

# Going Vegetarian

## is not a Road, but a Highway

— Tips and Recipes to Start Your Plant-Based Journey —

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Food photography  
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## I just saw a great recipe this morning for chocolate-covered chickpeas.

Sounds weird, but they are supposed to taste like malted-milk balls. I haven't tried them yet, but I will, because I know from experience that you can take unlikely-sounding plant-based ingredients and end up with delicious and surprising results.

Which is, in part, why I decided to write this little supplement for my website subscribers. I want everyone who has ever thought about whether they would benefit from a vegetarian lifestyle to give it a whirl, and what better way to convince anyone of anything than to prod them with chocolate?

Plant-based diets are getting lots of media attention these days, lots of celebrities making the transition, and it should come as no surprise. Anyone who has been alive on this planet for more than a few decades knows how much our lives and health have been affected by the infiltration of processed foods and the over-ingestion of animal protein. Somewhere along the line we've forgotten that food wasn't always so easy to acquire, that we didn't always have access to meat three times a day, that milk and cheese were luxuries that not everyone could afford or had access to, and that bread once came—not in a bag—but from our own oven and from wheat we grew and harvested and ground ourselves or bought from a neighbor.

They say life is all about change, but when change is affecting health on a pandemic level, it's time for something else to happen, and that something else is also gaining traction as more and more people figure out that one way to take control of their medical expenses is to take control of their own health by eating in a more healthful way. It is no secret that most disease states are actually food-related illnesses: heart disease, diabetes, obesity, and cancer. There is also plenty of evidence that indicates that even auto-immune disorders such as multiple sclerosis, lupus, and rheumatoid arthritis are food-related, and many people are treating themselves for these conditions with plant-based diets.

Okay, all fine and good, you get this, and you've made the decision, but how do you get started?

I am a Libra, so I am not a fan of doing anything that throws me off-balance, so from my point of view it is best to start slowly by making small changes. But, I do have to admit to hearing from readers of my book *Blue Moon Vegetarian* (which chronicles my and my husband's transition to a vegetarian, and ultimately vegan, lifestyle) who have gone cold turkey off of meat and meat products and who are happy and thrilled with the changes in themselves and who have vowed never to go back.

For me, for us, however, we weren't willing to throw out what we had in our pantry and freezer, and so made the transition over a number of weeks, using up what we had on hand, and experimenting with recipes along the way.

I had been vegetarian before, more than a decade earlier, so I turned to my favorite vegetarian recipe book *Laurel's Kitchen*, for a refresher on nutrition and a primer on other things such as cooking beans from dried, and making sure we got a balance of nutrients. Honestly, it isn't that hard. For a list of great and helpful resources to guide you through the transition, including a pantry list and handouts from my introductory vegetarian cooking course, go to the [Cool Resources](#) page on my website.

One of the things that people worry about—and the first thing everyone will ask when they hear you've gone vegetarian—is how you get your protein. Folks, here in America, the last thing you need to worry about is protein. If you check out my protein list [here](#), you will see that everything from cucumbers to rice has a certain amount of protein in it. In fact, there are almost no plant-based foods without at least some protein. And if you continue to use dairy products and wheat (we gave those up, too, in 2012), you'll see that you are likely still to be taking in too much protein.

To calculate your protein needs, follow this simple process:

- Record your desired body weight in pounds or kilos \_\_\_\_.
- If measured in pounds, multiply by 0.36 grams per day if you are in good health and in good physical condition.
- If measured in pounds and you are ill, pregnant, undergoing surgery, are under stress, or engage in weight training, multiply by 0.6 grams per day.
- If measured in kilos, multiply by 0.8 grams per day if you are in good health and in good physical condition.
- If measured in kilos and you are ill, pregnant, undergoing surgery, are under stress, or engage in weight training, multiply by 1.2 grams per day.
- For example, my perfect weight is 135, and I am pretty healthy, so I should take in about 49 grams of protein per day. My gorgeous daughter-in-law, who is taller than me, likely has an ideal weight of 150, but she is pregnant, so she should be consuming 90 grams of protein per day. To calculate your ideal weight, go [here](#).

