

Veganistan: A Vegan Tour of the Middle East & Beyond

Sally Butcher

Yuki Sugiura, Photographer

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In *Veganistan*, Sally Butcher spotlights Middle Eastern and Mediterranean flavors through spice-rich, plant-based meals.

Butcher and her Persian husband run Persepolis in London, a restaurant where “the Middle East is Allah’s gift to the non-meat eater.” Although veganism is not a mainstream concept in that region, she believes the cuisine lends itself to such a diet because much of it is “naturally vegetable-based” and “a lot of the flavor ... comes from the herbs, the spices, the cooking methods.”

Like a feast, the cookbook proceeds from mezze (appetizers) through main dishes to desserts and cocktails. Tips for uncommon preparation methods offer a chance to experience familiar vegetables anew: raw eggplant carpaccio with pomegranate molasses, hasselback zucchinis with dukkah, pumpkin stuffed with bread cubes and vegan cheese, and a sweet potato cake with dates and tahini.

The dishes span the Middle East and Mediterranean and also extend to North Africa (tagines) and Central Asia (Uzbek dumplings). Unexpected additions make the mouth water—sour cherry juice and juniper berries in a beet gazpacho; ginger and aniseed ice cream served alongside figs soaked in orange liqueur and raspberry vinegar.

The step-by-step instructions are straightforward and reassuring. For less run-of-the-mill ingredients, a footnote explains what it is, where to find it, and how to use it. An appendix gives general advice on how to substitute for meat, dairy, and eggs. For instance, a vegan frittata can be made with aquafaba (chickpea water).

Butcher’s enthusiasm comes through in the recipe introductions (“Well hot-diggity was I excited when I found out about corn couscous!”) and tongue-in-cheek references to her “hungry shopkeeper” spouse. Even the serving suggestions pick up on the whimsy, with popcorn “For 1 movie’s worth” and Turkish cabbage stew as “Dinner for 4 peasants.” Yuki Sugiura’s color photographs set the appealing food against patterned plates and textiles.

Veganistan’s globe-trotting, plant-based recipes zing.

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