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The Ultimate Veggie Burger

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A Good Appetite

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I am not a vegetarian, but that hasn't stopped me from embracing the veggie burger. Not to the exclusion of beef burgers, mind you, but to savor in its own right. I turn to veggie burgers when I crave the hamburger experience (soft bun, chewy protein, lots of spicy condiments) but would, at that moment, rather consume vegetables than meat.

Making a pretty good veggie burger is easy. Making a great one is a lot harder.

The downfall of many a recipe is the mush factor. Most of the elements that often go into a homemade veggie burger (vegetables, beans and tofu) are high in moisture, which can lead to a soggy patty that's unpleasant to eat and nearly impossible to flip on the grill without it falling apart. Getting a veggie burger with great flavor and the right texture is challenging. (So much so that accomplished chefs like Brooks Headley, the pastry chef at Del Posto, have taken up the cause.)

To develop my version, I cooked my way through more than a dozen recipes I found online and in Lukas Volger's authoritative cookbook "Veggie Burgers Every Which Way" (The Experiment, 2010). My favorites took the extra step of precooking the vegetables, which eliminates their water and condenses their flavors, before blitzing them in the food processor.

In his treatise on black bean burgers on the website Serious Eats, J. Kenji López-Alt goes even further to reduce the moisture by roasting the beans before adding to the mix. I absorbed this trick into my recipe and used kidney beans to keep the flavor a bit more neutral. I also adopted his use of mayonnaise, which

made the burgers succulent and almost juicy.

I like how tempeh and ground nuts added a nubby meat-like texture to other burger recipes I tried, and the way mushrooms and cheese added a savory umami character. Grated roasted beets gave the burger a slightly pink color that resembled beef, so I added that, too. Finally, pimentón lent spicy, smoky notes. To my taste, I had arrived at the ultimate veggie burger.

This recipe has a long list of ingredients and several steps to complete. But the ingredients are easy to find and the steps are simple. And you can make a double batch and freeze the extra mix. The next time the veggie burger craving hits, you'll be ready.

Recipe: The Ultimate Veggie Burger

More recipes are at NYT Cooking, which is under development as the recipe resource of The New York Times. If you don't yet have access, sign up for the wait list, at cooking.nytimes.com.

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