



COOKS & CHEFS

How to Make Vegan Eggless Eggs

Vegan ramen Innovation in Los Angeles.

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Bowls of soup at Ramen Hood, the ramen stall at Grand Central Market in Downtown Los Angeles, arrive, as ramen often does, garnished with a halved egg, submerged slightly in the broth, its glossy gold yolk peeking out from under a stripe of *togarashi*.

But that's not really an egg. Ramen Hood is a vegan ramen shop, and its egg is a vegan one, hatched in a kitchen rather than in a coop.

"We knew we couldn't sell ramen without it," Rahul Khopkar, the chef, says. He is not vegan and does not like eggs in ramen ("I will trade you my egg for your pork," he says) but he appreciates the egg's role. "It adds that velvety texture," Khopkar says. "It's a different kind of richness."

What he and Ilan Hall (the owner/proprietor of the shop) wanted to do, he says, was not just approximate the flavor of a chicken egg, but also make it resemble a chicken egg. We eat with our eyes first, after all. And so Khopkar began researching. He found a blogger who made an egg in a hole using tofu, which inspired him to experiment with using silken tofu as the egg white. That didn't quite work out; though the addition of agar firmed up the tofu

nically, it also gave the tofu an undesirable, grainy consistency. Hall suggested Khopkar go back a step and use unsweetened soymilk instead.



It worked. Khopkar mixes soymilk (from local producers [Mighty Soy](http://www.mightysoy.com/)) with agar and sea salt and brings it up to a low simmer; it's then poured into half-egg molds and refrigerated. When they've set, the crew then uses a melon baller to scoop out a bit of the white to make room for the yolk.

“The yolk was a little more complicated,” Khopkar says, before correcting himself. “A lot more complicated. We wanted the yolk to pop, and to have that same kind of luxuriousness that an egg yolk has. It turns out that emulating that velvety texture is very hard to do.”



They knew they'd use nutritional yeast as the base ("nooch," as it's called among those who use it, often is used to mimic cheese because of its savory richness). But what else? They spent a week experimenting and researching and experimenting again before finally coming up with their mix. It consists mostly of nutritional yeast, but also has B vitamins and carotene for color (turmeric, which is the perfect shade of yellow, was ruled out early on because of its strong flavor); black salt for that hint of sulfur; and sodium alginate to thicken. The powder is blended with water, poured into half-sphere molds and frozen.



When it's time to assemble the eggs, the frozen yolks are dropped in a calcium chloride bath and stirred for a few seconds. At this point, the calcium chloride reacts with the sodium alginate to form a thin membrane around the still-liquid yolks. (Ferran Adrià fans in the crowd will recognize this technique as spherification.) The yolks are then transferred to a shallow pan of hot water to temper. "So you don't bite into a frozen yolk," Khopkar says.

The yolks are then carefully dropped into the whites and voilà: a vegan egg.



On average, Ramen Hood makes a batch of seventy-two eggs Monday through Thursday. On Friday through Sunday, they make a double batch. If Amazon is out of half-sphere molds, it's probably because Khopkar bought out the inventory.

As for how the egg tastes: it's not exactly like a chicken egg. But it doesn't *not* taste like an egg, either. More importantly, it does what it's supposed to do. It makes Ramen Hood's sunflower-seed broth, already creamy and lovely, that much richer. If you are the sort of person who orders an egg with your ramen, you can consider the egg here just as integral as everything else in the bowl: the Sun Noodles, the king oyster mushrooms, the chili threads, the nori. Altogether, it is very satisfying, as good ramen always is.



As much thought as it took to create the egg, Khopkar feels like there's work to be done yet. Specifically, he wants to push the egg's richness even further. At the moment, though, he's wrestling with how extra fat negatively affects the membrane formation.

"The versatility of an actual egg is uncanny," he says. "In the vegan world, you need multiple types of products to replicate that versatility." Khopkar pauses and reflects again.

"Eggs are straight up amazing."

EGG, LA, RAMEN, RAMEN HOOD, VEGAN EGG
