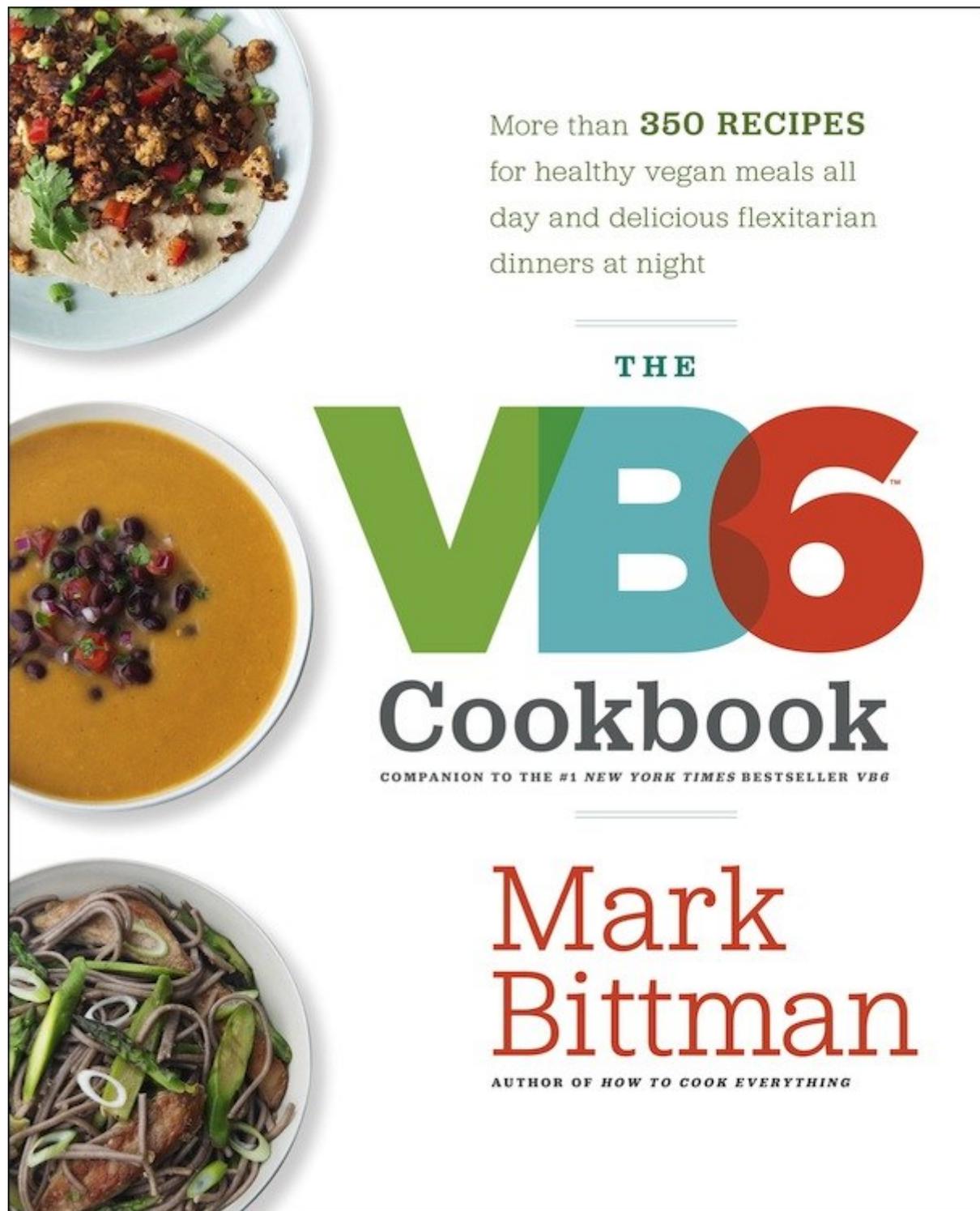


Cook the Book: 'The VB6 Cookbook' by Mark Bittman

KATE WILLIAMS



There was a time in my life when I relied almost exclusively on [Mark Bittman](#) . At the beginning of my sophomore year of college, I had moved off campus and was cooking completely on my own for the first time in my life. I had found a copy of [How to Cook Everything](#) (the yellow first edition) at a used bookstore and began using it as a guide for just about every meal. I doubt I am the only one of my generation to do so.

I may have not learned how to cook, well, *everything*, but my belief that recipes should be flexible, adaptable, and accessible was certainly founded in those early years of Bittman allegiance. I have, naturally, widened my sphere of culinary influence over the years. Likewise, Bittman has morphed as time has marched on, and he now writes with great confidence about the changes he's made to his diet. Last year, he published a guide to his diet, called [VB6](#), or "Vegan Before Six." This plan is less dogmatic than it may seem at first glance; rather than asking others to stick to a strict timeline of meals, Bittman instead asserts the benefits of eating vegan meals twice a day, and allowing meat (and most anything else) at one meal. For him, dinner is the "treat" meal, while for others it could be breakfast, lunch, or afternoon snack time. The point is not to be vegan in a political sense, but to substantially increase the amount of minimally processed plant-based foods eaten throughout the day. It makes good sense.

This spring, Bittman released [a companion cookbook](#) to his diet guide. This book is organized by mealtime and, in keeping with Bittman's personal preference, all of the dishes are vegan except for the dinner chapter and a few of the desserts. The recipes with animal products use them in smallish quantities, making them what Bittman calls "flexitarian." Like all of Bittman's work, the recipes in [The VB6 Cookbook](#) are streamlined, simple, and come with at least two variations each. They aren't all fast—the eggplant meatballs, for example, will take an hour or so from start to finish, and they're in the lunch chapter. Yet they're easily made ahead of time and packed up for lunches on the go, just like most of the food he suggests eating for a noontime meal.

[The VB6 Cookbook](#) isn't exactly breaking new ground in terms of vegan cooking, but given Bittman's desire to convince others to hop on his bandwagon, I doubt that innovative recipe-writing is his goal. Instead, he wants to demonstrate that healthy, plant-based foods can be approachable for anyone—not just those of us who willingly spend hours each day cooking for fun. You don't need to make your own vegan cheese or ferment your own kombucha to improve your diet. He just wants to get more people in the kitchen.

This week, we'll cook through a day of VB6 eating. We'll start with a breakfast of "chorizo" tacos, and then nosh on those eggplant meatballs for lunch. As a snack, we'll blend up an avocado dip to serve with crunchy raw radishes. And for dinner, we'll add in some meat by making a bowl of pork and asparagus soba.

Win 'The VB6 Cookbook'

Thanks to the nice folks at Clarkson Potter, we have five (5) copies of [The VB6 Cookbook](#) to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win a copy is to **tell us your favorite vegan dish** in the comments section below.