

Books, SEOs, and Als. Recipe searching in print and on line.

October 2025

I had cause the other day to use Google to find a recipe for Vegetable Lasagna. While searching for it I reflected on the ways I have used to find recipes over the sixty odd years of my cooking life. How do they work? What if any are the issues with their use and who is affected by them? In these times of rampant plagiarism, knowledge theft and the sale of personal information is anyone being abused. This article is the result of my cogitations. I'm going to use Vegetable Lasagna as my test case in all recipe searches.

In Print

Published cookery/recipe books

Until I got a computer this was the first site of search. The success of it depends on my having either a cookery book for a cuisine or a generalist book that may give recipes for that cuisine. Or that someone I know has a copy they could lend me. It happens that I have four cookery books for Italian cuisine.¹ I spent a short time looking through them – indexes are a wonderful invention. None of them have a recipe for Vegetable Lasagna. Recipes for lasagna yes, but not Vegetable Lasagna.

There is little to take issue with in this search. Recipes published are in the public domain. I bought the book in which they are published and can do with them what I like. If I use it in say an academic paper I cite the source. I gave personal information in the sale transaction with the assumption that it would not be used for purposes other than the transaction. I assume the publisher had the right to publish and that any author's rights are being upheld. If royalties are due I assume they are being paid.

My cookery book

There were several years some time ago when I, like so many women in the home and young girls doing domestic science, cut recipes out of magazines and newspapers and pasted them in what became my personal recipe book. There were two volumes and they nestle among my published cookery books. A search through them also was unsuccessful – lasagnas yes, Vegetable Lasagna no.

This is an entirely personal search. If recipes are given to me by others I may have written their name above the recipe. But for recipes I cut out of newspapers and magazines unless there is a name printed with it then the recipe writer becomes anonymous. When I have not cut out the date of publication I have to make a guess. When I forget to cutout details of when the recipe was published I have to look at other things in the recipe like was it published pre- or post-Australia's adoption of the metric system for quantities (1966). It's nothing I've worried about as the recipes are in the public domain. I don't interrogate the newspapers or magazines assuming they have the rights to publish the material and the authors have been paid if they aren't on staff. I pay for the recipe when I buy the magazine. I don't give my personal details when buying the magazine or newspaper.

Relatives and friends

Back in the day this was a common way of getting recipes. It was often by a phone call, which may have led to taking down the recipe by hand balancing a notebook or a scrap of paper. The

¹ Over my fifty years of being a domestic cook and a food writer/ historian I have amassed more than a hundred cookery books. The majority are Australian within which I have a couple of books for Italian cuisine. There are also books I have collected other than Australian publications.

recipe would be pasted in my book or may have been put in loose leaf among the pages and usually ascribed to the giver of the recipe – Mary’s Quiche recipe, Geoffrey’s Barbecue Sauce recipe, Aunt Margot’s Butter Cake and so on. This was also how I became proficient at cooking Sri Lankan dishes – my birth cuisine - asking my father in this case who would give me verbal instructions. Dad’s passed on and I doubt he had anything to tell me about Italian cuisine anyway.

This method is the most private of my searches with the least need for me to worry about authorship or publication or what happens with my personal details which my relatives and friends know.

In the case of the Vegetable Lasagna I couldn’t think of anyone to ask.

On line

Facebook

I am an inveterate Facebooker (FB), often asking a culinary question and hoping some of my Facebook friends would post a response. So I posted on my FB page ‘I want a recipe for Vegetable Lasagna’ and sat back to see what happened.

I got eight replies from FB Friends when I started writing this article and I expect there will be more. I love them because they are like a throwback to the early days of recipe writing where the writer expected that you would know enough to just give you a paragraph of pretty general instructions. Here are a couple:

I have done this and recall it's time-consuming but tasty. Lots of roasting of capsicum and zucchini and wilting of spinach before the layering and baking of the lasagne itself.

