



Meatless Mondays for All Ages

By Jenny Abel

I recently read [an article about Thomas Ponce](#), a 16-year-old animal rights activist from Florida who became a vegetarian at age 4 and a vegan at age 9. He is the founder of [Lobby for Animals](#), a nonprofit organization that encourages people to ask state and national legislators to make regulations that protect wild and domesticated animals. He is also the coordinator of [Fin Free FL](#), a group that fights to prevent the killing of sharks. In addition, he is the founder of [Harley's Home](#), his school-based animal rights club. When asked about the reason for his activism, Ponce says, "I feel that it is our responsibility as both citizens and human beings to use our minds, hearts and voices to speak up against the injustices we see in the world."



"I feel that I was put on this earth to educate people and to try to raise awareness about the suffering and cruelty that animals have to go through in slaughterhouses. Also, I want to raise awareness about how we pollute the environment and how badly we treat our one and only home." At age 11 Ponce approached his state senator asking him sponsor a bill calling for a halt to the sale, distribution, and trade of shark fin products in the state of Florida. The senator was supportive and told him that he would support the bill if he also got someone from the state house of representatives on board. Ponce did so and the bill was drafted. It made it to committee where it unfortunately died, but the episode demonstrates that a pre-teen was successful in raising awareness of the killing of a threatened species.

Ponce explains why it is so important to protect sharks: "Sharks are what we call keystone predators. They maintain the order of balance in the underwater ecosystem. When you take out a keystone predator, it disrupts the entire ecosystem." In addition to lobbying his state elected officials, Ponce also conducts petition drives, lobbying trainings for other concerned activists, and one-on-one conversations to convince people to make changes in their own lives to protect animals and the environment. He once asked his parents to stop the car as they were driving home so that he could go and convince a fisherman to release a baby shark that he had caught.

In a time when many of us are feeling powerless due to the daily onslaught of bad news coming from Washington, it is inspiring to read about how people who seemingly have no power—those who can't even vote yet—are making a difference.

The Mount Vernon Group of the Sierra Club will be hosting a Meatless Monday cooking class on June 12 at 7:00 at the Arlington Central Library. The class is free and all attendees will get to sample the tasty

and easy-to-prepare recipes that we'll be making. Please email jabel209@gmail.com to sign up to attend. Below is one of the recipes that we'll be making.

Mexican(ish) Kale and Quinoa Salad

From Cookie and Kate: www.cookieandkate.com

Ingredients

Salad:

- 1 cup quinoa, rinsed in a fine-mesh colander
- 2 cups water
- ½ cup pepitas (hulled pumpkin seeds)
- 1 small bunch of curly green or Tuscan kale, tough ribs removed and chopped into small pieces (or about 3 cups roughly chopped baby spinach)
- Fine sea salt
- 1 can (15 ounces) black beans, rinsed and drained, or 1 ½ cups cooked black beans
- ½ cup thinly sliced green onions or finely chopped red onion
- ½ cup lightly packed chopped fresh cilantro
- ½ cup oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, rinsed and chopped
- ⅓ cup crumbled feta cheese (optional)
- 1 to 2 medium jalapeños, seeds and membranes removed, chopped

Cumin-lime dressing

- ¼ cup olive oil
- 3 to 4 tablespoons fresh lime juice (about 2 medium limes)
- ¾ teaspoon ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon fine sea salt

Instructions

1. To cook the quinoa: Combine the rinsed quinoa and the water in a medium saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium-high heat, then decrease the heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Cook until the quinoa has absorbed all of the water, about 15 minutes, reducing heat as time goes on to maintain a gentle simmer. Remove from heat, cover, and let the quinoa rest for 5 minutes, which gives it time to fluff up.
2. Meanwhile, toast the pepitas in a small skillet over medium heat, stirring frequently, until fragrant and making little popping noises, about 5 minutes. Set aside to cool.
3. Place the chopped kale in a large serving bowl. Sprinkle it lightly with salt and massage it with your hands by scrunching up large handfuls at a time until it's darker and more fragrant (this makes the kale more tasty and easier to eat). Add the cooked quinoa, toasted pepitas, drained beans, onions, cilantro, sun-dried tomatoes, feta (if using), and jalapeño(s). Set aside.
4. To prepare the dressing, combine the olive oil, 3 tablespoons of lime juice, the cumin and salt in a cup or jar. Whisk until blended. Pour all of the dressing over the salad and stir until the salad is evenly coated. Taste, and add another tablespoon of lime juice (I like this salad to be pretty

zippy) and/or more salt, if necessary. For best flavor, let the salad rest for about 15 minutes before serving.

5. This salad keeps well, covered and chilled, for about 3 days. You might want to wake up leftovers with an extra squeeze of lime juice and a dash of salt.

This content originally appeared in the June 2017 issue of the Mount Vernon Sierran, the Mount Vernon Group's quarterly newsletter. Image of Thomas Ponce courtesy of onegreenplanet.org. Opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Mount Vernon Group or the Sierra Club. For more information about the Mount Vernon Group, please visit virginia.sierraclub.org/mvg/.