

CHECK THE Vibe

Written By Carole Audet

Todd Anderson is a vegan content and recipe creator in San Diego. Vegan for almost six years, he's found a niche for himself online as the Turnip Vegan, a play on 'turn up'. His goal is to build a wellness brand to motivate people and provide them with the tools necessary to transition to a vegan lifestyle.

Todd remembers clearly the events leading up to his decision to go vegan. During a trip to Las Vegas with friends, he indulged in a little too much drinking and an unhealthy diet. This took a toll on his body, and he was feeling it by the time he arrived home.

"I had this crazy hangover. I was sitting on the couch, and I was like, you know, I've just got to do better. I want to make better food choices," he recalls.

Looking for inspiration, he found the documentary *Food Choices* on Netflix. "As I look back on this, I'm so glad it was called *Food Choices*, because if it was called something to do with veganism, I would have been like, no, I'm not watching that."

Partway through the documentary, he experienced what he describes as "my moment." He explains, "There was one gentleman that said, 'We're the only species that drinks milk from another species.' For some reason, that line connected with me more than anything I ever heard before."

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From that point forward, the way he looked at food and what he put into his body changed. He decided to "try this out" without committing to going fully vegan in that moment.

"I started the journey for health reasons. For me to be able to fulfill the things I want to do in life, I need my health. Initially it was more of a selfish reason, but the moment I started tearing down certain walls, I started seeing other things. I remember one day looking at my partner's dog and I had this crazy connection. He can understand me, the communication is there. So now my journey has changed and I'm vegan for the animals. I'm vegan for the next generation, I'm vegan for the planet, I'm vegan for all those reasons."

Like many of us who start on our vegan journeys, Todd didn't know what to eat initially. This led him to make the comical decision to buy a Ninja and eat what he could blend. Not surprisingly, this left him feeling unsatisfied. A visit to an Indian restaurant provided the shift in perspective he needed. Once he incorporated a variety of foods, he had much more energy and he was finally able to lose a bit of stubborn fat around his middle, and all the food-focused worries of the past disappeared along with it.

His venture into sharing his journey online started as a way to educate those around him who didn't understand, and to prove to them that eating plant-based is delicious and nutritious. "I wanted to start a page. I looked at a bunch of other vegan influencers and I saw Sweet Potato and Badass Vegan, and I was like, I need a cool name, too. I was thinking, how about Turn Up Vegan? Turn up your health. Turn up your knowledge. Turn up your life. Turn up the things that are important to you. Then I spelled it turnip like the vegetable to have a double meaning."

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For the first three years after Turnip Vegan was born, Todd explored the vegan scene in San Diego. He rounded up every vegan he could find, met with each at the beach, set up a camera, and had a conversation. Some were athletes, some not. Then he filmed in restaurants, which led to getting a gig filming for a restaurant that now has multiple locations. "I originally started the page to show people that it's not just salads. There's a wonderful lifestyle out here. I've been blessed that it has turned into what it is today."

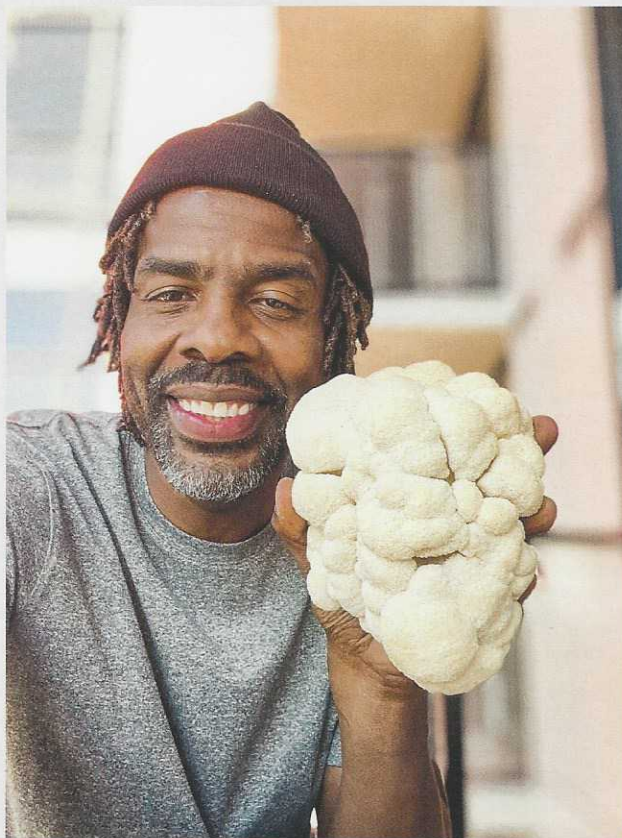
Todd's videography sideline has served him well. This work put him in front of amazing people from which he learned a lot. "Some of the things I know today I learned from filming for others. My first three years of veganism opened up so many opportunities for me. I

