Vegan desserts, like baked goods and frozen delights, are becoming less of an afterthought and more of a grand finale.

**NO BUTTER, NO PROBLEM.** Vegan desserts are satisfying the dessert cravings of die-hard vegans, carnivores and everyone in between. By either seeking out recipes that are naturally vegan or branching out into finding the right substitutes for dairy products, there are more ideas out there than may meet the eye.

“There are many excellent vegan desserts in the world that can go head-to-head with any non-vegan dessert,” says Elliott Prag, instructor/curriculum development manager at the Natural Gourmet Institute in New York City. “To me, a great vegan dessert has all the attributes of a great non-vegan dessert: richness, delicate texture, good mouth feel, vibrant flavor...all of these things are achievable when you understand the science and technique of vegan baking.”

While working with desserts that traditionally feature eggs, cream and butter can be a challenge, with the use of the right substitutes, such desserts can earn a place on the menu as a great dessert, period.

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**ICE COLD:**
This Chocolate Walnut Gelato is super cool, with no dairy in sight.

**BY TARA FITZPATRICK**
A SWEET TIME TO BE VEGAN: Desserts that contain no dairy or eggs are not just possible—they're dynamite. Sunrise Caribbean Pineapple Crisp (left) and Candied Pumpkin (right) are two examples of vegan desserts that exceed expectations of what's possible for sweet vegan eats.

"While eggs and butter can do some amazing things, there are a lot of great things you can do without them," Prag says. "I definitely have vegan recipes that I don't feel the need to add the qualifier, 'Oh, this is vegan.' People say to me, 'Really? This is vegan?'"

Not a Half-baked Idea
At Oberlin College in Ohio, vegan eating is taken very seriously. This year, the Bon Appétit-run dining operation was recognized by peta2 as the Favorite Vegan-friendly College in the nation, tied with Stanford University. Plenty of vegan options—main dishes, sides and sweets—can be found every day at the two main dining locations and other grab-and-go spots around campus.

The on-campus bake shop is the backbone of vegan dessert offerings at the two main dining halls at Oberlin, according to John Klancar, director of operations. He's especially proud of the recently added vegan pumpkin bars (pictured, lower left) and also the big selection of vegan cookies.

To keep things interesting, the bake shop regularly develops new cookies, and each has an ingredient list for the vegan lunch crowd to refer to. Here's a sampling of what's available:

- **Vegan Sugar Cookie:** Vegan margarine, beet sugar, vegan egg substitute, vanilla, flour, baking powder and salt
- **Vegan Sesame Cookie:** Sesame seeds, vegan margarine, shortening substitute, vanilla, vegan egg substitute, lemon extract, flour, baking powder, salt
- **Vegan Pumpkin Cookie:** Vegan margarine, beet sugar, pumpkin, vanilla, flour, baking powder, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt
- **Vegan Carob Chip Cookie:** Flour, beet sugar, vegan carob chips, vegan margarine, shortening substitute, vanilla, baking soda, salt, vegan egg substitute, brown sugar

VEGAN-FRIENDLY OBERLIN: Plates upon plates of vegan baked goods make the scene at Oberlin College's dining locations.

### 5 Smart Substitutions for Vegan Baking

1. **TO REPLACE EGGS:** Use fruit or vegetable purées, flax seeds, chia seeds or root thickeners like cornstarch, tapioca, arrowroot or kuzu (a root starch).

2. **TO REPLACE BUTTER:** Substitute a no-taste oil (such as coconut or canola), coconut cream or nut butters. Also available are multipurpose vegan shortenings.

3. **TO REPLACE MILK:** There are many vegan milks that approximate the thickness and fat content of cow's milk, such as almond milk, cashew milk, oat milk or coconut milk. Keep in mind that coconut milk will have a strong coconut flavor (not necessarily a bad thing, depending on the dessert).

4. **TO REPLACE YOGURT OR SOUR CREAM:** Puree soaked raw nuts like cashews or almonds and then add an acid (lemon juice or vinegar). Adding an acid to pureed silken tofu also works here.

5. **TO REPLACE WHIPPED CREAM:** Chilled coconut cream can be whipped, but will be heavier. Adding a strong extract to the coconut cream can counteract the strong coconut flavor, if that's not desired for the recipe. Vegan milks can be thickened with agar, a flavorless seaweed that works like gelatin. Set agar and vegan milk as you would with gelatin, then whip it in a food processor.

Source: Elliott Prag
Vegan Desserts Take the Cake

- **Vegan Oatmeal Raisin Cookie:** Brown sugar, beet sugar, baking soda, flour, oatmeal, cinnamon, raisins, vegan egg substitute, vanilla.

**The Butter Challenge**
A tricky part of vegan baking stems from the things that butter can do from a scientific standpoint. Butter produces a lighter product than vegan fats because it contains water. When butter melts during baking, that water turns into steam and lightens the product's texture, Prag explains.

