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Meat in your beets

Is the vegetarian dish that you are ordering really free of animal products?

Article by Chef Adam Goldgell

Or your Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, broccoli, and 50 other places you may not expect animal product in your typical restaurant meal.

The main culprit is stocks. Stocks are used in dozens of capacities on restaurant lines. I use stock to reheat, rehydrate. Add to a sautéed dish as a glaze. Finish a sauce with a combination of stock butter and flour. Here's a typical example - You order a bowl of Mushroom and rice soup; first the stock for the soup is a light chicken stock, then the rice is cooked in a different chicken stock, then you order the soup and it's a little thick so I add more chicken stock. I want to give it a velvety texture so I mount the whole soup with a little pat of butter. Risotto - the butter and milk filled rice dish... When I put the rice in the pan initially I add A little stock to loosen up the rice before the dairy goes into it.

When I want to stew a vegetable [cook for a long time in a liquid] Many times it's a mix of chicken stock and water.

While the idea of chicken stock may gross you out there is one stock that has been used in Asian cooking before the Buddha had a belly. It's called Dashi. Some Dashi is made from Kelp [completely vegan] but another form of Dashi is made from the entrails and pinched heads of dried sardines.

Why is chicken stock used so freely in typical kitchens? Wouldn't it make more sense to use vegetable stock instead while cooking vegetables? If you go to a very good restaurant they may be cooking with vegetable stocks in some circumstances, but my guess is 90 percent don't because chicken stock is sold in large tubs, it's very inexpensive and readily available. Vegetable stocks need to be made, and if you ever made a good vegetable stock, you know it takes time. It takes up space on the stove and involves at least 4 ingredients. Powdered chicken stock is 1 tub just add water.

Dashi stock has recently been incorporated into American cuisine for two reasons: One, it adds Umami; (the unexplainable taste that adds dimension past flavor to what you're cooking). And two, It also comes in the same form as chicken stock, in an inexpensive powder.

So ask your waiter... they should know right? Wrong! Not only does your waiter not know what's going on, usually the kitchen staff themselves don't understand the questions. I am the only English speaking person in my Kitchen. I am also the only one with a culinary education in either the front or back of the house. So if you ask the line cook if there's any animal product in your vegetables the answer may be no. Learn how to ask the question. Is there any chicken stock, beef stock or veal stock in my food? They might understand that. Also don't tell your waiter you're a vegan either. Tell them specifically what you don't want to eat. Give them a list.

Print it out and give it to them on a little card. They might learn something and you might get what you want.

Fryer oil is another way your Vegan meal is tarnished. Your vegetable fritter is being fried in oil that just deep fried a chicken cutlet 30 seconds before. The knife the chef just used to slice the Prime Rib just cut your garden burger - don't worry it's not vegan anyway because the lentils used to bind the whole thing was just cooked in chicken stock. I had a fryer in one of my restaurants to just to cook french fries. The only problem - the fryer was filled with duck fat.

Okay, I got a simple one; spaghetti and marinara sauce. Spaghetti cooked in water right? Tomato, onion, garlic, maybe some oregano in your marinara... Put on the pickup, [right before the waiter gives it to you] I throw a little butter in for a nice rich mouth feel. There goes your simple vegan meal.

While you might think in this day and age people would understand the simple differences between vegan and vegetarian - **You would be very wrong!** Most restaurants really want to do the right thing by you. One little sneaky trick is don't tell your waiter you are vegan, tell them you are highly allergic. At this point a manager type may take the order to the kitchen themselves which just might assure you get what you want.