

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JEFF HARRIS



Any vegetarian will tell you that veggie burgers weren't always cool. Back in the day, they were disregarded by chefs, ridiculed by meat lovers and most often banished to the bottom of the menu. But cool-kid chefs have been cranking out impressively "meaty" versions that are forcing everyone—including the most committed carnivores—to finally take veggie burgers seriously. The frozen bean blends of yesteryear are out; beet-studded, sweet potato-stuffed patties are in. Here are 10 favorites from around the country.



VEGGIE BURGER THE GRIND Phoenix

Owner Valerie Gutterson challenged every member of her kitchen staff to create a one-of-a-kind veggie burger. The winning chef went rogue, starting with the bun: He used gluten-free Texas toast. Between the slices, you'll find a patty of zucchini, red peppers and sweet potato, plus jalapeños, barbecue sauce, Swiss cheese and tempura mushrooms. "It's a veggie burger with a little edge," Valerie says. the grindaz.com

'SHROOM BURGER SHAKE SHACK Multiple locations

This mushroom burger had to earn its spot on the menu when the first Shake Shack opened in New York City in 2004. Founder Danny Meyer insisted that non-meat items be so unique that carnivores would crave them, too. This made the cut: It's a portobello stuffed with cheese, fried, then topped with lettuce, tomato and ShackSauce. shakeshack.com



S+S BEET BURGER SEED + SALT San Francisco

This isn't a beef patty, but owner Mo Clancy would lead you to believe otherwise: She likes the dishes on her plant-based menu to resemble their meaty counterparts. This patty looks like it's been grilled (it's oven-charred), and you can top it with chewy smoky "bacon" made from eggplant. Even the buns get special treatment: They're gluten-free and smothered with cashew ranch. seedandsalt.com

GUAC BURGER BY CHLOE New York City

Chloe Coscarelli is a self-professed avocado freak: "It's like butter for vegans," she says. So she based the burger at her all-vegan joint on her favorite ingredient. In addition to a heap of guacamole, the black bean-quinoa-sweet potato patty is topped with corn salsa, crunchy tortilla strips and the fan favorite, chipotle aioli. bychefchloe.com

FOOD STYLING: JAMIE KIMM

VEGGIE BURGER SLIDERS ROOT DOWN

Denver

Root Down chef Justin Cucci has spent more than 20 years perfecting his patty—which explains why it contains 14 ingredients, including three types of lentils, plus sunflower seeds and tamari. He serves his burgers as sliders, with sprout salad, pickled onions and jalapeño jam. Fans extend beyond Denver's city limits: Justin has shipped the burgers around the world, including Israel and Bermuda. rootdowndenver.com



BLACK BEAN FRITA FRITA BATIDOS

Ann Arbor, MI

Loco is Spanish for “crazy”—and the cooks go crazy with the toppings on this frita (Cuba's version of a burger). The black-bean patty is covered with muenster, cilantro-lime salsa, tropical slaw, avocado and a sunny-side-up egg. And you don't need to ask for fries with that: Every burger comes with some sandwiched between the buns. fritabatidos.com

CRISPY BEET BURGER NAN AND BYRON'S

Charlotte, NC

When chef Jamie Lynch was thinking of veggie options for his restaurant, he dreamed big: This jaw-busting version has two thick slices of fried beet. The toppings are all-American (the restaurant is named after the man and woman in the classic *American Gothic* pitchfork painting), with a few farm-to-table twists: arugula, sliced red onion, avocado and a goat cheese spread. nanandbyrons.com



TARO BURGER SWEET CANE CAFÉ

Hilo, HI

The owners of this restaurant also run a farm where taro, Hawaii's indigenous root vegetable, grows, and their taro burger is one of the most popular items on the menu. They mix the starchy pulp with onions, carrots and cumin to make a patty, then top it with cheese, sprouts and tomatoes. The buns come by way of the Big Island, too: They're from the nearby market Island Naturals, owned by Hawaii state senator Russell Ruderman. kalapanaorganics.com



VEGAN BURGER WHITE OWL SOCIAL CLUB

Portland, OR

A vegan gluten-free burger sounds like a parody of a Portland, OR, menu offering—and the people at White Owl do not apologize for that. “We wanted it to stand out—and stand up next to a meat burger,” says manager Jamie Otto. The showstopper is a bright mix of colors: a purple patty (made with shredded beets), topped with green pea shoots and vibrant carrot ribbons. Chefs briefly discussed changing the recipe, until they researched their social-media pages. “Eighty percent of our fans post about this burger!” says Jamie. whiteowlsocialclub.com

EL JEFE VEGETARIAN BURGER BILLY'S ON BURNET

Austin

This dish leads to a lot of questions from customers: “When they see it come up, people in line start to ask, ‘So it’s Frito pie? On a burger?’” says owner Rebecca Walston. The short answer: Yes. The chefs scoop the bean-and-corn chip mixture onto a vegetable patty and cover it with grilled jalapeños. The messy burger is served in a basket of fries that end up drenched in the drippings. billysonburnet.com