However, I believe that charts can only tell you so much, and as I had one very intelligent physician tell me a few years ago, "No two humans are the same." Learn to listen to your body. Get in the habit of sitting quietly with yourself for a few minutes a day. After four years at this, my husband and I both know when we need a serving of tofu or tempeh for a protein boost. If you are pregnant or ill, yes, maybe you do need a bit more, but most of us—vegetarian, vegan, and meat-eaters—get much more than we need. Protein is hard on your kidneys. They can only process 25 or so grams from any given meal. Much of our country's hypertension



epidemic can be traced to our having blown out the micro-vasculature in our kidneys with excessive protein consumption.

Many people who decide to go vegetarian make the mistake of being overly-reliant on grains and wheat-based processed “meats.” Please understand that any processed food is less than ideal and, in fact, many of these meat substitutes are very high in sodium and can be just as tough on your body and health as animal products. Also, be careful of consuming soy, which can be genetically modified and which contains bio-identical hormones which can be impactful, especially for children and overweight men.

For me, one of the things I love about plant-based eating is that it is so simple. I can get by very nicely on fresh vegetables, nuts (my waistline shows that I eat way too many of these nutrient but calorie-dense foods), dried fruit, tempeh (which I love grilled or marinated and fried in toasted sesame oil and dressed with tomato and lettuce on a bun), the occasional tofu stir-fry or baked tofu, bean burgers, and a cadre of great soups and casseroles made from plant-based recipes. In fact, vegetarian eating allows me to be a bit lazy, since most days I get by on a hemp-protein smoothie and don’t cook at all until dinnertime.

Also, eating organic is much less expensive if you go vegetarian (and even less so if you go vegan) because most food co-ops sell in bulk, as do most major chain stores. We are lucky enough to have an organic wholesaler called [Azure Standard](#) which ships all over the country and sells to buying clubs—and very likely one of these buying clubs is available near you. We get all of our beans, oats, rice, nuts, seeds, and flours—and we keep dozens of different kinds on hand—in 5 lb. bags, and you pay pennies on the pound if you buy in 25 pound bags. And much of what they sell they grow and process themselves on several thousand acres in Central Oregon, so you are helping to keep a family business going, not a conglomerate or corporation.

If you decide to take it a step at a time, I recommend this: start with fruit. Fresh fruit. And I always recommend starting literally with an apple a day. One organic apple a day. The thing is, plants have fiber, and many of us are not used to getting enough fiber, much less a sudden boatload of it, so if you one day wake up and start eating rations of nuts and seeds and beans and whole grains and raw fruits and veggies, you aren’t going to like me very much, and you are going to be tempted to go back to your old ways.

So start it easy. Have an apple today and one tomorrow and one every day from now until they lay your gentle self into the ground. Then, add a few more fresh fruits, and try an avocado spread on your toast instead of butter. You would have thought we had died and gone to heaven when we discovered avocado on toast. You can sprinkle it with a little spicy seasoning like Tony Chachere’s Creole Seasoning, which we both adore, or, you seriously can mix it with mashed banana and a bit of maple syrup or agave syrup for a sweeter treat. My grandson’s very first food was mashed banana, followed very closely by avocado and banana mixed. He still loves the taste of the stuff. We have a great quick dinner that features a fresh salad topped

by black or kidney beans with chopped tomato and avocado with a drizzle of vegan ranch dressing (Check out Follow Your Heart brand of salad dressings; I love them, and I have never eaten salad dressing—can't abide the flavor.) It's a meal fit for guests, and works great for camping, or any time you just don't want to spend a lot of time in the kitchen.

Speaking of salads, whether you love salads or not, they are another great way to ease into vegetarian living, and you don't have to be limited to iceberg lettuce. We have experimented with everything from dandelion greens to kohlrabi and with not a failure in the bunch. We mix everything with everything. It's so important to take risks, to try new things, to not let yourself be limited by convention. People look at us sideways sometimes because we both love to have just a bowl of popcorn (you have not eaten popcorn until you've cooked Azure Standard's organic multi-color popcorn in coconut oil in a pan on top of the stove) sprinkled with a little salt for dinner. I mean, who cares? It's full of fiber, a bit of protein, and, if you add a dose of nutritional yeast (see [What the Heck is Nutritional Yeast](#)), then you have the added benefit of a wallop of vitamin B12, which just about everybody—vegetarian or no—should be taking.