Spinach. Blanche. Squeeze out water. Make a rich tomato sauce (red wine, onions, garlic, herbs etc.) Add spinach and cook it down to consistency you want. Proceed as usual with the rest.

FB is the first search type that collects information on me via my profile which I have to give it if I want to use the platform. Mind you, a library membership also collects personal information. It’s what happens with this information on FB that is problematic. Here’s how my friend Ross describes the working of FB.

‘Sadly almost anything you do on the net creates algorithms about you which determine how advertisements are targeted to you. Facebook can of course use your Facebook posts to determine ads targeting cooking, food or even flowers (yes, even your pictures have keywords attached to them). Sadly, it is not only that - if you went to your browser and spent 20 minutes browsing tourist information for Thailand you’ll find ads for Thailand appearing on your Facebook - Facebook also uses other sources such as browsing data or data from Google to determine your advertising.’

So, okay, these ads are an annoyance. But more than that, money has been made from my profile and posts. The aggregate of my data will be sold.

FB also owns Messenger. In my chats with FB friends using Messenger FB collects information. If I mention that I am going on Sunday to Ikea I will be the subject of targeted advertising not only from Ikea but from other stores that have the same products for sale as Ikea does. If I post that I am looking for a specific kitchen utensil say a Kenwood blender with a pasta attachment to

make lasagna then I will be snowed under with advertisements not only for that item but also other kitchen items like a Mixmaster or pressure cookers. FB will also know that I am a cook from the volume of posts I make about food and already FB sends me ads for cooking implements.

This material on FB's bad behaviour has come to me only recently. Does it mean I am going to stop posting on FB? No. But I may try to be more cautious in my posts and chats.

Happily on the subject of my post re Vegetable Lasagna, FB seems to have decided that I am not worth advertising to.

YouTube

I rarely watch anything on YouTube. For the purpose of this article I did. As I expected there was an abundance of YouTube clips on making lasagne and a few less on making a Vegetable Lasagne. The clips may advertise brands of the ingredients or give me a URL to more recipes or a site where I can learn more about the presenter(s) the brand of the ingredients or implements being used – they are what I would call advertorial.

I got lucky and in only my second look for a clip came across a couple called Inspired Taste. The recipe was simply given over 3 minutes. Techniques for cutting the vegies, softening them up, prepping the lasagne sheets and layering the lasagne looked easy where I might have had some qualms. The setting was a simple bare kitchen. And there was some soothing elevator music. I went looking for the recipe but couldn't find it – my usual dreadful search skills.

Here again the material has been created for public exposure so I had no qualms about using it. I assumed the presenter had the appropriate permissions if there were any to have.

Celebrity chefs on line

The internet is swamped with 'celebrity chefs' these days. What, I thought, would Jamie Oliver have to offer.

I put his name in the Search box at the top of my screen and got taken to his site. It had pictures of some of his dishes including one for Summer Veg Pasta with feta and rocket.

I clicked on that image and was taken to a page with the recipe on it. There was also information on how many serves the recipe would give me, the degree of difficulty, how long it would take to make it, nutrition per serve, the ingredients list and the method. Pretty comprehensive information.

He had a recipe for a Tasty Vegan Lasagna.

Ingredients

2 red onions

2 cloves of garlic

2 carrots

2 sticks celery

olive oil

1 teaspoon dried chilli flakes

100ml vegan Chianti wine

1 x 400 g tin of green lentils

2 x 400g tines of quality plum tomatoes

*1 kg mixed wild mushrooms
4 heaped tablespoons plain flour
800ml almond milk
70g vegan Cheddar cheese
300g dried lasagne sheets
½ a bunch of fresh sage (15g)*

