

# clover food lab

Hello!

Michelle here. Most folks at Clover aren't vegetarian (I happen to be, though). And one of my favorite parts about eating vegetarian is that it forces you to get creative. Have a meaty recipe you'd love to try? How can you get those savory, rich, hearty flavors without the meat? Usually, the answer is a well-seasoned, well-sourced, and perfectly prepared vegetable. I feel like maybe nobody on the GLOBE has mastered that art quite like Chris Anderson.

Our Senior Vice President of Food Systems, Chris, has been working at Clover since 2008. He was the first paid employee, although, [even Ayr doesn't know when he officially started](#). He's been a part of crafting almost every item on the menu.



Today, Chris will answer some questions we received from our survey about one of his favorite past-times: substituting vegetables for meat while keeping all the heart of the original dish.

**Q: What are some of your favorite ingredients to have on hand when nodding to meat?**

- As for ingredients, use the same ones as whatever dish you are trying to recreate. So if you are making a take on Baja tacos, you'll want guajillo chiles and cornmeal and maybe cilantro. The first step is **recreating the umami and depth of flavor you get from meat**. Often the flavor and umami comes from fat and collagen, whereas veggies are very lean. These elements elevate the spices and other flavors you pair them with. I can't recommend this enough: **healthy fats, tomato paste** (which I like to caramelize), **miso, soy sauce, dried mushrooms** (whole or powdered) and different types of **seaweed**.

**Q: Can you talk more about the role of fat when making veggies taste great?**

- Vegetables are extremely lean. Fat helps **develop and build flavor** (ie. sautéing, roasting, confit, ect.) When you start making vegetables the center point in the meal, you need fat to carry the different spices, herbs, and flavors you are pairing it with. Fat makes the meal more satiating. At Clover we are usually using olive or safflower oil, and occasionally butter and cream to ensure the flavors really bloom.

**Q: How do you get inspired by meat dishes like bolognese or ground beef and turn them into plant-based dishes?**

- Recipes like this have been polished over many decades. They are consistently delicious and that's why many restaurants and chefs cook them over and over again. I like to look at these classic recipes and recreate the flavors, just without the meat. You have to work a lot harder to develop the flavors and umami in these dishes with new cooking techniques and pairings, but we also work with really beautiful veggies from organic soil and farmers that care a ton about what they're doing. When you combine good ingredients and techniques, a lot of times we create something that actually tastes better than the original dish (hi carrot lox).

**Q: Speaking of carrot lox, what are some spices or ingredients that evoke seafood?**

- My go-to is shiitake mushrooms (the texture reminds me of clams) and various types of seaweeds.

**Q: How do you make mushrooms not slimy?**

- Freshness is key. I think that most folks are working with mushrooms that are old, and sliminess is a classic characteristic of old mushrooms. I challenge folks who love mushrooms to buy a couple different varieties next time they are at the store, and just quickly cook them with high heat and a little olive oil, butter and a little sea salt. Taste them side by side and you'll notice a wide breadth of subtle flavors and degrees of texture.

Some examples of these principles in action are:

**Lentil Bolognese** - Uses caramelized tomato paste, soy sauce, miso paste, porcini powder to replicate the flavors of ground beef while the lentils mimic its texture.

**Carrot Lox** - Uses soy sauce & kombu to get its seafood notes- plus super thin slices of carrots so they really absorb them (and the consistency resembles salmon!).

**Most of our fried mushroom sandwiches** - Use the umami mushrooms to replicate a meaty sandwich - paired with the same frying and battering technique as the original (e.g oyster po-boy but with blue oyster mushrooms).

So whether you're trying to eat more vegetables or just want to get creative with old recipes, we hope these answers help! Let us know what you dream up in your own food lab at home : )

- Michelle & Chris