The next week, take a real step forward and add a few garbanzos (also called chickpeas) to your salad. Don't buy them in a can, although if you must, please make sure they are organic, because most beans otherwise are laden with pesticides and preservatives.

Instead, try this: put 2 cups of dried beans in 2 quarts of water (always 4:1, water to dried beans) in a pot on the stove. Try to use filtered water if you can. As much as possible, don't drink unfiltered tap water. Heat to boiling, then turn off the heat. Let sit until cool. Drain the water. Then add 2 quarts more and bring to a boil again. Reduce heat to simmer. Cook on low for about 2 hours or until beans mash easily between your fingers. (You can also do this part in a Crockpot, on low, and let cook all day while you are at work.) After they are finished, you can add a little salt and pepper if you like. Add them cold to your salad, or mash them up with a little tabasco and mayo and make a sandwich of them with some alfalfa sprouts and tomato, and some homemade baked fries on the side and voila! You have your first veggie meal.

You can also make a wonderful dip called hummus from them. It's tangy and garlicky and makes a great potluck donation. You can serve it with pita bread or a veggie tray or crackers. It also fills the bill for a Friday night when you want something special to whip up to prove to your family that going veggie is a really good thing. [This recipe from Oh She Glows](#) is one of my favorite recipes. You'll need something called tahini that is actually sesame seed butter. Tahini can be a bit pricy, but it doesn't take much, and it keeps for quite a while. When I buy it, I just make hummus the focus of several meals over a few weeks. I also like to stir it into navy bean soup to add a rich flavor, and if you mix it with maple syrup it is quite yummy on pancakes or toast and adds a nutritional punch to a weekend breakfast treat.

Once you've mastered the cooking of garbanzos, you will find you can use them in just about anything from soups to candy, as noted [here in that vegan "Malted-Milk" Ball recipe](#) I mentioned earlier. And if you try them before I do, please let me know how it went!

I've started you with garbanzos because they are not known for producing flatulence the way other beans are, but, also please know this—if you eat beans regularly, your body will begin producing the appropriate enzymes required to digest them, and they *will not create gas*. This part takes a while. A few weeks, perhaps, but in the meantime, you can help the situation by skimming any foam the beans create while cooking, and by draining off the cooking water completely **a second time** and adding water back into them if you need to—in the case, say, of cooking a soup or chili.

One last thing I will leave with you, and this is a bit of a teaser, because I won't be featuring a full discussion of this until my new book *Blue Moon Gluten-Free Vegan* comes out in October. But I'd like to challenge you to do a bit of research about coconut and coconut oil. We have replaced all butter and shortening in our recipes with coconut oil. What nutrition experts now understand is that coconut is very likely the secret to eternal youth. There's a reason people from the islands are so vibrant and happy, and it isn't just the sun. If you have a Costco close by (and, dear people, please know that I DO NOT advocate any one store or any one brand; I am simply sharing my story, and that includes brands and conscientious businesses whose ethics promote the well-being of everyday humans) you can get a rather humongous jar of coconut oil for about \$20. One lasts us about 3-4 months. The further you get into vegetarianism, the smaller your appetite for fat, and once you discover coconut oil, which is solid at room temperature, liquid oils all but leave your cooking lexicon. Read more here: [101 Uses For Coconut Oil](#).

I leave you today with a few basic recipes from *Blue Moon Vegetarian* and from my upcoming cookbook *Blue Moon Gluten-Free Vegan* and also with this welcome and promise: **You're going to love this new life!**

All my very best,

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## Paula's Version of the World's Best Granola



2 cups nuts of any kind  
1 tablespoon butter, melted  
2 tablespoons agave syrup or honey  
½ cup orange marmalade  
¼-½ cup filtered water  
1 tablespoon vanilla  
1/8 teaspoon sea salt  
4 cups oats  
dried fruit, amount and type as preferred

Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Chop nuts in food processor. Make a liquid of butter, agave, marmalade, water, vanilla, and salt. Bring to a boil. Place nuts in a very large pan and pour liquid over them. Stir. Add oats and mix. Pay attention to dryness level and add water to liquid mix if it looks like you are going to need it. Don't get it too wet. Spread evenly over as many ungreased cookie sheets as your oven will hold. Toast for one hour, then begin checking every 15 minutes until granola is very dark but not yet burning (in other words, slightly over-toast the mix). This may take as long as 2 hours. Stir in dried fruit after granola has cooled. Store, well-sealed, in a cool, dark place.

