



The Meatball Shop's quinoa summer squash salad is one of the newest additions to the menu. (Credit: The Meatball Shop)

EAT AND DRINK

The Meatball Shop adds more vegetables to menu

It may be called The Meatball Shop, but if chef Daniel Holzman had his way, the popular fast-casual chain would be known for its vegetable dishes, too.

"Not to be a bragger, but I think we have an amazing selection of delicious vegetables ... and I think our value is really extraordinary," Holzman said. "If the gimmick of The Meatball Shop wasn't the meatballs, and it was just a restaurant, I think we would be known for our vegetables first."

The restaurant is making some changes on its menu at all six NYC locations that bring a greater focus to its veggies, too.

For the past six months, The Meatball Shop has been working on a menu overhaul that launched this week that adds a new section alongside the popular beef, pork and chicken balls and its daily greens, roast veggies and market salad sides.

The "Sink Veggies" will rotate seasonally and are divided into legumes, grains, raw and cooked. Currently on the new menu are a spicy and crunchy chickpea salad for the legume; a quinoa summer squash salad for grains; a golden beet and fennel salad for raw; and pickled mushrooms for cooked.

Holzman said it felt like it was time to add something new to the food menu.

"We change the beverage menu three times a year, but the food menu has been really static. ... The beef meatballs haven't changed in six years," Holzman said. "Every time we change the beverage menu, we should be bringing something to the food menu to be a little more fun."

The additions also come at a time when a wave of NYC restaurants like Nix, Little Park, Narcissa, Semilla and Take Root are known for their "vegetable-forward" menus. And even though most customers naturally associate The Meatball Shop with its meatballs, its vegetable dishes sell just as well.

"From a financial perspective, the meatballs are the core of our business, but we sell a lot of veggies," Holzman said. "The vegetables are what I really find to be the area where I get to be creative, and we get to cook food that still excites me."

As the chain continues to expand — it's planning to open its seventh NYC restaurant this fall in Hell's Kitchen — it has looked to farms that can keep up with its growth. It recently started a new relationship with the Brooklyn-based Gotham Greens, which has several rooftop greenhouse facilities in the city.

"We take so much care into the sourcing of our ingredients," Holzman said. "When you find a good, local vegetable farmer, you can stick with them for a long time."

The Meatball Shop's quinoa summer squash salad

Among the new menu items that launched this week at The Meatball Shop is a quinoa summer squash salad.

"We've always had a lot of interesting, seasonal, locally foraged, hot veggies available, but the idea is really expanding the cold offerings over the summer," chef Daniel Holzman said. "What do I want to eat in the summer? I want to eat a crunchy vegetable salad."

Holzman shares the recipe for his quinoa summer squash salad:

Makes 9 cups

3 cups red quinoa, cooked

2 lbs. yellow squash, sliced and drained (see squash prep)

3 cups cherry tomato vinaigrette (see recipe)

1/4 cup parsley, chopped

1/3 cup lemon juice

1 tsp. kosher salt

Combine all ingredients, mixing well.

Cover and store in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours.

Stir before serving.

Squash prep

2 lbs. yellow squash (about 4 large squash)

2 pinches kosher salt

Wash the squash well in a water bath, wiping to remove any sand.

Trim both ends and then cut into 1/4 slices.

Toss with salt and mix well, careful to separate slices stuck together.

Let sit for 2 hours, then drain the liquid.

Cherry tomato vinaigrette

3 cups cherry tomatoes, stemmed

4 cloves garlic, minced

1 small onion, diced

6 sprigs thyme

1 1/2 tsp. kosher salt

1/2 cup olive oil

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

Toss tomatoes, garlic, onion, thyme, salt and oil.

Put into a hotel pan, cover with foil and roast at 475 degrees for 20 minutes.

Cool and transfer to a container.

Stir in vinegar gently to avoid breaking up the tomatoes too much.

Remove thyme sprigs and refrigerate.