

Garden Lettuce Leaves Stuffed with Beet and Tahini Spread

This recipe is adapted from one by Lebanese born photo journalist and cookbook author, Anissa Helou. This recipe is simple to make, very tasty and makes a stunning presentation served spooned onto small romaine or other lettuce leaves. If both purple and golden beets are available make a double batch: one with each color. Also delicious served in leaves of endive. Garnish with chopped hard cooked eggs, avocado or simple with black or tan sesame seeds.

Serves: 6

Cooking time: 20-30 minutes

12 or more perfect lettuce leaves, rinsed and dried (small romaine heart leaves or endive leaves)
5 or 6 medium (golden and/or red) beets, trimmed, scrubbed, cut into 1" chunks (about 3 cups)
1/4 cup fresh lemon juice, plus more as needed
1/4 cup tahini (ground sesame paste), plus more as needed
1 garlic clove, smashed in a mortar and pestle with the salt, or grated
1/2 teaspoon coarse salt, plus more as needed
1 half avocado, pitted, seeded and diced (optional garnish)
1 hard cooked egg, chopped (optional garnish)
Tan or black sesame seeds (optional garnish)

— preparation —

Place the leaves in a large bowl and cover with cold water. Add a couple of ice cubes. The leaves will crisp while the beets are cooking.

Place the beets in a steamer and set over boiling water. Cover and cook until the beets are tender, 15 to 20 minutes depending on the size of the chunks. Combine the beets, lemon juice, tahini, garlic and salt in the bowl of a food processor and pulse, scrapping down the sides of the work bowl as needed, until the mixture is smooth. Taste and correct the seasoning with more lemon juice, tahini, and salt, if needed.

Drain the leaves and spin in a salad spinner or carefully dry with a towel. Arrange the leaves rib side down on a large platter. Use a tablespoon to place a small mound of beet puree toward the stem end of each leaf. Sprinkle with garnish of your choice. Serve chilled or at room temperature.

Recipe by Marie Simmons

Black Rice, Mango and Sugar Snap Pea Salad with Rice Vinegar and Tamari Dressing

Black rice studded with sunny orange squares of ripe mango and bright green sugar snaps makes a stunning presentation. The best rice to use for this salad is Chinese black rice, marketed as Forbidden rice®. Unlike the more typical Japonica black rice, which has a round grain that cooks up soft and sticky, Forbidden Rice® has a long grain with a less starchy consistency which makes it perfect for savory dishes and salads.

Cook Time: 25 minutes

Serves: 4

8 ounces string-less sugar snap peas, trimmed (about 2 cups)

Coarse salt

1 cup Forbidden rice®

Dressing:

3 tablespoons unseasoned Japanese rice vinegar (Marukan brand is best)

2 tablespoons mild flavored extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon reduced sodium tamari or soy sauce

2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil

1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger

1 garlic clove, grated

¼ teaspoon coarse salt

1 ripe mango, peeled and pitted, cut into ¼ inch pieces, about 1 1/2 cups

½ cup chopped red onion

2 tablespoons finely chopped cilantro

2 teaspoons tan sesame seeds

2 tablespoons chopped cilantro (garnish)

— preparation —

Bring a medium saucepan three-quarters filled with water to a boil. Add the sugar snaps and 1 teaspoon salt and cook, until tender, about 1 minute. Remove the sugar snaps from the boiling water with a perforated spoon or skimmer and place in a strainer. Rinse with cold water and set aside to cool. Add the rice to the boiling water and cook until the grains are tender, 25 to 30 minutes. Drain in a strainer. Rinse with cold water and set aside to cool.

Dressing: Whisk the vinegar, oil, tamari, sesame oil, ginger, garlic and salt in a large bowl. Add the rice, sugar snap peas, mango and, red onion and 2 tablespoons of the cilantro and gently toss to combine.

Spoon the rice salad onto the platter and sprinkle with remaining cilantro and sesame seeds.

Recipe adapted from Fresh & Fast Vegetarian: Recipes That Make a Meal (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2011) by Marie Simmons

Ginger and Crushed Red Pepper Rubbed Seared Shrimp

An add-on recipe for the omnivores at your table:

This simple recipe of shrimp rubbed with a mixture of garlic and crushed red pepper and quickly seared in a hot skillet is delicious served on a bed of cooled brown or black rice that has been seasoned with a rice vinegar dressing. Garnish the plate with wedges of fresh peach or slices of peeled ripe mango or papaya.

Serves: 4

1 tablespoon mild flavored olive oil
1 tablespoon tamari
1 teaspoon grated fresh ginger
1/8 teaspoon crushed red pepper, or to taste
12 large jumbo shrimp peeled and deveined
2 scallions, trimmed and sliced thin

— preparation —

In a bowl whisk the oil, tamari, ginger, and the red pepper; add the shrimp and stir to coat, rubbing the mixture into the shrimp. Cover and refrigerate about 1 hour or until ready to cook.

Heat a large nonstick or iron skillet over medium heat until hot enough to sizzle and evaporate a drop of water. Add the shrimp a few at a time. Sear one side 1 to 2 minutes. Adjust heat to keep pan from getting too hot. Turn the shrimp and cook 1 minute more or until the shrimp are cooked through. Sprinkle with the scallions and serve.

Recipe adapted from *Fresh & Fast* (Houghton Mifflin) by Marie Simmons

Shredded Tuscan Kale Salad with Tomato, Avocado and Pepitas

This is a delicious and rather revolutionary idea: raw kale salad. I'm not sure who gets the credit for this recipe but I find it on the menus I suspect it is from an innovative raw foods chef. Having tested this salad with every variety of kale I can find, I've decided the mild tasting, tender, pebbly leaf Tuscan (Iacinato kale); often sold as "dinosaur" is the best. For the mildest tasting kale make sure the leaves are small and not too mature. Although the kale is raw, it is softened by rubbing it with your hands with the lime juice, olive oil and salt dressing.