## Herbed French Lentil Soup



1/4 cup olive oil  
2 red onions, finely chopped  
2 carrots, grated  
6 cloves garlic, coarsely chopped  
2 bay leaves  
1/4 cup dried parsley  
1 teaspoon ground rosemary  
1 teaspoon dried basil  
1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper  
1 teaspoon sea salt  
dash of cayenne  
4 cups vegetable broth  
2 cups organic French green lentils  
8 cups water

Sauté onion, carrots, and garlic in olive oil until onion is transparent. Add spices. Add broth and lentils. Add water. Bring to boil. Simmer uncovered over low heat for 1 hour or until lentils are soft. Serve with pita wedges and hummus or homemade cheese.



## Eggless in Clarkston

1 tablespoon olive oil  
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped  
1 stalk celery, thinly sliced  
1/3 red bell pepper, chopped  
1/2 leek, thinly sliced  
1 1-inch piece ginger root, peeled and minced  
1 cup cooked brown basmati rice  
1 cup cooked white basmati rice  
1 tablespoon tamari sauce  
Crushed chipotle chili pepper  
White pepper

Heat oil, garlic, and celery over medium-high heat until celery just starts to soften. Add bell pepper, leek, and ginger. Stir fry until bell pepper is tender but still slightly crisp. Add rice and tamari. Season with chili pepper and white pepper to taste. Serves 4.

## Phil's Pepper-Onion-Garlic-Cheese Omelet

2 tablespoons butter  
1/2 red bell pepper, chopped  
1/4 white onion (not yellow), finely chopped  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
5 eggs, slightly beaten  
2 tablespoons whole milk  
1/3 cup grated Tillamook Vintage White Extra Sharp Cheddar Cheese

Sauté vegetables and garlic in butter in omelet pan over medium heat until onion is transparent. Remove from pan and set aside. Beat eggs with milk. Pour into pan. Cook over medium heat until egg is set. Sprinkle with cheese and vegetables on one half. Fold plain half over vegetable half. When cheese is melted, flip omelet. Serve immediately with sourdough toast and strawberry-rhubarb jam.

## Sweet Lentil Polou

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil  
1 small red onion, finely chopped  
1 bay leaf  
1 cup cooked brown basmati rice  
1 tablespoon tomato paste  
3 cups vegetable broth  
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon  
pinch cardamom  
1 cup baby brown lentils  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon white pepper  
1/2 cup dried currants  
1/2 cup pine nuts

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Sauté onion and bay leaf in olive oil over medium heat until onion is soft. Discard bay leaf. Add rice and stir until hot throughout. In a small bowl, mix tomato paste, broth, and spice. Add mixture to rice along with the lentils. Bring to a boil, cover, and simmer on very low heat for 30 minutes. Stir in seasoning, fruit, and nuts. Pour mixture into covered casserole. Add very hot (not boiling) water as necessary to create a thick soup. Cover and bake 20-30 minutes. Serve with salad or vegetable raita. Serves four liberally.

## Nutty Black Bean Burger



- ½ cup onion, diced
- 1 large garlic clove, minced
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup oats ground into flour
- 1 ½ cups bread crumbs
- 1 cup grated carrots
- 1 cup cooked black beans, mashed
- ¼ cup finely chopped cilantro
- ⅓ cup almonds, ground into meal
- ½ cup sunflower seeds, ground into meal
- 1 tbsp. coconut oil
- 1 tablespoon tamari (tamari is soy sauce made from actual soybeans and not wheat)
- 1 ½ teaspoon chili powder
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon oregano
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- Fresh ground black pepper to taste

In large skillet, sauté onions and garlic in ½ tbsp oil. Place all ingredients (except spices and salt) into a large mixing bowl and stir well. Add seasonings and salt to taste. With slightly wet hands, pack dough tightly into 6 patties. Fry burgers in a bit of coconut oil in a skillet over medium heat for about 5 minutes on each side. Or, bake for 30 mins (15 minutes on each side) at 350 degrees F, until golden and crisp. To grill, pre-bake burgers for 15 minutes at 350 degrees F oven before placing on a pre-heated grill until golden and crisp on each side. If gluten-intolerant, use certified GF oats, GF Tamari, and gluten-free breadcrumbs.

