Born and raised in New Orleans, I began learning Creole-cooking techniques as soon as I could reach the stove-top. My grandfather, Gilbert Austin, had a farm in Opelousas, Louisiana, and maintained a herd of roughly 100 head of cattle. When calves were born, it was typical for our freezer to get filled with veal! I learned quickly how to smother steaks in a gravy with peppers and onions and how to best use beef and pork products. In addition, we took advantage of the abundance of fresh, local seafood from Lake Pontchartrain and the Gulf of Mexico.

Once my daughter, Keryl, embraced a vegetarian diet and later became the Senior Editor of Vegetarian Journal, the challenge was to transition recipes to vegan fare with a Creole flare. Even though dishes like smothered okra and red beans with rice are vegetable-rich, they are traditionally cooked with generous amounts of seafood, beef, and pork. Vegan cookbook recipes never quite satisfied our southern Louisiana taste buds, so we modified our family recipes to make them even more appetizing. Readers may choose to modify recipes as needed (by reducing margarine and oil) to suit their dietary preferences.

**PAW-PAW’S SMOTHERED TURNIP ROOTS (OR HASH BROWNS)**
*(Serves 8)*

'Smothered potatoes' (known more commonly as 'hash browns') are used as a breakfast item or as a side dish for dinner in Creole households.

To make the smothered potatoes, use Irish potatoes or Yukon Golds. Follow the directions for the turnip roots but also add a teaspoon of crushed rosemary, if desired. Cook the potatoes a little longer because you want these to brown. Stir often to prevent burning because the mixture will begin to stick. (You want this to happen so the hash browns have a crustiness.)

6 cups turnip roots, peeled and diced
3 cups water, enough to cover the tops of the diced turnip roots
6 ounces nonhydrogenated vegan margarine
3 cups peeled and chopped sweet Vidalia onions (Start with 3 medium-sized onions.)
1 cup chopped green or orange bell peppers
4 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
1 teaspoon (approximately 4 dashes) cayenne pepper, or to taste
1/2 cup chopped scallions
1/4 cup parsley flakes

Place the turnip roots and water in a 3-quart pot, cover, and bring to a boil. Then, uncover and continue boiling until tender, approximately 10 minutes.

In a saucepan, melt the margarine. Add the sweet onions, bell peppers, and garlic, and sauté over medium-low heat until the onions are soft and translucent, approximately 30-45 minutes. If water is left in the pot, drain off. Add the pan of cooked vegetables and margarine to the roots. Add the cayenne, scallions, parsley, and (for potatoes) rosemary. Stir well and continue cooking over medium-low heat until the edges of the onions begin to brown. Serve hot.

**GRANNY THÉRÈSE’S ‘BUTTER BEANS’**
*(Serves 8)*

Though red beans are the most famous New Orleans bean dish, tourists aren’t aware that many locals turn to ‘butter beans’ (more commonly known as ‘lima beans’) during Lent, when Catholics are forbidden to eat meat on Fridays. During Lent, my grandmother would prepare this recipe by just...
Adding butter, which makes it easy to transition this dish from Creole to vegan.

Olive or corn oil spray
1 pound large dried lima beans (known as ‘butter beans’ in New Orleans)
4 large bay leaves
8 cups water
8 ounces nonhydrogenated vegan margarine
1 large yellow or sweet Vidalia onion, peeled and chopped
1 large green or orange bell pepper, chopped
4 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
1/4 cup parsley flakes

Spray the bottom of a soup pot or stockpot with an olive oil or corn oil spray. Rinse and sort the beans to remove any foreign material. Place the beans, bay leaves, and water in the pot. Cover and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Then, lower the heat to medium-low so they simmer slowly.

In a large pan, melt the margarine, and then add the onions, bell peppers, and garlic. Sauté together until the onions are soft and translucent, approximately 30-45 minutes. Add these to the butter beans and let the mixture continue to simmer until the beans are tender and creamy. Stir often to keep the beans from sticking to the bottom of the pot. For a thicker mixture, once the beans are tender and have begun creaming, leave the pot uncovered so the mixture reduces faster. If the mixture gets too thick, add a little hot water while simmering to thin. Remove bay leaves and stir in the parsley 5 minutes before serving over rice.

**CHUCK AND JOS’ GUMBO**
(Serves 12)

Some people make gumbo with just a blend of meats; others add seafood. Our family recipe was made with country sausage, hot sausage, crabs, shrimp, oysters, chicken, ham, duck, and beef. Uncle Chuck and Aunt Jos each have versions the family loves, but each is also unique.

