

# Even Chef Deborah Madison, Who's Known for Her Vegetarian Recipes, Likes to Have Meat on Her Dinner Table Sometimes

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The beloved chef, writer, and teacher shares tips for making weeknight dinners, her go-to dishes, and more.

what's —  
for dinner



By [Bridget Shirvell](#) Updated October 14, 2021



Credit: Courtesy of Deborah Madison

Deborah Madison, author of *An Onion in My Pocket* (\$13.99, [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)), will have you dreaming of simple, comfort foods like a BLT. The minimal ingredient sandwich is what you'll find on the chef, writer, and teacher's table Friday nights from August through the first freeze. She makes the sandwich using "wonderful tomatoes from the farmers' market," toasted sourdough bread she makes herself, and lettuce from her garden. If you're surprised that bacon is on Madison's menu, don't be. While best-known as for her vegetarian cooking, Madison herself is not a vegetarian. "I'll always be thought of as a vegetarian so I try to make the point that I do eat meat, while at the same time I do like vegetables and we eat a lots of vegetarian meals," she explains. In fact we could consider her one of the first advocates of a plant-based diet.

When winter comes around and the local tomatoes are no more, she'll swap that Friday night BLT for baked potatoes, sometimes with sausage, sometimes without but always with a big salad. "Everyone seems to love both meals and even though they are meant to be easy for me, we often have company and they are still easy," Madison says. Simple, easy dishes are one of the things she relies on. Here, she shares her tips for getting dinner on the table, her go-to meals, what she thinks of the new interest in plant-based foods, and more.

## Dinner Strategies

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Madison is a big advocate for leftovers. She says, "Plan on leftovers, whether you've frozen them or just have them in the fridge. We had friends for a Southwestern dinner the other night, and tonight we're having posole with red chile and garnishes. So good and so easy—and, of course, a vegetable." Another weeknight dinner strategy that saves the cook time and stress is to have "a menu that's always the same on one night of the week. I love Fridays because I wake up and know exactly what I'm going to make."

## Her Weeknight Go-Tos

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When the weather turns cooler, Madison relies on cauliflower, which she'll use to make a curry with tomatoes. "I love the curry, as does my husband. It's substantial but not heavy; it is good with rice which he loves." But it's not always the star player. "Sometimes, the cauliflower is a vegetable side dish with turmeric, cumin, tahini sauce, and plenty of cilantro."

Another back-pocket recipe is chicken thighs braised in vinegar and broth. "Again, my husband loves this dish with the vinegar sharpening the chicken, which he normally doesn't care for." And her other weeknight go-to is black bean chili, which she makes in large enough batches so there will be leftovers to freeze.

## Tips for Adding More Plant-Based Foods to Dinner

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"The important thing is to start cooking," says Madison. "If you're stuck, get a cookbook and go to the vegetables, tofu, or whatever." Another of her tips is to think of what dishes you enjoy, then master the technique. Make it many times—with your variations if you wish—until you don't need a recipe anymore. Then go to the next dish. Lastly, "know that your dishes don't have to be complicated. They can be, but they don't have to be."

## **Why Has Vegetable Focused Cooking Has Become More Popular?**

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"For one we have so many more interesting vegetables and it's been found that eating widely from them is good for us," she says. And with people eating less meat, the focus moves to the vegetables. Madison is not a fan of plant-based meats saying , "Why not just eat a grass-fed, grass-finished hamburger?"