Method

- 1. Peel the onions, garlic and carrots, trim the celery and pick the rosemary leaves, then finely chop.*
- 2. Scrape into a large pan on medium heat with 2 tablespoons of oil and the chilli flakes, and cook for 20 minutes, or until lightly golden.*
- 3. Pour in the wine and let it bubble and cook away, then tip in the lentils (juice and all) .*
- 4. Scrunch in the tomatoes, add one tin worth of water, then simmer over a low heat for 1 hour. Season to perfection with sea salt and black pepper.*
- 5. Meanwhile, working in batches, tear the mushrooms into a large non-stick frying pan on a medium heat and dry-fry for 5 minutes (this will bring out the nutty flavour), then transfer to a plate.*
- 6. Quickly wipe the pan, then pour in 4 tablespoons of oil and stir in the flour. Gradually whisk in the almond milk, simmer for 5 minutes to thicken, then pour into a blender.*
- 7. Add a third of the mushrooms and 50g of the cheese season with salt and pepper, then blitz until smooth.*
- 8. Preheat the oven to 180C/ 350F/ gas 4).*
- 9. Spoon a layer of tomato sauce into the bottom of a 25cm x 35cm baking dish, scatter over a few mushrooms, then cover with lasagne sheets and 5 tablespoons of creamy sauce. Repeat these layers three more times, finishing with all remaining creamy sauce and mushrooms.*
- 10. Grate over the remaining cheese. Pick the sage, tossing in a little oil, then push into the top layer.*
- 11. Bake at the bottom of the oven for 50 minutes, or until golden and bubbling. Leave to stand for 15 minutes before serving. Delicious served with a simple seasonal salad.*

I was exhausted just looking at the instructions. But the recipe looks doable and points to it for being a vegan recipe and using vegan Chianti and vegan cheese.

Again it was created for public use so no querulousness from me.

Google

Search engines like Google don't generate information. Here's how its searching is done:

Google Search works through a series of processes that include crawling, indexing, and ranking:

- **Crawling:** Google uses automated programs called crawlers to discover and gather information from web pages across the internet.
- **Indexing:** After crawling, Google organizes the information into an index, similar to an index in a book, which allows for quick retrieval of data when users perform searches.
- **Ranking:** When a user enters a query, Google's algorithms analyze the indexed pages and rank them based on relevance and quality, taking into account hundreds of factors to determine the best results to display.

If you've created content like a recipe for the web you will probably have done it through a program part of which is Search Engine Optimisation (SEO). You will be suggested some ways to get your site to be the first in something like Google's search.

I put Vegetable Lasagna in my search engine and I was taken to a page crowded with information. It told me what good vegetables were for making vegetable lasagna - spinach, beetroot, eggplant, capsicum, sweet potato, kales and carrot - and over fifty ways to make it – flan style, layered with veggies and noodles. Some recipes were accompanied by calorie information, how long it took to make, how many servings from the recipe. Some had embedded videos of a minute's length. There were several from t.v. cooking shows or dedicated food channels (like SBS² Food). Some were from recipe celebrity sites. Some from online kitchens. I was offered *A Pioneer Woman's Vegetable Lasagna Recipe*, *An Award Winning* recipe, and something called *Copycat Strouffer's Vegetable Lasagna Recipe*.

Here again is content made for public distribution, in this case to the searcher. I assume any acknowledgements it has to make are being made and that the appropriate rights and payments have been taken care of.

All of which makes a Google search an easy way to find a recipe for Vegetable Lasagna like this one from taste.com.au

Vegetable Lasagne

Darienne Sutton. Updated on: 10/04/25

Experts recommend eating 5 serves of fruit and vegetables a day. This hearty and healthy lasagne will be a major contributor to the vegetable portion of that challenge.

Ingredients (9)

- 300g low-fat fresh ricotta
- 1 tbsp olive dip (Verdale Olive Estate brand) or tapenade
- 4 (200g) fresh lasagne sheets (Latina brand)
- 250mls (1 cup) tomato pasta sauce (like Five Brothers Roasted Garlic & Onion)
- 250g (½ small) butternut pumpkin, peeled, deseeded, cut into thin slices
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg
- cracked black pepper, to taste
- 6 small (about 350g) egg tomatoes, sliced
- 1 bunch English spinach, washed, stems removed

Method

Step 1

Pre-heat oven to 200C, Cover a baking dish with nonstick baking paper.