## Next Stop Nirvana



- 1 cup huckleberries
- 2 bananas, sliced
- 1 nectarine, chopped
- 1 peach, chopped
- 1 12-ounce can pineapple chunks
- 1 cup walnut halves, coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons pineapple juice
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons lime juice
- 1 teaspoon agave syrup
- 1/2 cup San Pellegrino Sparkling Mineral Water
- 1/4 cup candied ginger, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons chocolate mint leaves, crushed
- 1 ounce dark chocolate, grated
- Honey

Mix fruits and walnuts in medium-sized bowl. Mix juices, agave syrup, and water, pour over fruit and toss lightly with ginger and mint leaves. Separate into serving bowls, top with grated chocolate, and drizzle lightly with honey. Garnish with dark chocolate wafer cookies and serve immediately, else the sauce loses its fizz. Makes 4 good-sized helpings, or, 8-12 if split up over scoops of sherbet.

## Paula's Lasagna al Forno



### Sauce:

1/4 cup olive oil  
2 medium red onions, chopped  
4 cloves garlic, mashed  
1 bell pepper, chopped  
3 carrots, grated  
3 bay leaves  
1 tablespoon oregano  
2 teaspoons thyme  
1 tablespoon basil  
2 teaspoons rosemary  
2 teaspoons fennel  
1/2 cup dried parsley  
2 tablespoons paprika  
6 cups chopped fresh tomatoes  
2 6-ounce cans tomato paste  
1 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper  
2 tablespoons agave syrup  
vegetable broth

Sauté onion, garlic, and pepper in olive oil over medium heat until onion just begins to caramelize. Stir in carrots and herbs and cook until pungent, about another 10-15 minutes. Add tomatoes, tomato paste, black pepper, and agave syrup. Thin with broth as needed. Cover and simmer for 20-30 minutes.

### Lasagna:

1 sauce recipe  
1 pound DeBoles' Organic Jerusalem Artichoke Lasagna Noodles



1 quart whole milk ricotta cheese  
2 cups toasted walnuts, chopped  
8 ounces grated Asiago cheese  
2 bunches fresh spinach, chopped  
1 pound whole milk mozzarella cheese

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Spread a layer of sauce on the bottom of a Dutch oven. (Baking dishes are too shallow.) Lay enough dry lasagna noodles on top of sauce to cover it. Spread half the ricotta on top of the noodles for the next layer. Top with 1/3 of the nuts, and 1/4 of the Asiago. Add another layer of sauce, then another layer of noodles, making sure the noodles run the opposite direction of the first layer. Spread spinach over the noodles and top with sliced mozzarella, saving enough to grate for the top. Add another layer of sauce, then more noodles, again, changing the direction the noodles run. Spread the rest of the ricotta on the noodles next and another 1/3 of the nuts. Add a final layer of noodles in the other direction, then more sauce. Top with the rest of the mozzarella, grated, and the rest of the nuts. Cover with foil held in place by the Dutch oven lid. Bake for one hour. Let sit covered for 30 minutes before serving.