"Butter's flavor is also difficult to replace," he adds. "Often the removal of butter in a vegan recipe takes a lot of the dessert's character with it."

There are vegan margarine products on the market, which often work well, and vegetable oil, flax oil, coconut oil, avocado, applesauce and even prune püree can work as substitutes. See more of Prag's substitution suggestions in the sidebar on p. 33.

**Is Honey Vegan?**

This is a debate that has been raging for decades among vegans. "You'll never find a self-respecting vegan downing a glass of milk or munching on a slice of buttered toast," writes Slate columnist Daniel Engber. "But the modern adherent may be a little more accommodating when it comes to the dairy of the insect world: he may have relaxed his principles enough to enjoy a spoonful of honey."

Old-school, hard-line vegans argue that bees are animals, and therefore honey off limits. But some vegans make the exception. Perhaps one vegan wouldn't buy a bottle of honey at the store, but need to decide on a personal level what dietary rules work for them.

I have personally opened a local hive and have seen that the bees are stems from the things that I consume. I am comfortable with my decision, especially after I have relaxed his principles enough to enjoy a spoonful of honey.

**The Mean, Green, Vegan Brownie**
At the University of North Texas in Denton, the all-vegan dining hall, Mean Greens, features a good variety of vegan desserts. For the most part, these desserts "are already vegan to begin with," says Bill Hunter, CMB, executive pastry chef.

In pursuit of the ultimate vegan brownie recipe, the bake shop has been fine-tuning many different combinations of substitutes in a trial-and-error process. Hunter is using a recipe he developed when he worked at a five-star hotel as a jumping-off point.

"We replaced the eggs with part flax meal, part soy flour, part coconut oil and part water," Hunter says. "The taste is great, and we're fine-tuning the water level and bake time and temperature to get the desired texture."

The baking team also found that adding a small amount of baking powder helps replace the air that the eggs would have held.

Overall, Hunter's advice on finding the right substitutions in vegan baking is to "go slow," he says. "There is quite a learning curve."

**Keeping it Cool**
When Prag of the Natural Gourmet Institute first began tinkering with vegan desserts, he made a lot of simple items, like fruit crisps, puddings and cookies. Lately, he's been branching out into vegan versions of ice cream, especially with Asian flavor profiles. For example, the Black Sesame Ice Cream features coconut milk, maple syrup, rice syrup, sea salt and black sesame seeds.

Prag isn't the only one getting into vegan ice cream. At Oberlin, student demand led to the addition of Vegan Lemon Sorbet to the ice cream self-serve area, says Eric Pecherkiewicz, MS, RDN, LD, dietitian/marketing manager.
Vegan Desserts Take the Cake

Vegan—Naturally!
3 Super Simple Vegan Dessert Recipes

While substitutions for dairy will recreate the creamy texture and buttery element in some desserts, there are plenty of other desserts that are already vegan in their original form. These three ideas from Meatless Monday are also perfect for autumn.

CANDIED PUMPKIN
YIELD: 8 servings
4 cups pumpkin, peeled and cut into 1-in. cubes
2 cups water
1 cup dark brown sugar

1. Place pumpkin and water in small saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil and cook 15-20 minutes, or until pumpkin flesh becomes tender when pierced with fork. Drain, reserving 1 1/2 cups water and set pumpkin aside.
2. Pour reserved pumpkin cooking water back into saucepan. Add brown sugar and bring to a boil. Add pumpkin to saucepan, reduce heat to medium-low and simmer about 15 minutes. Remove from heat and let stand/dry 8-10 hours, then divide into candylike pieces.

AGAVE VANILLA POACHED PEARS
YIELD: 4 servings
1/2 cup agave syrup
1 vanilla bean
4 ripe pears

1. Bring 4 cups of water and syrup to a boil in small, deep saucepan over medium-high heat. Turn heat down to medium-low and simmer.
2. Split vanilla bean down the center lengthwise using paring knife or spoon. Scrape out vanilla bean seeds and stir into honey-water mixture along with scraped pod.
3. Add pears to pot. Simmer pears about 10 minutes, until soft, but not mushy. Transfer pears to four bowls.
4. Increase heat under syrup to medium-high and cook 10-15 minutes, or until syrup has reduced and thickened. Pour syrup over each pear.

GRILLED FIGS WITH THYME & AGAVE SYRUP
YIELD: 2 servings
2 cups figs, stems removed and halved
1 Tbsp. agave syrup
1 tsp. fresh thyme leaves

1. Preheat grill to medium-low heat.
2. When grill is heated, place figs on grill pan in single layer. Grill for 1-2 minutes, or until slightly soft. Flip and grill another 1-2 minutes.
3. Transfer figs to serving platter. Carefully place a few leaves of thyme on each fig, drizzle with syrup and serve.

Photo and recipe: Meatless Monday