

Reinventing Salad

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Salads can be versatile and really add dazzle as a side dish or as the main entrée in a meal. The fresh ingredients in a salad are packed with potent antioxidants, potassium, numerous phytochemicals and other vitamins and minerals that really boost our nutritional levels to enhance our health. For some of us, it can be challenging to get adequate amounts of fruits and vegetables into our diets. Salads can help solve this problem and be quite delectable.

Unfortunately, many of us get caught in a “salad rut” and make the same kind of boring salad time after time. We blend the usual types of lettuce – iceberg, Romaine, red or green leaf with tomatoes, carrots and *maybe* cucumber. Add some dressing and voila! – salad is served. It’s time to reinvent salads and get creative with an unlimited amount of options to make you look forward to eating salad again by taking in some of God’s finest nutrients!

Starting with the greens, consider these possibilities as the “foundation” of your salad:

- Mesclun (field greens or spring mix) which is a mix of a variety of young salad greens like arugula, Belgian endive, Boston lettuce, baby spinach, chicory, watercress, radicchio, romaine, escarole, curly endive, and frisee just to name a few. Look for packaged bags of “spring mix” in the produce section of your grocery store to make preparation easier.
- Consider topping with fresh herbs like basil, chives, dill, parsley, cilantro, mint, oregano, thyme or marjoram. Tip: Don’t use more than 2 fresh herbs at a time or you may overpower the salad. As a general rule, use no more than ¼ cup of fresh chopped herbs per 2 quarts of salad greens.
- As far as add-ins, the sky is the limit. It’s really a matter of where your imagination can take you. Make it convenient by purchasing already chopped or shredded veggies. Here are some ideas that will get you started:
 - Citrus, apples, pears, bananas, berries, peaches, Mandarin oranges, pineapple, melons, grapes, and dried fruits too.
 - Various nuts for crunch – walnuts, peanuts, almonds, cashews, etc.
 - Any cheese, but strong flavored cheeses work best because you only need to use a small amount, which reduces the fat content. Try Feta, Bleu cheese, Pecorino, or Parmesan.
 - All sorts of veggies including ones less commonly used like asparagus, squash, sugar snap peas, garbanzo beans or blanched green beans.
 - Marinated and grilled meats and fish can add protein to a salad to serve as a main entrée. Consider salmon, beef, chicken, pork, tuna, lobster or crab.
- Finally, add a sweet or savory light dressing depending on what flavors you want to highlight and what else you may be serving with the salad.

Here are a couple of recipes to get your creative juices flowing:

Boston Lettuce, Orange and Onion Salad with Citrus Vinaigrette (from FoodNetwork.com)

Ingredients:

3 tablespoons orange juice

1 teaspoon lemon juice

1/3 cup olive oil

2 heads of Boston lettuce, separated into leaves, rinsed and spun dry
1 small red onion, cut into thick rounds
4 navel oranges, rind and pith cut away, sliced into rounds
3 tablespoons snipped chives
½ cup slivered almonds
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions: In a small bowl whisk together the juices, salt and pepper to taste. Add the oil in a stream while whisking until thoroughly blended. On each of 8 chilled salad plates, divide lettuce leaves, onion slices and orange slices evenly. Drizzle the vinaigrette over the salads and sprinkle with the chives and almonds. Serve chilled.

Thai Beef Salad (from Eating Well Magazine – April/May 2005 issue)

Ingredients:

1 lb. Sirloin steak, trimmed of visible fat
1 tablespoon reduced-sodium soy sauce
½ teaspoon freshly ground pepper
2 scallions, cut into 1-inch pieces
Zest of 1 lime
3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
1 ½ tablespoons fish sauce (found in grocery stores usually in the Asian food aisle)
½ teaspoon sugar
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
4 cups mixed field greens
2 cups torn red leaf lettuce
2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
2 tablespoons sesame oil or canola oil

Directions: Preheat grill or broiler. Rub steak all over with soy sauce and black pepper. Grill or broil to desired doneness and let rest on a cutting board for 5 minutes before slicing. Mix scallions, lime zest, juice, fish sauce, sugar and crushed red pepper in a shallow dish. Slice the steak into thin strips against the grain and cut each strip into bite-size pieces. Add the steak to the marinade, along with any accumulated juices from cooking the steak. Toss well, cover and refrigerate overnight. When you are ready to serve the salad, place greens and mint in a salad bowl. Add the steak and marinade, drizzle with oil, gently toss, and serve. Make 4 servings – 2 cups each.