The key to great gumbo is to add ingredients that you love. This recipe serves only as a guide to creating a vegan version. Use 21/2-3 pounds of your favorite vegan ‘meats’ selected to create a blend of flavors, and instead of water, you can substitute vegan chicken or vegetable stock.

If an instant roux (a mixture of flour and fat used to thicken soups, sauces, and gravies) is not available, you can make your own by blending 1/2 cup flour with 1/2 cup vegetable oil. Stir constantly over a medium-low heat until the mixture is a medium brown color.

1 pound 2 ounces WestSoy Chicken-Style Seitan
8 cups water, divided
1/2 cup instant roux or homemade roux using recipe above
2 Tablespoons kelp granules
1 teaspoon gumbo file (ground sassafras leaves, available in the spice aisle in some large grocery stores and online)
1/2 teaspoon powdered thyme
1/4 cup parsley flakes
1/2 teaspoons cayenne pepper

Using medium-low heat, melt the margarine in a stockpot. Add the onions, bell peppers, and garlic and sauté together until the onions are soft and translucent, approximately 20-35 minutes. Add the bay leaves and sauté for another 10 minutes. Raise the heat to a medium setting, add the vegan meats, and stir-fry for approximately 5 minutes.

Use 2 cups of the water to dissolve the instant roux. Add the roux, the 6 cups water, and the remaining ingredients. Stir well. Cover the pot and bring to a boil. Stir well. Lower the heat to medium-low and simmer for 15 minutes.

Make this gumbo a day ahead and to refrigerate it overnight so the flavors can ‘marry.’ When ready to eat, warm, remove bay leaves, and serve over cooked rice.

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| Total calories per serving: 414 | Fat: 23 grams |
| Carbohydrates: 41 grams | Protein: 13 grams |
| Sodium: 258 milligrams | Fiber: 12 grams |
JEFF AND LYDIA’S
GAZPACHO
(Serves 8)

Tomatoes are a fundamental ingredient for Creole cuisine, and this soup makes good use of them.

New Orleans is a wet city, and it’s been said, “It’s a good wet!” Using wine or liquors as a flavor enhancer for food is common, but you don’t have to use alcohol in this dish.

4 large tomatoes, peeled, cored, seeded, and chopped
1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded, and diced
1 large red onion, finely diced
4 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
2 Tablespoons red wine vinegar or plain vinegar
Juice of 2 limes
1 bunch cilantro, chopped, reserving some for the garnish
2 cups no-salt-added tomato juice
3 canned chipotle peppers
1 Tablespoon cumin
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
2 shots tequila (optional)
1 ear corn, roasted and kernels removed from the cob, or one 11-ounce can kernel corn, diced
Salt to taste
5 ounces jicama, peeled and grated (for garnish)

In a large bowl, combine the tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, bell peppers, garlic, vinegar, lime juice, and most of the cilantro.

In a blender, combine the tomato juice, chipotles, cumin, cinnamon, and tequila. Add half of the vegetable mixture to the blender and blend until only slightly chunky. Remove from the blender and add the corn, salt, and remaining vegetables. Garnish with the reserved cilantro and jicama and serve.

MAW-MAW’S TROPICAL CARROT SALAD
(Serves 8)

Pecans are plentiful in southern Louisiana, and many families have their own trees. Adding nuts and crushed pineapple to a traditional carrot salad makes it appealing, even to non-vegetable lovers.

1/3 cup raisins
1 pound carrots, peeled and finely grated
1 cup chopped celery, including tender leaves
1 cup chopped pecans
One 20-ounce can crushed pineapple (in its own juice), well-drained
1 cup vegan mayonnaise, or to taste

Let the raisins soak in hot faucet (tap) water until they plump. Drain well.

In a bowl, combine all ingredients and refrigerate until cold.

MEL’S FRUIT AND NUT RICE
(Serves 18)

Our family’s traditional ‘dirty rice’ recipe uses chicken gizzards and livers. Substituting dried fruit and nuts makes a colorful, delicious alternative, especially for the holidays.

8 ounces dried cranberries
1/2 cup raisins
1/2 cup golden raisins
8 ounces nonhydrogenated vegan margarine

AUNT CARM’S GREENS IN PEANUT SAUCE
(Serves 8)

If you love African cuisine, this is an easy way to create a nutritious side dish. I usually use the Glory Foods Sensibly Seasoned Mixed Greens (a low-sodium vegan blend of turnip, mustard, and kale greens available in many large grocery stores). I have tried using crunchy peanut butter for this recipe, but I prefer the creamy variety.

