

## The New Melting Pot The Evolution of New American Cuisine

New American Cuisine is a fusion of foods and cooking styles that blurs the lines between international specialties. It began to develop in the 1960's, drawing upon global influences, with an emphasis on the use of fresh, local ingredients. Today, New American Cuisine features imaginative assimilations of various cultural favorites from any number of famous chefs. It has morphed into an ever-growing, creative melting pot of unique and delicious dishes.

Many people have also adjusted their eating habits with better health in mind, migrating to diets utilizing less meat. The modern term for this dietary approach is "flexitarian." It describes a move toward a vegetarian approach to eating, while incorporating some dairy and fish, with occasional meat consumption. A sizeable segment of the population is now exploring this more nuanced, flexible style of eating.

According to the American Institute for Cancer Research, eating this way helps combat major health concerns like heart disease and various cancers. Meals tend to be lower in fat, higher in fiber, and loaded with vitamins and phytochemicals.

For decades now, international manufacturers have been creating "mock meats." Now commonly referred to as "plant-based meats," these new creations are carving out a growing slice in the food supply chain. As stated by Mary Allen, writing for the Good Food Institute: "Today, plant-based meat companies are now identifying the desired tastes, textures, smells, and structures of animal meat on a molecular level and working backward to figure out what raw materials from the plant kingdom can be functionalized and combined to satisfy any "meat tooth." The results are remarkably successful and relatively high in protein. In fact, in June of 2021, Vegetarian Times reported that 78% of Americans were bringing plant-based alternatives to their grilling season.

I call this new and vibrant version of flexitarian cooking, with its increasing emphasis on plant-based alternatives, the "New Melting Pot". It's still locally and seasonally focused, and it's fresher and greener than ever. It's part of the continuing evolution of the colorful and imaginative melting pot of cultures, cuisine, and ingredients we've collectively developed over the past 60 years.