Step 2

Combine the ricotta and olive dip or tapenade in a small mixing bowl with a fork.

Step 3

Place a sheet of pasta on the lined baking tray. Spoon 60mls (¼ cup) of pasta sauce over the pasta and spread evenly. Layer half of the pumpkin slices over the sauce. Sprinkle over half the nutmeg and some pepper. Top with half of the tomato slices and half of the spinach.

Step 4.

² Special Broadcasting Service which is partially funded by the Government to broadcast culturally diverse material.

Top with another sheet of pasta and spread with 60ml (1/4 cup) of pasta sauce. Spread the ricotta mixture evenly over the top of the sauce.

Step 5.

Layer with another sheet of pasta and spread with 60ml (1/4 cup) of pasta sauce. Layer with the remaining pumpkin slices and sprinkle with the rest of the nutmeg and some pepper. Top with the remaining spinach.

Step 6.

Spread the remaining pasta sauce over the spinach and top with a final layer of pasta. Top with the remaining tomato slices.

Step 7.

Bake in a preheated oven for 45 minutes or until the pumpkin is tender when tested with a skewer.

As a cook I reckon the recipe is doable with interesting alternative vegetables – pumpkin and spinach and not the usual red/ yellow/ green peppers (capsicum).

Google does collect information on users using different methods:.

- Tracking. Google employs top tracking devices to collect cookies, search history, pixels, and more from each website you visit.
- User-entry. Whenever you type into a form, Google obtains whatever you wrote. This includes names, addresses, emails, or even Google services that are unrelated to the search function.
- Third-party app use. Google watches you while you're using a third-party app that uses something like Google Analytics.
- Device sensors. Google sees your location whenever you're using apps with device sensors, like your GPS or the Maps app.

In Google's defense, it does not sell your user data to third parties as many companies do. It hoards this data and releases it to others in an anonymized form. It puts every user into various 'segments'. For example, based on their internet history, a single user might be placed in the dog lover segment, the London resident segment, the politically radical segment, and the female aged 25 to 34 segment. This might not sound too bad, but the potential for abuse and breaches is ever-present. And the outcome of compromised data could be devastating for many users. Google uses your data to profile you into different groups and other companies pay Google to learn more about users and send ads to selected groups.³

Artificial Intelligence (AI) chatbots

ChatGPT

A Large Language Model, like Chat GPT, is a sophisticated pattern-finding system designed to identify and replicate patterns in human language. It's "large" due to its extensive training on diverse text sources, enabling it to process and respond to a wide range of language-based queries and tasks. This vast training dataset allows Chat GPT to mimic human-like text generation, making it a powerful tool in natural language processing.

³ Safety Detectives What does Google Know About Me? 2025 Guide

They work through cosine similarity, looking for the next word that is the closest mathematically. It's an algorithm. It's training on lots of text or patterns. Different LLMs have different training sets, making them more suitable for professions with rich specialised vocabulary for vocabularies and technical registers. Because the internet is so full of recipes, and recipes have a particular language structure, they are an easy content type to predict. But it's still just predictive text. It's not a tool for providing content it's for shaping it.

The substance needs to be that of the inquirer, ChatGPT will then optimise the linguistic patterning for the presentation of the inquirer's ideas and information.

Here's how ChatGPT described its process with a cute reference to cooking.

It's a bit like talking to a very well-read chef who's memorised millions of recipes and cooking tips.

When you type in what ingredients you've got or the kind of dish you want, the program uses patterns it's learned from all those recipes to put together new ones that fit your request.

It doesn't "look up" a single recipe — it predicts each word step-by-step based on what would make sense next, using what it's learned from all the recipes, instructions, and food writing it's been trained on.

The result feels like it's "thinking," but really it's just following those learned patterns at lightning speed.

Here's what can happen. I asked ChatGPT 'Give me a recipe for Vegetable Lasagna.' This was the result.

