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## Plant-powered in Lamorinda

By Jenn Freedman



Photos Jenn Freedman

Plant-based eating has become a global trend that is here to stay: from millennials to elite athletes to corporate workplaces to mainstream health organizations, veganism - a diet that excludes all animal products (meat, dairy, and eggs) - has emerged from the fringes and is verging on mainstream. In fact, according to a report by research firm Global Data, the U.S. has seen a 600 percent increase in people identifying as vegans in the last three years - or 6 percent of American consumers.

Using that statistic, Lamorinda could have upwards of 3,500 vegan residents, and while that may not be the case (yet), it's a safe bet that we have plenty of plant-hungry locals. But whether you follow a strict plant-based diet, want to decrease your meat/dairy intake, or are just a passionate and curious foodie, there is good news: Lamorinda has more options than ever before!

Sure, vegans can find something to eat at almost any restaurant by omitting a few ingredients of a menu item or just ordering side dishes ... though more and more, chefs are intentionally crafting delectable dishes using only plants, and this is something to celebrate. Here are a few of my favorite discoveries:

Baagan Plant Grill is a vegan Indian food truck that recently joined the Moraga farmers' market every Sunday, with a full-page menu that offers burgers, teas and more. The spicy mung burger is satisfying to the taste buds and the eyes ... piled high with a rainbow of veggies and an herbal cashew spread, easily washed down with a refreshing blackberry sage lemonade. And don't miss the vida potato cakes served on a chana salad with a cilantro-lime cashew dressing and one of the best tangy tamarind sauces I have ever tasted. Just the other day my omnivorous friend told me that she had just tried a burger and tea from Baagan ... and her verdict: "It was filling and delicious, without the same heavy feeling after from my typical choice."

Also in Moraga, Town Bakery & Cafe features an incredibly fresh organic faro bowl with assorted seasonal vegetables and mushrooms that taste like they were just picked from the garden ... and they were - the seasonal produce comes from Moraga Garden Farm just down the road. One of the new spots in town, Noodle Theory, has a spinach ramen miso bowl with roasted mixed mushrooms and truffle oil that is delicate yet decadent - sure to hit the spot on a cooler day. And do not miss the spicy dry sautéed green beans ... those gingery, slightly

sweet bites are additive.

Lafayette has some solid options as well. Roam Burger has been impressing me for years with their shockingly delicious homemade vegan burger made with beets, quinoa, black beans, dates and more, that even my omnivorous friends order regularly. For a hearty feast order on a bun with fries (russet, sweet, onion, and zucchini are all vegan), or for a lighter meal, order over the farmers market salad or next to the seasonal veggies. Kabab Burger offers an entirely plant-based sampler platter, which includes hummus, Turkish salad, baba ganoush, spicy eggplant, pickles, tahini, dolmas and my favorite, their falafel balls. Paxti's is the go-to pizza joint with their signature vegan deep dish pizza with spinach, garlic, red onion and Daiya cheese on a whole wheat crust. Kale salad lovers should check out Sideboard's fiesta bowl, which includes black and white beans, tomatoes, quinoa, and brown rice with a tangy jalapeno cilantro vinaigrette. For a healthy grab-and-go vegan meal or snack, Urban Remedy has dozens of options - salads, bowls, protein bars, juices, soups, and snacks. Try the Japanese inspired black rice umeboshi bowl, a satisfying balance of textures with the crunchy rice and seed blend next to the silky avocado and miso flavored dressing. For a unique flavor profile, check out the veggie chopped salad with sweet potato, smoked vegan cheese, and eggplant "bacon" bits with a tangy lemon dressing. And consider stocking up on my current snack addictions while you're there: the sour cream and chive kale chips and the carrot curry crackers.

Important to note, most Asian/Indian cuisines naturally have vegan choices, and Lamorinda has over a dozen such eateries. I am still working through these tasty options and look forward sharing more plant-

based highlights soon. Bon appetit!



Town's veggie and farro bowl



Roam Burger's veggie burger



Sideboard's fiesta bowl

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