learned a lot and I built a lot of good relationships."

Once the pandemic hit and all the work he had lined up was cancelled, he decided to film himself creating a vegan recipe. "I saw Tik Tok was becoming a video forward way of viewing content. I did my first video, and I remember plating it nicely. I remember looking at it and wondering where I had learned that. I realized that those three years of me travelling, spending time in the kitchen, spending hours editing footage meant I picked up all these tools. I love vegan food and I love impressing people, especially on Tik Tok. Sometimes I make something and people can't believe it's vegan."

Todd is inspired in the kitchen now, the complete opposite of his pre-vegan days. And he grows a few items himself, including mushrooms and herbs. By 2030, he wants to grow the majority of his food. "I think that plays a part in me being creative. It's something about planting this seed, watching it grow, harvesting it, cutting it, cooking it, and then eating it. It's a beautiful process."

For someone who used to dislike mushrooms, they now feature prominently in the content Todd shares, and he has a particular fondness for lion's mane





mushrooms, which are gaining popularity but there is very little information about how to use them. That's why he developed his *It's All About Lion's Mane* cookbook. "When I got into growing my own mushrooms last year, I started to search for different

ways to prepare lion's mane but found only one or two. I felt it was a good space to create a book, considering people are cooking more with culinary mushrooms," he explains.

Todd and his partner, Samantha, launched Spoiled Vegan Café, which takes its name from the vegans Todd initially conversed with on camera who went on to form a group that called themselves the Spoiled Vegans. After they went their separate ways, Todd moved to downtown San Diego above Red Hat Coffee. After conversing with the owner about making food available there, Todd and Samantha did just that, pop-up style.



He learned a lot from the time spent experimenting in the kitchen with Samantha, who has a background in food and nutrition. They eventually signed a lease for space, but that was a mere month before the pandemic hit. Despite that, they remained in operation until January 2022, but shut down then because of their less than ideal location. They will be reopening in Lemon Grove and providing the food in an existing coffee shop. "It's going to be more like Spoiled Vegan Express, but I think it will be the perfect location and a good way to come back."

Todd's first travel destination upon becoming vegan was Costa Rica. He wondered whether he would have difficulty finding vegans options while there, but he needn't have worried. "I remember driving on this narrow road and seeing the biggest 'Go Vegan' sign I've ever seen. It was spray-painted on this big building. We all jumped out of the car and took photos in front of it. We discovered Costa Rica is very vegan friendly."

This experience highlighted for him that the vegan movement is happening everywhere. "Throughout my travels, I would say every place I've been was vegan forward or had a lot of options. Brazil was difficult, I think I found only one or two vegan-ish places there. But beyond that, it's been wonderful."

Despite the lack of plant-based food options in Brazil, he remembers it as one of his favourite trips, in particular, his journey down the Amazon River from Belém which gave him the opportunity to be taught by a tribe how to pick acai and cacao. "That experience was incredible. It also made me feel so grateful. I think experiences like that have allowed me to downgrade. Right now, I'm downgrading my apartment to a smaller space so I could get an RV and travel half time. I think seeing different perspectives allowed me to say, hey, we don't need all these things to have happiness. It was beautiful to see that, and the people were beautiful too."

Helping people transition to a vegan lifestyle is at the heart of everything Todd does, all the while keeping in mind his own pre-vegan mindset. "I understand that everyone needs to have their moment, and I try to be there when they have that moment and show them how much fun I'm having with the lifestyle. That's why I try to make these videos colourful and creative. I use music that I and others love to show I'm not any different just because I eat plants." ●

If you'd like to learn more about Todd, his cookbooks and YouTube videos, find him online at turnipvegan.com and on social media:

   @turnipvegan