

## FOOD

# Move Over Meat - Vegetables are taking center stage on your plate

NewsUSA

(NU) - Historically, American dinner plates have featured meat as its mainstay/star, with vegetables as tepid, secondary supporting players. Now, the balance of power on the plate is shifting as fresh, homegrown vegetables take center stage.

Recent “food trend” studies show that more people are making vegetables the main course of their meals. Although the interest in healthy eating extends to all age groups, millennials seem to be driving this healthful food trend. Data from the NPD Group suggests that people younger than 40 are eating 52 percent more fresh vegetables compared with young adults 10 years ago, and that preference is likely to continue as they age.

In support of this trend, professional chefs, bloggers, restaurants and home cooks are embracing the flavors of a vast variety of vegetables, from common to exotic. Episodes of the popular “Iron Chef” television show feature vegetable-centric meals and a recent article in *New York* magazine noted, “Simply put, the once-meat-obsessed populace is realizing that vegetables actually taste good. Especially when fresh, in season, and carefully prepared.”

You’ll see that many restaurants now offer vegetable-based entrees that have inspired home cooks to explore the healthy and delicious potential of making fresh vegetables a main course.

Some reasons driving the shift in popularity of vegetables over meat include:

**- Vine-Ripened, great taste.** Homegrown vegetables have a home field advantage when it comes to flavor because they stay on the vine to fully ripen and are harvested just before eating. Store bought veggies are often harvested before they’re fully ripe, so they don’t spoil on the journey to the store. Once picked from the vine, sugars begin to turn to starch-and that homegrown sweetness dissipates.

**- Good health.** Everyone knows that vegetables are good for you, but research backs it up. In a study of over 130,000, in the *Journal of American Medical Association Internal Medicine*, consumption of plant protein is associated with longer life compared with animal protein consumption.

**- Good stewardship.** Eating more vegetables and less meat can have a positive effect on the environment. Data from the University of Oxford, England, suggests that eating more vegetables could have a greater impact on reducing one’s carbon footprint than giving up a car!

As vegetables grow in popular-



**Confetti-Herbed Vegetables**  
Photo Credit: Courtesy of Bonnie Plants

ity and push meat from the center of the plate, more people are interested not only in eating more vegetables, but eating locally grown vegetables - hey, what’s more local than growing your own veggies at home? Growing vegetables at home is convenient, satisfying, a money-saver in the produce aisle, and they’ll taste better, too!

Fortunately for the home gardener, professional growers make it easy to grow nutritious and delicious vegetables at home. Bonnie Plants, for example, is a greenhouse grower offering more than 250 varieties of vegetable, herb, and fruit plants, ranging from traditional favorites to new and different choices. Some easy-to-grow options for your veggie main course include hearty tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, and zucchini.

Bonnie Plants operates more than 70 greenhouse facilities in 48 states and trucks fresh plants from greenhouses to retailers near you, so they’re ready for planting upon purchase, and you’ll harvest six weeks sooner than if you grow from seed. Plus, the plants are grown a truck-ride away from the retailers that sell them. Don’t worry if you have little outdoor space, patio-ready caged varieties and combo pots are available as great options for small spaces.

Curious home gardeners interested in healthy eating can enjoy experimenting with vegetables to replace meat. For a new take on burgers, try substituting squash. Veggie burgers, like their meat-based counterparts, can be made in advance, frozen in patties, and pulled out for easy reheating as a healthy burger choice on a busy night. Try putting a new spin on salad, substituting Swiss chard for a fresh, peppery taste in lieu of such standbys as lettuce, spinach, and arugula.

Time to season your home-grown veggies? Bonnie Plants also offers herb plants, so fresh seasoning is only a snip away with a quick trip to your garden plot or pot.

Visit [bonnieplants.com](http://bonnieplants.com) for more information on varieties along with planting tips, tending, troubleshooting, harvesting, and a plethora of delicious recipes to try!