

Yes—but the difference is not always clear from the front of a package. “Vegan” and “plant-based” are both marketing terms that can help shoppers find products aligned with their preferences. Neither one, by itself, tells you everything about a product’s ingredients, manufacturing, or verification.

In general, **vegan** signals that a product does not contain animal-derived ingredients. Depending on the standard behind the claim, it may also mean that animal-derived processing aids or other animal-related inputs are excluded. **Plant-based** usually emphasizes ingredients that come from plants, but it does not necessarily promise that every ingredient is plant-derived or that the product meets a formal vegan standard.

That distinction matters on foods, supplements, cosmetics, and other products—especially when a label makes a broad claim but gives few details. The practical approach is to treat front-label language as a starting point, then check the ingredient list, capsule shell, certification marks, and available product documentation.

What “Vegan” and “Plant-Based” Usually Mean

“Vegan” is a specific promise—but not a federally defined one

For many shoppers, vegan means no ingredients sourced from animals. That can include obvious ingredients such as meat, dairy, eggs, honey, gelatin, and beeswax, as well as less obvious substances such as certain colorings, enzymes, or carriers.

However, “vegan” is **not a single, generally applicable labeling definition established by the FDA**. The FDA regulates foods, drugs, and cosmetics in different ways, but it does not provide one universal vegan certification or definition for every product category. A company using the term is responsible for ensuring its claims are truthful and not misleading, but the word alone does not tell you what standard the company applied or how it checked the product.

So a vegan claim can be useful, but it is not the same thing as independent verification. If the distinction matters to you, look for a recognized third-party vegan mark or ask the company how it defines and substantiates the claim.

“Plant-based” can be broader—and less precise

“Plant-based” often describes a product whose main ingredients come from plants, or a way of eating that emphasizes plants. It may be used for products that are fully vegan, but the phrase does not always mean that. A product could be predominantly plant-based and still include an animal-derived ingredient, depending on how the manufacturer uses the term.



There is no one consumer-facing rule that makes every “plant-based” label equivalent to “vegan.” The claim may describe the product’s overall character rather than guarantee the origin of every ingredient. That makes ingredient verification especially important if you avoid all animal-derived ingredients, have a relevant allergy, or follow a strict vegan standard.

Why the Capsule Shell Deserves Its Own Check

When evaluating a supplement, check the capsule shell before you move on to the active ingredient. A formula can feature plant extracts or minerals and still use an animal-derived capsule.

Gelatin, commonly made from animal collagen, is a frequent capsule material. A product with a gelatin shell is not vegan, even if the contents are entirely plant-derived. Plant-based capsule materials may include hydroxypropyl methylcellulose—often abbreviated **HPMC**—or pullulan. But don’t rely on the word “capsule” alone: a label that lists only “capsule” without identifying the shell material leaves an important question unanswered.

Also look at the full formula, not just the capsule. Some products use carriers, coatings, or excipients that may be animal-derived. If the label does not make the source clear, ask the company. Ingredient names can be technical, and the same broad ingredient description may not reveal its origin.

Hidden Animal-Derived Ingredients and Colorings

Animal-derived ingredients are not always easy to spot. Some are familiar, such as whey, casein, lactose, fish oil, and shellac. Others may appear under technical names or be used in processing. The following examples are worth checking, although sourcing and use can vary by product:

- **Gelatin:** often used in capsules, gummies, and some food products.
- **Lanolin:** derived from sheep’s wool and used in some personal-care products and supplements.
- **Beeswax:** may appear as a coating or in cosmetics.
- **Shellac:** an insect-derived resin sometimes used as a coating or glaze.
- **Carmine or cochineal extract:** a red coloring made from insects.

- **Some vitamin D3:** commonly sourced from lanolin, though non-animal sources are available.
- **Fish-derived ingredients:** including fish oil and some marine collagen products.

Colorings deserve particular attention because they can be difficult to identify from a product's appearance. Carmine, for example, is not plant-derived. Color additives are subject to applicable food or cosmetic rules, but a shopper still needs to inspect the ingredient declaration and, when necessary, request clarification about an ingredient's source.



"Natural" does not automatically mean vegan. Nor does "clean," "cruelty-free," or "plant-powered" establish that every ingredient is animal-free. These phrases can refer to different product attributes, so treat each as a separate claim.

What Third-Party Vegan Marks Add

A credible third-party vegan mark can make a label more useful [athleisuremag](#) by adding outside verification. Certification programs typically have their own rules for ingredients and may review product information or manufacturing practices. The details vary by certifier, so check what the specific mark covers rather than assuming all programs use the same standard.

