

Refreshing Summer Salads

Written by Debbi Covington

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Keep it fresh! Good salads are only made with good ingredients and freshness is all-important when it comes to purchasing salad greens. Let your eyes guide you. Fresh greens look fresh. They won't have any leaves tinged with brown nor will they be wilted or slimy. Take a look around the produce section and you'll see leaves in many colors and textures ranging from pearly, pale Belgian endive to bright red and white radicchio. Greens also have a variety of flavors from robust and peppery arugula to sweet, nutty and mild lamb's lettuce or mache.

The greater the variety of leaves you include in your salad, the more interesting it will be, and the more nutrients it will contain. Because of the salad greens' high water content, they are very perishable, so buy them as close as possible to serving. When you get salad ingredients home give them a rinse in cold water then spin them dry or use a tea cloth to pat them dry. Never leave salad to soak in a sink of cold water because all of the water-soluble vitamins and minerals will leech out. Once you open a bag of prepared greens they should be used within 24 hours. You can prepare most salads several hours in advance and store in the refrigerator, but do not dress until just before serving, because the acid in most dressings causes the leaves to wilt.

Pear-Blue Cheese Tossed Salad

For the dressing:

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon honey
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper

For the salad:

- 1 (5-ounce) bag baby lettuce mix
- 1/2 cup chopped walnuts, toasted, divided
- 1 medium pear, cored and chopped

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½ cup blue cheese crumbles

Whisk oil, vinegar, honey, mustard, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Set aside. Place lettuce in a large bowl; add half of the walnuts. Pour dressing over lettuce; toss until coated. Place equal amounts of salad onto 4 plates. Top each evenly with pear, blue cheese and remaining walnuts. Serve immediately. Serves 4.

Red Onion, Tomato and Herb Salad

For the vinaigrette:

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

For the salad:

2 pounds fresh tomatoes, thinly sliced

Sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

1 red onion, thinly sliced

¼ cup chopped fresh basil

¼ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

Fresh chives, chopped

Whisk the olive oil and vinegar together in a small bowl. Arrange the tomato slices on a large platter. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, to taste. Separate the onion slices into rings and place them on top of the tomatoes. Sprinkle the herbs over the top. Drizzle the dressing over the salad. Cover and chill for 20 minutes before serving. Serves 4.

Fennel, Orange and Pecan Salad

For the dressing:

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon mayonnaise

¼ cup chopped fresh chives

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1 teaspoon sugar

¼ teaspoon black pepper

1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil

For the salad:

8 cups mixed salad greens

1 tablespoon butter

1 large red onion, thinly sliced

1 large bulb fennel, thinly sliced

2 large oranges, sectioned

½ cup toasted pecans

½ cup crumbled feta cheese

In a small bowl, whisk together all ingredients for dressing until emulsified; set aside. In a medium skillet, melt butter. Saute onion for 10 minutes over low heat. Cool. Place salad greens, fennel, orange, pecans, feta and sauteed onions in salad bowl. Drizzle dressing over the salad.; toss to coat. Serves 4.

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Mushroom, Apple and Goat Cheese Salad

For the vinaigrette:

1/3 cup olive oil

1/3 cup balsamic vinegar

1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

2 tablespoons honey

Salt

Freshly ground black pepper

For the salad:

1 tablespoon butter

1 pound assorted fresh mushrooms, trimmed and coarsely chopped

1 (4-ounce) package arugula

1 large apple, thinly sliced

1/2 cup walnut halves, toasted

4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled

Whisk together vinaigrette ingredients until blended. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Melt butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat; add mushrooms and saute for 6 minutes or until tender. Stir in 2 tablespoons of the vinaigrette. Remove from heat and let cook 15 minutes.

Toss together arugula, apple and mushrooms. Toss with desired amount of vinaigrette.

Transfer to a serving dish and sprinkle with toasted walnuts and goat cheese. Serves 6.

Mesclun Salad and Strawberries with Lemon-Mustard Vinaigrette

For the vinaigrette:

4 tablespoons lemon juice

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

1/2 teaspoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon hot Chinese mustard

2 tablespoons sugar

1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1 cup vegetable oil

For the salad:

7 cups mesclun salad or spring mix

1/2 cup pine nuts, toasted

3 cups fresh strawberries, sliced

2 bunches green onions, sliced

1/3 cup Romano cheese, freshly grated

Black pepper, freshly ground

Combine first 7 ingredients in blender. Mix well. Toss salad greens with pine nuts, strawberries, and green onions. Toss with Lemon-Mustard Vinaigrette and Romano cheese. Top with freshly ground pepper. Serves 6.

Salad Greens with Orange-Balsamic Vinaigrette

For the vinaigrette:

1/4 cup orange juice

2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

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1 teaspoon sweet hot mustard

1 clove garlic, minced

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

For the salad:

4 cups mixed baby greens

1 tart apple, cored and thinly sliced

½ cup Gorgonzola cheese, crumbled

¼ cup roasted pistachio kernels

Whisk together orange juice, balsamic vinegar, mustard, and garlic. Gradually whisk in oil until well blended. Set aside to mellow flavors. For salad, divide greens among four salad plates.

Top with apple slices. Sprinkle with cheese and nuts. Whisk dressing; drizzle over salads.

Serves 4.

Spinach Salad Oriental

For the dressing:

¼ cup white vinegar

½ cup ketchup

1/3 cup sugar

2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce

½ cup vegetable oil

1 tablespoon grated onion

Salt

For the salad:

1 (10-ounce) package fresh spinach, torn into bite sized pieces

3 boiled eggs, roughly chopped

6 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled

10 fresh mushrooms, sliced

1 small red onion, chopped

1 (8-ounce) can bamboo shoots, drained

1 (15-ounce) can baby corn, drained

Combine the first six ingredients in a jar with a tight-fitting lid and shake well. Season with salt to taste. Refrigerate several hours before serving. In a large salad bowl, toss the spinach, eggs, bacon, mushrooms, onion, bamboo shoots, and baby corn. Add dressing and toss gently.

Serves 6 to 8.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com . She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com.

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