**If you want the challenge of trying both vegan and gluten-free, here it is,  
and well worth the learning curve!**

## Cherry Oat Sunday Cake

3 c. whole, steel-cut oats  
1 c. sorghum flour  
1 ½ c. coconut sugar  
½ c. potato flour  
¼ c. tapioca flour  
1 tsp. xanthum gum  
1 tsp. ground cinnamon  
1 tsp. baking powder  
1 tsp. baking soda  
1 tsp. sea salt  
3 medium-sized honeycrisp apples (we've tried other types of apples, but none compares)  
2 c. filtered spring water  
1 c. coconut milk (in a carton in the refrigerator section—not in a can)  
½ c. agave  
½ c. sunflower oil  
2 flax "eggs" (see below)  
1 banana, pureed  
2 c. frozen, organic dark cherries

**Applesauce:**

Peel, core, and coarsely chop apples. Place apples, water, and ½ c. coconut sugar in medium-sized crockpot on low and cook 8-10 hours, stirring occasionally. The thickness of the applesauce at this point depends on the juiciness of the apples. If it needs to further thicken, remove lid and continue to cook on low until desired consistency is reached. Cool, spoon into canning jars, about 2/3 full. Makes about 3 cups. Set aside 1 c. Store remaining in refrigerator up to 1 month. Freezes beautifully for up to a year.

**Flax “eggs”:**

For each “egg” soak 1 tbsp. flax meal in 1½ tbsp. warm water for 20 min.

**Cake:**

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees. Spray 9 x 12 pan with sunflower oil and set aside. Blend remaining dry ingredients in a large mixing bowl. In a separate bowl, blend wet ingredients with 1 c. applesauce. Then stir into dry mixture. Continue stirring for 5 minutes. Mixture should be somewhat foamy. Add cherries. Fold into batter until cherries are well distributed. Cover bowl with a slightly dampened towel and let batter sit 15 minutes. Pour into prepared pan. Cover again and let sit another 15 minutes. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour or until inserted toothpick comes out clean. Allow to cool before serving.

**Gluten-tolerant version:**

Substitute 1 ¾ c. unbleached pastry flour for the following: sorghum flour, potato flour, tapioca flour, and xanthum gum.

**Vegetarian version:** Use 2 large eggs in place of flax “eggs.”

# That's it. Thanks for reading!

If you know someone who would enjoy this free ebook, please feel free to share it with them. Just send them a link to this page right here:

<http://paulamariecoomer.com/going-vegetarian>

And if you're interested in more tips and recipes to start your plant-based journey, including the following recipes, please try out my food memoir *Blue Moon Vegetarian: Reflections, Recipes, and Advice for a Plant-Based Diet*.

## Main Dishes

Baby Lentil Stew  
East Meets West Burritos  
Eggless in Clarkston  
Five Beans  
Neat Loaf  
Oatmeal/Cottage Cheese Burgers  
Oatmeal-Walnut Burger  
Oatmeal-Walnut Loaf  
Paula's Lasagna Al Forno  
Phil's Fabulous Three-Bean Nachos  
Phil's West Texas Greek Company Supper  
Red-Hot Four-Star Two-Bean Burritos  
Spicy Chili Bean Stew  
Spicy Goulash  
Spring Fever  
Tesla's Rice

## Side Dishes, Soups, and Breads

Garden Lentil Soup  
Garlic-Thyme Farm Cheese  
Grandma's Pan Bread  
Great (E)scape Vichyssoise  
Grilled Vegetable Polou  
Herbed French Lentil Soup  
Hot Tomato-Basil Casserole  
Icebox Soup  
Kentucky Potato Salad for a Crowd  
Phil's Famous Baked Beans



*"A book that will feed all the essential parts of you: your body, your mind, your soul."*

—Kim Barnes, author of the internationally-acclaimed *In the Kingdom of Men*

Phil's Hot-and-Spicy Stir-Fried Green Beans  
Sweet Lentil Polou  
Three-Bean Cheesy Spoonbread

## Breakfast

Brunch Florentine  
Paula's Version of the World's Best Granola  
Phil's Mellow Yellow Scramble  
Phil's Pepper-Onion-Garlic-Cheese Omelet  
Skillet Cakes

## Lunch

Bloodroot Stew With Grilled Sunflower Sandwiches  
Five Bean Sandwich Spread  
Mighty Fine Taco Salad  
Phil's Daily Hemp Shake  
Phil's Vegetable Roll-ups

## Dessert and Snacks

Agave Caramel Corn  
Banana-Peach Crunch  
Elegant Dessert Gorp  
Maui Mix  
Next Stop Nirvana  
Protein Balls  
Pumpkin Pudding