Certification marks are different from a company simply printing "vegan" on its own packaging. A mark can indicate that an outside organization has reviewed the product under its criteria. It may also make it easier to distinguish a verified claim from general marketing language.

Still, a mark is not a substitute for reading the label. Certification scope can vary, and a logo may apply to a particular product line rather than every item from that brand. Confirm that the mark is genuine, identify the certifying organization, and check whether the product you are buying is included.

"Organic" Is Not the Same as "Vegan"

The **USDA Organic** label concerns organic production standards, not whether a product is vegan. Organic certification can provide information about how covered agricultural ingredients were produced, but it does not, by itself, rule out animal-derived ingredients. A product can be organic and contain dairy, honey, or gelatin; a vegan product can also be non-organic.

Likewise, an organic claim and a vegan claim answer different questions. If you care about both, look for evidence for both. Do not treat one certification or label term as a shortcut for another.

Label or mark What it may tell you What it does not automatically tell you **Vegan** The company claims the product meets its vegan criteria. That the claim has been independently verified or follows one universal FDA definition. **Plant-based** The product emphasizes plant-derived ingredients or a plant-forward formulation. That every ingredient is animal-free. **Third-party vegan mark** An outside organization has reviewed the product under its program's rules. That every certification program has identical criteria or scope. **USDA Organic** Covered ingredients or products meet applicable organic standards. That the product is vegan.

How to Verify a Vegan or Plant-Based Claim

Ingredient verification does not have to become a research project every time you shop. A consistent checklist can help you spot the most common gaps:

1. **Read the full ingredient list.** Look beyond the headline ingredient and scan for animal-derived substances, colorings, coatings, and excipients.
2. **Check the capsule or delivery format.** Confirm whether a capsule is gelatin, HPMC, pullulan, or another material. For gummies, chews, and softgels, check for gelatin, beeswax, and other animal-derived components.
3. **Look for a specific certification mark.** Identify the certifier and verify that the mark applies to the product in your hand.
4. **Ask about unclear ingredients.** Request the source of any ingredient whose origin is not apparent, especially if the company uses a broad phrase such as "natural flavors."
5. **Review quality documents for the right purpose.** For supplements, a certificate of analysis (COA) tied to your batch or batch lab reports may help confirm certain quality attributes. Ask what the documents actually test.

What a COA Can—and Cannot—Confirm

A **certificate of analysis (COA) tied to your batch** can provide useful information about a particular lot, depending on the tests performed. For example, a COA may report identity, potency, or contaminant results. Batch lab reports can offer similar batch-specific testing information, but the report's value depends on the laboratory, the methods, and the analytes tested.

A COA does *not* automatically verify vegan status. Most routine testing does not identify the source of every ingredient or establish that animal-derived processing aids were never used. If vegan status is your priority, ask whether the company has ingredient sourcing documentation or third-party vegan certification, and use the COA as one piece of a broader review—not as a vegan certificate.

For example, shoppers considering a supplement brand such as Joy Organics should evaluate the specific product rather than assume that one brand-wide statement applies to every formula. Check the product page and packaging, review the shell material and full ingredient list, and ask customer support for the documentation relevant to the exact product and batch. If the answer is vague, keep asking or choose a product with clearer verification.

Questions to Ask a Brand

When the label leaves a gap, a short, specific question is more useful than asking only, “Is this vegan?” Consider asking:

- What material is the capsule shell made from?
- Are any ingredients, carriers, processing aids, or colorings animal-derived?
- What does your “vegan” or “plant-based” claim cover?
- Does a third-party organization certify this specific product? Which organization and standard?
- Can you provide a certificate of analysis tied to my batch, and what does it test?

A clear, product-specific answer is a good sign of transparent labeling practices. A generic response that repeats the marketing claim without addressing the shell, ingredient sources, or certification scope does not resolve the question.

The Bottom Line

“Vegan” and “plant-based” overlap, but they are not interchangeable guarantees. Vegan usually communicates an animal-free formulation, while plant-based can describe a plant-forward product without promising that every ingredient is free from animal sources. Because vegan labeling is not federally defined by the FDA as one universal standard, the word on the package is not the end of ingredient verification.

Check the capsule shell, scan for hidden animal-derived ingredients and colorings, and distinguish organic claims from vegan claims. Third-party vegan certification marks add outside verification, while batch lab reports and a batch-specific COA can help answer other quality questions. The best label is the one you can understand—and the best claim is the one the company can clearly support.