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## Earth Action: Make a Vegetarian Meal



By [Gemma Alexander](#)

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Earth911 is honoring the 52 years of Earth Day with 52 Actions for the Earth. Each week through Earth Day 2023, we will share an action you can take to [invest in the Earth](#) and make your own life more sustainable. Getting dinner on the table every day is hard enough without worrying about the state of the planet, but this week you can reduce your [foodprint](#) by making one vegetarian meal.

### Action: Make a Vegetarian Meal

#### The Matter With Meat

In 2018, the journal Science published a [comprehensive study](#) of agriculture's environmental impacts. They concluded that while meat and dairy provide one-fifth of the world's calories and about a third of its protein, they use 83% of farmland and produce 60% of agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions. By contrast, at least [one study](#) has found that a vegan diet can be healthier while generating only 20% of the greenhouse gases of a meat-heavy diet. Eliminating meat and dairy is the best way to [cut carbon from your diet](#).

#### The Matter With Meatless

#### What Do You Think?

Are you considering moving because of climate change?

Yes

No

I'm researching my options to decide

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As anyone who has tried to lose a few pounds can attest, any dietary change is hard. Many factors, such as access, affordability, health, and culture, influence our food choices. A major dietary shift like cutting out meat and dairy may simply not be possible. Even people who are determined to make the switch to vegan are advised to do so [slowly](#). There is a significant learning curve when figuring out how to replace meat's protein and amino acids with plant-based food sources. A healthy vegan or vegetarian diet often includes ingredients and requires cooking techniques that are not common in the standard American diet.

## Make a Vegetarian Meal

One vegetarian meal is not going to make a significant difference to your environmental impact. A family of four eats [one to two pounds](#) of meat in a single meal. But at [6.61 pounds](#) of [CO2-eq](#) per serving of beef, every pound of meat you don't eat trims a tiny bit off the climate impact of your overall diet. And if you add one new climate-friendly meal to your regular rotation, that reduction can add up over time.

So whether you are on a journey towards veganism, a [bad vegetarian](#), or just trying to cut down on red meat, there are a lot of [hacks](#) for eating more plants and [cutting meat consumption](#).

This week, start with a little research on [vegetarian protein](#) sources and then add one new vegetarian meal to your cooking repertoire. It doesn't have to be dinner – a meatless [breakfast or lunch](#) is just as helpful. A [vegan slow cooker](#) recipe has the added benefit of saving time. Learn how to make a meal based on [legumes](#) or a dish that uses a favorite vegan ingredient like [peanuts](#). Test out one of the [plant-based meat](#) options or try a vegan version of a favorite dish like [mac & cheese](#).

Whatever you make, you're helping the environment. And with any luck, you'll find a dish that your family will happily eat again. Then you'll be helping the environment a little bit more every time you make it.

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By [Gemma Alexander](#)

Gemma Alexander has an M.S. in urban horticulture and a backyard filled with native plants. After working in a genetics laboratory and at a landfill, she now writes about the environment, the arts and family. See more of her writing [here](#).

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