

COOKING GREEN

Breaking the Bondage of Western Culinary Traditions

by Kay Bushnell

Changing our individual purchasing habits can be one of the easiest ways to reduce the horrendously polluting practices of today's livestock industry. The extensive damage inflicted on the land from thousands of grazing cattle, contamination of water from factory-like dairies, and spills of chicken entrails from chicken factories motivate many environmentalists to take action. In fact, until we do take action as consumers such desecration of the natural world is likely to continue. Our collective personal food choices can significantly reduce the rows of plastic-wrapped Styrofoam trays of animal body parts displayed in supermarkets and the pollution caused by their production.

Some people may feel stymied when they face implementing their decision to eat a healthy plant-based diet. They may want to eliminate meat and animal products but are so used to the typical Western diet of meat, eggs, and dairy products that preparing food without them may seem daunting and at first glance too difficult to undertake. One has only to take a look at American and European cookbooks to see how steeped the western world is in animal-based foods. I am always puzzled when I hear a plant-based diet called "strict" or "limited". On the contrary it is an animal-based diet that is limited, generally restricted to a foundation of 5 meats plus eggs and dairy products. Fortunately, popular cookbooks such as *Vegan Vittles* by Joanne Stepaniak and *The Peaceful Palate* by Jennifer Raymond can make the transition to plant-based cooking easy and delicious.

The following recipe for Sweet Potato Soup provides an excellent introduction to plant based cooking. It calls for a plant-based milk and vegetarian broth instead of cream and a meat-based broth. The "yams" that we find in supermarkets are really sweet potatoes, not yams. True yams are large tuberous vegetables typically grown in Africa, Asia, and in southern Florida. Call them what we will, sweet potatoes are exceptionally rich in fiber, vitamin A, beta-carotene, and potassium. Baked sweet potatoes make delicious, sustaining meals on the trail, and can be eaten in hand, skin and all.