

Twelve Plants, Five Courses, One Summer Series: Plant-based meals even a carnivore could love

“If this were my situation every night, I’d never eat meat again,” my friend Melissa said of our Twelve (Plants) dinner in Newport. For her birthday, we traveled to Root on Broadway, where Twelve (Plants) was popping up with a 5-course, plant-based, prix fixe dinner. While several restaurants offer vegan cuisine, and several offer a chef’s tasting menu, I can’t think of any other fine dining experience in which every course is *designed* to be plant-based. And as my friend Melissa pointed out, the food is so magnificent that even the most avid meat-and-cheese lover will not feel deprived.

Since mid-June, Chef Pete Carvelli and Chef Stefano Mariotta have been collaborating on a biweekly summer dining series, creating unique multi-course menus for each dinner. I asked the chefs in advance what wine might pair well with our meal, since the dinners are BYOB, and the chefs suggested a rosé, which was exciting because Melissa and I love rosé and we’d have probably brought a bottle regardless of the answer.

We arrived at 6pm for the early seating (the second begins at 8pm), and we were given two wine glasses. Root on Broadway is a plant-based breakfast and lunch spot—in fact, it’s the only exclusively plant-based restaurant in Newport—and by day they offer juices and smoothies, breakfast bowls and grain bowls, as well as sandwiches, teas and coffees. But since summer 2020, owners Paul and Kate Webber have collaborated with Carvelli to host biweekly pop-up dinners.

The interior is small but bright, with wooden high-top tables, a couple of round tables and window bar seats affixed with vibrant yellow chairs. The scents from the openly designed kitchen wafted to the corner where Melissa and I sat. “This is going to be good,” we both said, eyeing the chefs at work.



We began with an *amuse bouche*: a chickpea panisse with beet “ketchup” and garlic aioli. This chickpea fritter shaped like a French fry was perfectly crisp on the outside and soft on the inside. Although I’m not keen on “regular” ketchup, I would buy bottles of this beet version. It was sweet, but not in an artificial way.

Along with the panisse was a cubed watermelon “sashimi,” topped with avocado purée and served over a bed of toasted panko. Neither Melissa nor I could understand how roasted watermelon could adopt the *exact* same texture as sashimi; this is a culinary feat of mystical proportions.







The creativity of each dish skyrocketed from there. The first course was a leek cooked in a banana leaf (which we slid off onto a separate plate), with parsley emulsion, bell pepper couli and toasted hazelnuts. The typically tough leek was softened, the hazelnuts gave it a crunch and the parsley was unusually distinct. The second course, a cucumber ceviche topped with sliced radishes, was served with a cucumber dill sauce, avocado and lime crema. Dill is one of my secret favorite ingredients, and the lime crema really took it to the next level, making me feel like I was on a mountaintop in Peru.

Between the third course — seared artichoke hearts with artichoke emulsion, black olive caramel and crispy shallots — and the fourth course (which I'll return to), we were given a palate-cleansing fennel sorbet. Who makes a perennial herb into a sorbet? It was surprisingly accurate to the taste of fennel, yet also sweetly palatable (as well as cleansing).



It was the fourth and main course, however, that did me in: a Hearts of Palm "No-Crab" Cake. Served with a spicy dill remoulade and roasted red pepper salsa, it mimicked the very taste and texture of crab cakes. It's hard to choose a favorite among the plates, but this might have been my favorite.

We ended the experience with a Lemon Tart, served with seasonal berries, lemon gel and a marsala cookie; it was light, zesty and refreshing. Basically a health food. Best of all, the five courses were of the Goldilocks variety — "just right" in size — allowing us to get our fill without needing to be wheeled out after dinner.

The Twelve (Plants) summer series extends through August, likely into the fall — but also keep an eye out for a future endeavor between this dynamic duo of chefs as they work on a new project called Fire and Fennel (@fire_and_fennel). If there's one thing I learned from this entirely plant-based dinner series, it's that Chef Carvelli and Chef Mariotta will know how to surprise and delight you.

*Reserve a spot at **TwelvePlants.co** or follow @twelve.plants on Instagram; Root on Broadway, 6 Broadway, Newport*