

delicious. TEST REPORT



VEGAN PLEASURES
Chef Lydia Downey;
hearty ribollita; dive-in
choc-nut brownie



THE COOKERY SCHOOL



WHERE **Demuths Cookery School, Bath**
(demuths.co.uk)

THE COURSE **Vegan Fast and**

Delicious, 10am-4pm, £95, including refreshments and lunch
TESTER **Jess Sutton**

WHAT IT'S LIKE Demuths Cookery School specialises in plant-based cooking. Owned by chef, restaurateur and veggie pioneer Rachel Demuth, its HQ is a beautiful Georgian townhouse in Bath. My class was a half-day but the school also offers full-day, evening, weekend and longer courses; all are vegetarian, covering Mexican, Indian, Japanese, Spanish, Italian and other cuisines, plus raw and gluten-free cooking classes too.

Bath looked wonderful in the morning sunshine and the warmth of the city was echoed in the friendly welcome from staff. The school has great views – almost too gorgeous to turn away from while we tucked into our freshly baked vegan biscuits and cups of tea. The recipes we

cooked were all seasonal – the veg sourced from a local producer. I was excited to learn that we'd be cooking and eating two lunches as well as pudding... Yes!

WHAT I LEARNED Some people hear the word 'vegan' and a 'must I eat rabbit food?' panic ensues. The class showed this doesn't need to be the case. All the ingredients we used were easy to buy in any supermarket, and we were tutored by two chefs who really know their stuff. Lydia taught us expert knife skills, getting us to chop vegetables extra-fine to make our starter, ribollita – a substantial, chunky Tuscan-style vegetable soup. While the soup was simmering, the other tutor, Janifa, explained how to make farinata or socca, a pancake-like Italian dish that's made with chickpea flour.

Crispy tofu is a dish I love but I've never managed to quite get it right when I cook it at home, so I was eager to discover from Janifa that there's a secret: you coat marinated tofu in cornflour, along with various spices and sesame seeds, so the outside goes gorgeously crisp when you fry it. It was impossible to resist and we ate piece after piece, dunked in sweet chilli sauce or, as here, in tahini dressing.

On to pudding... We were shown how

to make vegan labneh (strained yogurt) to accompany chocolate and hazelnut brownies. To make our vegan version we used plain soya yogurt (instead of the more usual greek yogurt) that had been strained overnight. We were encouraged to add our own flavourings, such as rosewater, orange blossom water, maple syrup and agave syrup. Being able to tweak the flavours to our liking was, for me, one of the highlights of the class.

When it was ready the labneh was served with brownies that were gooey and rich – chia seeds were used as a binding agent instead of eggs. Getting the right quantities to make a vegan bake with the right flavour and texture can be a challenge, but Lydia and Janifa got it spot on.

THE VERDICT Most of my fellow students were meat eaters, which shows the course isn't just attractive to vegans. What we learned was suitable for any skill set, with a good combination of demos from the chefs and hands-on work. Expect to leave with a booklet of recipes, a wealth of knowledge and extra tips from the tutors, and to feel inspired to cook meals without meat as the centrepiece. The place has credentials too: it won the 2017 Crumbs Award for best cookery school. I recommend it.



THE TAKE-HOME TIPS By expert teacher Lydia Downey

- A large chef's knife is easier to use than a small one to chop vegetables finely.
- In vegan baking you can use soaked chia seeds in place of eggs: 1 tbsp of chia seeds with 3 tbsp of water equals

roughly 1 egg. Use them whole or ground and mix with the water, allow to sit for a few minutes until they take on a gooey texture, then use like eggs.

- Use a tub of dairy-free coconut yogurt if you don't have time to strain natural yogurt to make labneh.