1/4 cup olive oil
One 26- to 28-ounce can of your favorite chopped greens, such as collards or kale, drained well
1 Tablespoon granulated onion powder
1 Tablespoon granulated garlic powder
1 Tablespoon parsley flakes
1 teaspoon cayenne pepper, or to taste
4 heaping Tablespoons creamy peanut butter
Heat the oil in a pan over medium-low heat. Add all of the other ingredients, except for the peanut butter. Stir until heated through and no liquid from draining the greens remains. (The mixture will sound like it's starting to fry.) Stir in the peanut butter and continue stirring slowly until the peanut butter is melted and thoroughly incorporated into the mixture. Serve hot.

Total calories per serving: 130  Fat: 11 grams  Carbohydrates: 6 grams  Protein: 4 grams  Sodium: 227 milligrams  Fiber: 2 grams

**UNCLE CURT'S CREOLE POTATO SALAD**  
(Serves 8)

When money got tight, Creoles often made a homemade substitute for mayonnaise by mixing the yollows of hard-boiled eggs with yellow mustard and cooking oil. Including the mustard and vegetable oil remains a standard in our family recipe, but I have modified it so that tofu replaces the hard-boiled eggs. For Uncle Curt's unique spin on this old-time favorite, you can substitute yams (sweet potatoes) for the Irish or Yukon Gold potatoes.

2 large Irish or Yukon Gold potatoes  
1 pound firm tofu, drained and chopped  
1 cup finely chopped celery  
¼ cup chopped scallions  
¼ cup parsley flakes  
4 Tablespoons vegetable (soybean) oil  
1 Tablespoon yellow mustard  
1 Tablespoon black pepper  
½ teaspoon granulated garlic powder  
3/4 cup vegan mayonnaise

Boil the potatoes in their skins until fork tender. Peel and dice. While the potatoes are still warm, mix in all of the ingredients in a large bowl. Serve warm, or refrigerate and then serve cold.

Total calories per serving: 236  Fat: 14 grams  Carbohydrates: 19 grams  Protein: 7 grams  Sodium: 211 milligrams  Fiber: 3 grams

**KERYL'S PRALINES**  
(Makes approximately 40 pralines)

*These have become a favorite at The VRG's Annual Pre-Thanksgiving Potluck!* This recipe replaces evaporated milk (or cream) with almond milk, which makes it vegan and adds an even nuttier flavor to the pralines.

3 cups organic white sugar  
1 cup vanilla almond milk (at room temperature)  
2 Tablespoons nonhydrogenated vegan margarine  
2 dashes ground cinnamon  
1-2 cups pecan halves (at room temperature)

In a medium-sized pot, combine the sugar, almond milk, margarine, and cinnamon. Cook, stirring, over medium heat until sugar is dissolved. Reduce heat to low and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, for approximately 20 minutes until bubbly and foamy. While the mixture cooks, lay out sheets of aluminum foil, shiny side up, on a flat surface, such as a counter or table. When the mixture is bubbly, remove from heat. Stir in pecans until evenly coated. Use a large serving spoon to spoon mounds of coated pecans onto the foil. Work quickly but carefully. If the mixture starts to harden in the pot or becomes sugary before you finish, add some more milk and mix until smooth.

Allow pralines to harden on the foil for approximately 10 minutes. As soon as the pralines are hard, move them to a serving platter or a storage container. Store at room temperature.

Total calories per praline: 82  Fat: 2 grams  Carbohydrates: 16 grams  Protein: <1 gram  Sodium: 10 milligrams  Fiber: <1 gram

**UNCLE ERROL'S LEMONADE PUNCH**  
(Serves 9)

Anyone who has visited New Orleans knows that the high humidity makes the heat unbearable. No recipe submission would be complete without sharing our family's favorite version of lemonade. You can substitute store-bought lemon juice in this recipe, but fresh-squeezed lemons will yield the best taste!

10 ounces (1 ¼ cups) fresh squeezed lemon juice (Start with 3 or 4 jumbo lemons.)  
10 ounces (1 ¼ cups) orange juice, preferably with extra pulp  
2 cups pineapple juice  
5 cups water  
2½ cups sugar (Use your favorite vegan variety.)

Sliced oranges and lemons (to garnish)

Mix all of the ingredients except for the sliced oranges and lemons. Refrigerate until cold. Serve over ice with half a slice each of orange and lemon to decorate.

*Variation:* Right before serving, fill each glass halfway with the lemonade base and then add cold citrus-based soda (such as 7 Up or Sprite) or ginger ale to fill.

Total calories per serving: 268  Fat: <1 gram  Carbohydrates: 69 grams  Protein: 1 gram  Sodium: 5 milligrams  Fiber: <1 gram

Meryl Austin Cryer is a lifelong resident of New Orleans, Louisiana.