Here's a simple recipe for vegetable lasagna that serves 4-6 people:

Ingredients:

- 8-10 lasagna sheets
- 2 cups ricotta cheese
- 1 cup grated mozzarella cheese
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 egg, beaten
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- salt and pepper to taste
- 2 cups marinara sauce (homemade or store-bought)
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese (for topping)

Vegetable layers:

- 1 zucchini, sliced
- 1 eggplant, sliced
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced
- 1 cup sliced mushrooms
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup spinach leaves

Instructions:

1. *Preheat oven to 180°C (350°F).*
 2. *Cook lasagna sheets according to package instructions. Drain and set aside.*
 3. *In a pan, sauté the onion, garlic, zucchini, eggplant, bell pepper, and mushrooms with a bit of olive oil until tender. Season with salt, pepper, basil, and oregano. Add spinach at the end and wilt.*
 4. *In a bowl, mix ricotta cheese, egg, mozzarella, Parmesan, salt, and pepper.*
 5. *In a baking dish, spread a layer of marinara sauce. Arrange lasagna sheets on top.*
 6. *Layer the vegetable mixture, followed by the ricotta mixture. Repeat the layers, finishing with lasagna sheets topped with marinara sauce and shredded mozzarella.*
 7. *Cover with foil and bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil and bake for another 15-20 minutes until golden brown.*
 8. *Let it rest for 10 minutes before serving.*
- Enjoy your vegetable lasagna!*

I was flummoxed. For one thing its response to my question was blindingly fast, beginning almost before I finished asking my question. The recipe was produced fully in a matter of seconds. The instructions are simple and clear with a standard structure for recipe writing. Searchers can leave comments. Someone had commented: 'I've suggested adding prep/cook time, serving size, and dish size details to make the recipe more practical.' Yes to that and also how about a list of the equipment I would need to make it.

It asked if I wanted a quick weeknight version (fewer steps, less cooking), or a gourmet layered version with roasted veggies and béchamel. I opted for the gourmet version. As with the main recipe this was delivered in a flash.

I opted to have it read aloud. It was pretty fast and in an American accent. Neither of which were wins for me.

I could give it the thumbs up 'good response' or thumbs down 'bad response. I upped the thumb.

The recipe looks doable the only questionable ingredient is the marinara sauce which is great for seafood dishes but would I reckon overwhelm the flavours. And the lack of tomato sauce or paste is also a mark down from me.

ChatGPT, like other chatbots, does collect and data from a recipe inquiry to inform future responses – prompts, responses and other personal details you may provide and saves them as long as your account is open... Even if you delete your saved conversations OpenAI can still use the saved data to improve its AI models... You can delete saved conversations easily- just select the prompt you want to delete then press the Trash icon....OpenAI's privacy policy does state that they'll anonymize your personal information when using your conversations to improve the service.[5] But, there's no guarantee that all sensitive information will be hidden or stripped.⁴

⁴ Wiki How to do anything

AI recipe generator

Matai described the work of a recipe generator as this.

Online recipe generators use algorithms and natural language processing to create recipes based on user input. Here's a breakdown:

- 1. User Input: You provide details like ingredients, dietary restrictions, cooking time, and cuisine preferences.*
- 2. Database Search: The generator searches a vast database of recipes, often sourced from cookbooks, food blogs, or user submissions.*
- 3. Algorithmic Processing: The system applies filters and ranking algorithms to match your input with suitable recipes. This might involve machine learning models trained on recipe patterns.*
- 4. Recipe Generation: If no exact match exists, the generator might create a new recipe by combining ingredients, cooking methods, and flavor profiles from various sources.*
- 5. Output: The generator presents you with one or more recipes, often with adjustments based on your preferences. Some generators also consider factors like nutritional information, flavor pairing, and cooking techniques to create unique recipes.*

I tried out freeairrecipegenerator. The site asked me whether I wanted a particular dish or particular vegetables or other ingredients. I asked for a vegetable lasagna recipe.

