



'You've Got to Trust Your Spirit': Tabitha Brown on Healing, Cooking from the Heart, and TikTok

By Courtney Davison
2025-08-21 10:34:29



"After the first 10 days, the headache just disappeared," Brown recalls. "I thought, OK, I'm onto something here."

That decision transformed not only her health but also her career. She began sharing vegan recipes with followers online. In the early days of the pandemic, she joined TikTok, and her audience exploded. "I had a million followers in the first 30 days," she says. "That did blow me away."

Since then, she's authored a *New York Times* bestselling cookbook, released her own line of seasonings, and continued to grow her online audience with her signature warmth, wisdom, and approachable recipes. We caught up with Brown to talk TikTok fame, salt-free flavor, and her go-to summer grill recipes.

In Brief

- Tabitha Brown shares how shifting to a vegan diet cured her years-long headaches and transformed her health and career.
- She talks about cooking from the heart, using salt-free seasoning for health equity, building community on TikTok, and trusting your intuition. **Read on for the full interview and watch the video below.**

Today Tabitha Brown is one of the most iconic vegan voices of her generation, but she wasn't always plant-based. "When you're from the South, out in the country, and lack resources, you eat whatever you get," says Brown, reflecting on her upbringing in Eden, North Carolina. Brown became interested in plant-based eating as a teenager, adopting a vegetarian diet in hopes of easing painful menstrual cramps.

Years later, Brown developed debilitating symptoms that doctors suspected were autoimmune in nature. "I had a terrible headache in the back of my head and they couldn't figure out why," Brown recalls. The pain lasted 19 months, sometimes making it hard to walk or even open her eyes. After watching *What the Health* on Netflix, she decided to try going vegan for 30 days.

Has TikTok changed the way you cook?

Tabitha Brown: It didn't change how I cook. It just changed how I film ... I used to go live on Facebook for like 45 minutes or an hour every day at five o'clock. ... My daughter kept telling me, "Mom, you should get on TikTok." Finally, I said, "OK." Back then [TikTok videos had to be] 60 seconds, and I thought, Oh, my God! I've got to show a recipe in 60 seconds?! But I realized, oh, wait, more people can watch this instantly. People like to see really quick what they can do to make a recipe themselves and get it done. TikTok definitely introduced a new way of shooting for me.

Your carrot dogs are a cookout hit. Any other favorite grill recipes?

Brown: One of my favorites is a barbecue jackfruit kebab: jackfruit, red onions, pineapple, mushrooms, and red bell peppers. I use canned green jackfruit, which has little triangle chunks you can slide onto skewers. Brush it all with your favorite barbecue sauce. Then let them sit on the grill, turning them a couple times. I like to put avocado on the grill too, and peppers and onions, zucchini, yellow squash, and mushrooms. Oyster

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mushrooms on the grill are amazing.

When you need to throw together a quick dinner, what's your go-to?

Brown: I love sautés. So I'll do Tuscan kale with sweet potatoes, mushrooms, onions, bell peppers, and I just sauté it all up together.

Why did you decide to make your seasoning line salt-free?

Brown: When I was younger and I first started cooking, I remember, my granny told me, 'You never want to oversalt your food. Season your food with herbs and spices.' So that was something I always remembered. And then seeing so many family members and other people who look like me have high blood pressure and suffer from different ailments made me realize, I've got to take care of myself. ... When I started doing content, I was more vocal about it, telling people, 'Hey, we as Black and brown people have the highest rates of high blood pressure ... and diabetes. Let's not use so much salt.' We can season other ways. So it was really to give people an option to season their food without the risk of it hurting them.

You create a lot of dishes using budget-friendly staples. What's always in your pantry?

Brown: Oh, my Lord. I've got so much in there. There's always seasonings. I always keep gluten-free pasta or rice on hand because you can [build] dishes easily with those, and I always have some type of wraps, like spinach wraps or sun-dried tomato wraps. And pecans, because I use them to make [meaty dishes].

Many of your recipes don't include measurements. Why?

Brown: If you don't trust yourself to cook without measurements, that means you don't trust yourself to make decisions. So I wanted to encourage people. You know what you like. If you don't like a lot of something, don't put that in there. If you know you like something a little bit, then put in a little bit. You've got to trust your spirit. So that's why I called [my first cookbook] *Cooking from the Spirit*.

Tab's Spice Cabinet

Want to season like Tabitha Brown? These are the go-to spices she keeps on hand to make every dish sing. Just don't forget her golden rule: "Remember, when it comes to seasoning, you can always add more to taste, but you can't take it out once it's in there!" says Brown. "For instance, I love ground cinnamon and dried ginger, but I use a light hand with them because they can be overpowering." Brown says that she also goes light on blends that have added salt, such as nori komi furikake and some everything bagel seasonings: Less is more.

- Garlic powder (not to be confused with garlic salt) and onion powder
- Salt-free seasoning blends, such as Like Sweet Like Smoky seasoning (from Brown's line with McCormick) and poultry seasoning (good for seasoning mushrooms)
- Everything bagel seasoning
- Curry powder
- Nori komi furikake seasoning, to add seafood flavor
- Dried parsley, oregano, basil, and dill
- Black salt (aka kala namak), for adding eggy flavor to dishes
- Himalayan pink salt
- Lemon pepper

Photo courtesy Tiffani Tyler