

TASTY TARTS AND PLANT-BASED PLEASERS

VEGANUARY MAY BE OVER, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN VEGAN CUISINE IS OFF THE MENU. GISELLE WHITEAKER SAMPLES HOME-DELIVERED VEGAN FARE FROM FRANK DALE.

A month of meat-free eating is not something I'm likely to sign up for, so Veganuary passed with little effect on my eating habits. I recognise switching to a vegan diet comes with benefits – increasing nutrients, minerals and fibre, lowering cholesterol levels, reducing environmental impact – but it's not something I'm ready to adopt full time. Not even for a month. I have decided though, that it's time to compensate for lockdown baking, and part-time veganism seems a good way to go about it.

I've committed to eating vegan at least once a week and expanding my repertoire of

vegetarian cooking. Conveniently, Norwich-based Frank Dale appears to have followed my lead. The family-based brand with its roots firmly entrenched in 100 years of British farming heritage has introduced a range of vegan quiches, pies, cakes and tarts that can be delivered across the nation. This seems like the perfect time to put them to the test.

Frank Dale pivoted during the pandemic. Originally, the go-to brand for professional chefs, it established a direct-to-consumer proposition including a range of bakery goods. In recognition of the vegan sector rapidly

increasing in popularity, Frank also doubled its plant-based offering to six savoury and sweet dishes. I want to try all of them. Best of all, with Frank's Vegan Bundle, I can.

A box turns up on my doorstep and it's loaded. There are two cherry tomato, red pepper and basil quiches, two spring vegetable and mature cheddar-style quiches, a dozen mini pies and a dozen mini quiches. Then there's the sweet stuff – a dozen bite-sized mini chocolate and raspberry cakes and a lush-looking woodland berry and sable crust tart. This will last weeks.





All of the items can be frozen, so I reserve a selection for immediate eating and store the remainder. I'm keen to sample the pastry. Vegan pastry is no mean feat, hence the popularity of Greggs vegan sausage rolls, with their lush wrapper. Frank has it right, too. I sample both the mushroom, leek and ale and the country vegetable mini pie and the pastry is a highlight, light and flaky, giving way to the delicious flavours inside.

The next day, I move on to the spring vegetable and mature cheese tart, one of the recent additions. The pastry here is different. It's a stone-baked British oat and pea flour pastry,

thicker and crispier, a hint of coconut oil coming through. It makes an ideal container for the rich broccoli, pea and mint inner, which is accompanied by a smooth British oat-based vegan custard and topped with tasty mature vegan cheese. Paired with a side salad of my own making, it's a delectable light dinner. It's so good I forget that it's vegan, helping me overcome my ideological resistance to plant-based food.

I can't resist also tucking into the berry and sable crust tart. The classic-flavoured pastry case is filled with a base of smooth vanilla vegan custard topped with cherries, blackberries,

redcurrants and blueberries. Every item from Frank Dale's bakery is created entirely from scratch, so the tart has that homemade, tangy, sweet and totally satisfying flavour. It is large enough to be quartered and I'm pleased I have three more servings to come.

Frank Dale has me hooked. While I'm not ready to permanently give up my omnivorous ways, when plant-based treats taste this good, I'll happily dabble. Now hand me another one of those chocolate and raspberry cakes.

Frank Dale is undoubtedly the king of Classic British Miniatures, from mouthwatering mini Yorkshire puddings to quiches and cottage pies, baby Victoria sponges and Black Forest cakes, as well as the vegan range of goodies. For more information, visit www.frankdalefoodsonline.co.uk



HERE ARE THREE MORE OF OUR FAVOURITE VEGAN FOODIE PROVIDERS:



ORRISS & SON CHILLI SAUCES

Ready to liven up your plate? NEW Orriss & Son is a punchy, specialist collection of fermented chilli sauces created by David Underwood – chilli enthusiast and globetrotting chef - that are vegan and gluten free. The small-batch sauces can be used as a marinade; added during cooking to increase intensity; dropped into a salad dressing; or splashed neat onto a finished recipe. Choose from the original 'Even Flow' hot sauce, based on fiery and fruity habaneros; 'My Wave', which takes inspiration from the heat of the classic piri-piri seasoning; or 'Fresh Tendrils', based on the subtle heat of fresh green jalapeños. www.orrissandson.com

MANDIRA'S KITCHEN

Mandira's Kitchen, based in the Surrey Hills, is an award-winning producer of authentic Indian food created as delicious freezer meals and accompaniments. Many of the dishes from Mandira's Kitchen range are vegan, and they are all handmade in small batches using family recipes. Temptations include Enchorer Dalna (Jackfruit); Palak Dal, made from split yellow lentils, with baby spinach and fresh tomatoes; Vegetable Pulao, a dish of delicately spiced basmati rice cooked with peas, carrots and a bouquet of aromatic spices; Chana Masala (spiced chickpeas); crispy Vegetable Samosas; pea patties; and a range of chutneys. www.mandiraskitchen.com



LOC'S TASTE OF VIETNAM

Vietnamese-born Loc is a Yorkshire-based chef, who shares his food heritage through an online cookery school, Loc's Taste of Vietnam. Buddhism influences Vietnamese culture and cuisine, so vegan dishes are commonplace. Favourites include pho, an aromatic fragrant noodle soup packed full of fresh herbs that can be made with vegetables and tofu. Loc's store cupboard box offers vegan-friendly spices, noodles and sauces as well as more unusual ingredients, such as annatto seeds, black beans, fermented bean curd and vegan fish sauce – and if you want to make tofu, Loc can help with that too. www.locstasteofvietnam.com