Classic Layers of Roasted Vegetables Lasagna

Ingredients

For the Roasted Vegetables:

- 1 medium zucchini, sliced into 5mm rounds
- 1 medium eggplant, sliced into 5mm rounds
- 1 red bell pepper, deseeded and sliced
- 1 yellow bell pepper deseeded and sliced
- 3 tbsp olive oil, divided
- 1 tsp oregano
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp black pepper

For the Rich Tomato Sauce:

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 small yellow onion, finely diced
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 800ml (28 oz) can crushed tomatoes
- 1 tsp dried basil
- ½ tsp sugar
- Salt and black pepper to taste

For the Bechamel Sauce:

- 50g unsalted butter
- 50g all-purpose flour
- 750 ml whole-milk, warmed
- ¼ tsp ground nutmeg
- ½ tsp salt
- ¼ tsp white pepper

For Assembly

- 12 – 15 sheets no-boil lasagne noodles
- 250 g fresh mozzarella
- 100 g Parmesan cheese, shredded
- Fresh basil, for garnish

Step 1

Preheat oven to 200C (400 F), Prepare the vegetables by tossing the zucchini, eggplant, and bell peppers with 2 tablespoons of olive oil, oregano, salt and pepper. Spread them in a single layer on two large baking sheets.

Step 2

Roast the vegetables for 15 – 20 minutes, flipping half-way through, until tender and slightly caramelised. Remove from oven and set aside.

Step 3

While vegetables roast, prepare the tomato sauce. Heat 1 teaspoon of olive oil in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Add the diced onion and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the minced garlic and cook for 1 minute longer.

Step 4

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, dried basil and sugar. Season with salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer, then reduce heat and cook for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Step 5

Prepare the bechamel sauce. Melt the butter in a separate saucepan over medium heat. Whisk in flour to form a smooth roux. Cook for 1-2 minutes.

Step 6

Gradually whisk in the warm milk, ensuring no lumps for (about 5 minutes). Stir in the nutmeg, salt and white pepper. Remove from heat.

Step 7

Assemble the lasagna in a 23x33 cm (9x13 inch) baking dish. Spread a thin layer of tomato sauce over the bottom of the dish.

Step 8

Lay the vegetables in the following order: 4 lasagna noodles, one-third of the bechamel sauce, and one-third of the shredded mozzarella and Parmesan.

Step 9

Repeat the layering process: 4 lasagne noodles, the remaining half of the roasted vegetables, one-third of the bechamel sauce, and one-third of the cheeses.

Step 10

Finish the top layer: 4 lasagna noodles, the remaining tomato sauce, the remaining bechamel sauce, and the remaining mozzarella and Parmesan cheese.

Step 11

Cover the dish tightly with aluminium foil and bake for 20 minutes more. Remove the foil and bake for an additional 15-20 minutes, or until the top is golden and bubbly.

Step 12

Let the lasagna rest for 10-15 minutes before slicing and serving. Garnish with fresh basil.

The recipe is doable, interestingly using bechamel sauce instead of the usual tomato sauce/paste.

Recipe generators do collect data from its inquiries to improve suggestions. Reputable apps anonymize or encrypt data. Always check their privacy policy.⁵

⁵ www.crossml

AI Caution

An acquaintance of mine writes of AIs

Consider any content you are putting in tools like this as lost to their data set. They are breaching the copyright of any author with recipes online. And they are claiming the copyright of any data you put into it.

Future Searching

This has been a description of the ways I search for recipes in print, person to person and online. I identified whether there were any concerns over a medium's use. Most of the material is in the public domain. Search strategies have changed over time moving with technology changes. I am more likely to search online than thumb through printed cookery except when I want to find a new take on South Asian cuisine or I'm doing research for an article. So, the copyright issue notwithstanding, and having concerns about sale of my personal data to third parties by two of the non-AI platforms, having seen what AIs can do to accurately generate recipes I am happy to embrace them. I reckon chefs will continue to produce BIG books extolling their dishes at least while there are still coffee tables.