be trying to lose weight, or trying to manage hypertension, diabetes, or another condition)
- those with dairy or egg allergies, and
- those keeping kosher or halal.

A 2016 Harris poll found that 3.3% of U.S. adults are vegetarian, and around half of those (1.6%) are vegan. However, in the 18-34-year-old group, the numbers rise to 5.3% vegetarian of whom 2.6% are vegan. (*Vegetarian Journal*, 35:4, pp. 8-9.)

Are vegan diets healthy? Yes, and for all life stages, including pregnancy, lactation, childhood, adulthood, and old age, according to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. (*J. Acad. Nutr. Diet.*, 2016, 116:12, pp. 1970-1980).

What about protein? Greens, beans, nuts, grains, veggies, and tofu supply plenty. The RDA for protein is specific to the individual, but generally about 0.8 - 1 gram per kilogram of body weight. (So, around 55-68 grams of protein per day for a 150-pound person.) Good overviews on vegan protein can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

Should vegans supplement? Vegans must take vitamin **B12** either by eating fortified foods (i.e. plant-based milks or tofu), or taking a supplement, or both. For more on B12 needs, click [here](#).

Vegans also need to pay special attention to their **Omega 3** fatty acid intake. A small daily serving of walnuts, flaxseeds, or chia seeds meets the RDA for essential omega-3 fats. In addition, some vegans choose to take an Omega 3 supplement.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License. Feel free to copy and distribute it noncommercially, but please include my authorship information and link when you do. Also if you change the work at all, please state that you have done so. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.

Food Groups with Examples of Vegan Foods Commonly Donated to Pantries

Note: *never* assume a packaged food is vegan even if it “looks” vegan. Always check the label and ingredients list. Also, check out:

- PETA’s comprehensive list of animal-derived ingredients (including food colorings and other “miscellaneous” ingredients): <http://www.peta.org/living/other/animal-ingredients-list/>
- PETA’s list of “accidentally vegan” foods, meaning those not created specifically to be vegan, but that contain no animal products and are therefore vegan: <http://www.peta.org/living/food/accidentally-vegan/>

Protein – note: *all* the food groups provide protein, but these are the most concentrated sources of the highest quality proteins. Eating a variety of plant-based foods throughout the day can provide all necessary amino acids when calorie needs are met, meaning complementary proteins are a thing of the past (*J. Acad. Nutr. Diet.*, 2016, 116:12, pp. 1970-1980).

- Legumes: beans, peas, lentils, hummus, etc.
 - Note: traditional refried beans contain lard (look for vegetarian refried beans), baked beans may contain pork – always check labels
- Nuts, nut-butters, seeds (also a good source of healthy fat)
- Tofu, tempeh, other vegan proteins if available
- Nondairy milks (soymilk generally has the highest protein content – also available: almond milk, cashew milk, hemp milk, oat milk, coconut milk, pea milk, macadamia milk, hazelnut milk.) Nondairy milks are commonly available in shelf-stable packages.

Grains/ Starch

- Pasta – many varieties contain egg, but many do not – always check label
- Rice – check labels of boxed, flavored rice
- Potatoes – check labels if boxed, flavored potatoes
- Corn (canned, fresh, frozen) – check label
- Tortillas – generally vegan, check label to be safe
- Bread – check label
- Oats – check labels if flavored
- Cereal – check label
- Cornmeal, polenta
- Other less common grains: faro, quinoa, couscous, etc.
- Mixes for cakes, cookies, pancakes – may or may not contain animal ingredients
- Chips/ crackers/ salty snacks – check label

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License. Feel free to copy and distribute it noncommercially, but please include my authorship information and link when you do. Also if you change the work at all, please state that you have done so. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.

- Granola bars – always check labels, many contain milk products

Vegetables

- Canned & frozen – check label for butter, dairy, or other non-vegan ingredients
- Canned vegetable juices (may also contain fruit)
- Fresh

Fruit

- Canned – often vegan however some may have dairy in the form of whipped topping or other ingredients – check label
- Apple sauce (packs, squeeze pouches) – check for honey
- Frozen – check labels if ready-to-prepare smoothie as it may contain yogurt
- Juice
- Dried, fresh

Popular Brands with Vegan Options (still check labels to be safe)

- Cereal: Barbara's, Cascadian Farm, Kashi, Life
- Snacks: Cliff bars, Doritos Spicy Sweet Chili (purple bag), Fritos, various Lays, Nabisco crackers and cookies (some), Nature Valley, Wheat Thins, Zesta
- Baked Goods: Arnold Bread Products, Thomas Bagels, Mission Tortillas
- Soups: Amy's Brand (some), Thai Kitchen Noodle Bowls (some)
- For more brands/ food options, see above for accidentally vegan foods.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License. Feel free to copy and distribute it noncommercially, but please include my authorship information and link when you do. Also if you change the work at all, please state that you have done so. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.

Other Resources

Books:

- How Not to Die, Michael Greger, MD
- Vegan for Life, Jack Norris, RD and Virginia Messina, MPH, RD

Cookbooks

- Oh She Glows, Angela Liddon
- AfroVegan, Bryant Terry
- There is plentiful information on cooking vegan on the Web. Please search on, “vegan _____” and insert your favorite food and you’ll get recipes and cooking tips.

Documentaries (available on Netflix):

- Forks Over Knives
- Vegucated

Websites:

- <https://vegan.com>
- <https://www.theveganrd.com>
- <https://vegetariannutrition.net/>
- <http://www.vrg.org/>
- <http://www.pcrm.org/>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans:

<https://health.gov/dietaryguidelines/2015/guidelines/>

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License. Feel free to copy and distribute it noncommercially, but please include my authorship information and link when you do. Also if you change the work at all, please state that you have done so. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.

About the Author

Anja Grommons is a registered dietitian nutritionist living in Western Michigan. With a strong upbringing centered around food and cooking, Anja has turned her passion for nutrition into a career. Vegan herself, Anja is specifically interested in the use of plant-based, vegan diets in the prevention and reversal of chronic disease. Anja has studied plant-based nutrition through the T. Colin Campbell Center for Nutrition Studies. Anja hopes to own her own nutrition practice one day. In the meantime, Anja keeps a nutrition blog: vegcentricdietitian.com and writes for [VegOut Media](#), a vegan city guide with sites in Los Angeles, Indianapolis, and Kalamazoo, MI. For more information, contact Anja at agrommons@gmail.com

In Acknowledgment

Heather Mauney: Director of Agency Relations at Food Bank of South Central Michigan

Hillary Rettig: Author, Activist, and Cofounder of Vegan Kalamazoo

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 United States License. Feel free to copy and distribute it noncommercially, but please include my authorship information and link when you do. Also if you change the work at all, please state that you have done so. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/us/>.