Prep Time: About 10 minutes

Serves: 4

1 small bunch (about 10 ounces or about 12 leaves about 10 inches in length) Tuscan kale (Iacinato), washed and dried
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice,
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 teaspoon coarse salt

Salsa

1 ripe avocado, halved, pitted, peeled and diced (1/4 inch)
1 ripe tomato, cut into 1/4 inch dice (use the seeds and juices), about 1 cup
1/2 cup diced (1/4 inch pieces) red onion
1 teaspoon finely chopped seeded jalapeño pepper, plus more to taste
1 small garlic clove, grated
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 teaspoon coarse salt
1/4 cup toasted unsalted *pepitas* (pumpkin seeds)

— preparation —

To prepare the kale, cut along both sides of the stem of each leaf with a sharp knife or pull the ruffled leaf away from the stems with your hands. Discard the stems. Gather a bunch of the long kale leaves together on the cutting board and slice into thin (1/8) crosswise slices. You will have 4 to 6 cups lightly packed.

Combine the kale, lime juice, oil and 1/2 teaspoon of the salt in a large bowl. Rub the ingredients together (like giving the kale a massage) with your hands until the leaves wilt, 1 to 2 minutes. Set aside.

Salsa: Combine the half of the avocado and tomato, the jalapeño, garlic, lime juice, oil and salt and stir to blend. Add to the kale and toss.

Top with the remaining tomato and avocado and the pepitas and serve.

Recipe by Marie Simmons

Toasted Quinoa with Spinach, Pan-Seared Cherry Tomatoes, Walnuts and Parmesan

Quinoa has an irresistibly nutty taste, a texture that is crunchy, yet delicate, and cooks in less than 20 minutes. High in complete protein and native to Peru, the Inca's called it, the "food of the gods" Botanically an herb, quinoa is an excellent source of protein. To enhance its nut-like taste I often toast it (after rinsing) before cooking in water. It is important not to skip the instructions for rinsing quinoa before toasting or cooking because rinsing will remove the naturally occurring bitter coating of saponin, a substance put there by nature to repel the birds.

Serves: 4

1-1/2 cups quinoa
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon grated or crushed garlic
3 cups hot water
1 teaspoon coarse salt
1/2 cup broken walnuts
1 cup tri-color grape or petite red cherry tomatoes
1 bag (5 ounces) baby spinach, about 5 cups packed, rinsed and drained
½ cup grated Parmigiano Reggiano
Torn basil leaves (optional garnish)

— preparation —

Place the quinoa in a fine mesh strainer and rinse under cold running water for at least 45 seconds. To save water swish the quinoa in a bowl of water and then drain.

Add the oil to a deep skillet or sauté pan with a lid and warm over medium low heat. Add the wet, but well drained, quinoa and turn the heat to medium high. Stir the quinoa over medium heat until it dries out and begins to turn golden, 8 to 10 minutes.

Add the garlic and cook, stirring, 10 seconds. Add the water and salt and heat to a boil. Cook, covered, over medium low heat, until all of the water is absorbed and the quinoa grains have burst open and appear fluffy, 18 to 20 minutes.

Meanwhile spread the walnuts in a small skillet and stir over medium low heat until toasted, about 5 minutes. Set aside. Turn the heat under the skillet to high and when it is hot enough to evaporate a drop of water quickly add about ½ tablespoon of olive oil and all the tomatoes to the skillet. Shake or slide the skillet back and forth over the burner to turn the tomatoes allowing them to cook over the high heat until the skins blister and crack evenly, about 5 minutes. Take the skillet off the heat and let stand until ready to add the tomatoes to the quinoa.

When the quinoa is cooked add the spinach and cook, stirring into the hot quinoa, over medium high heat, until the spinach is almost wilted, about 3 minutes. Add the walnuts, tomatoes and half the cheese. Toss to combine. Top with remaining cheese and garnish with basil.

Warm Green Bean, Fresh Corn and Tomato Salad with Fresh Garden Mint

This is a simple salad that calls out to me in early summer when fresh corn, tender green beans and decent tomatoes begin to make their appearance at my produce market. The corn we have available today is so sweet I find it palatable cut from the cobs and used raw in salads. You can give it a quick steaming if preferred, but I like its raw crunch. This salad is also excellent made simply with green beans, red onion and mint, with or without the tomatoes or corn. Make sure to add the mint to the hot cooked beans so they can absorb the flavor better.

Serves: 4

6 ounces green beans, trimmed and cut into 1 inch pieces (about 1 ½ cups)
Coarse salt
1/4 cup chopped packed mint leaves
1 cup fresh raw corn kernels (cut from 2 ears of corn)
2 medium tomatoes, trimmed, cut into thin wedges
¼ cup thin lengthwise slivers red onion
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons fresh lime or lemon juice

— preparation —

Heat a medium saucepan three quarters filled with water to a boil. Add the beans and 1 teaspoon salt and cook until crisp tender, 5 to 8 minutes. Drain. Transfer to a large bowl and toss with the mint. Let stand while preparing the remaining ingredients.

Combine the corn kernels, tomatoes, red onion, oil, lemon juice and ½ teaspoon salt in a salad bowl. Add to the salad bowl and toss to blend. Serve at room temperature.

Short Cuts and Substitutions

There are many variations on this theme. For instance narrow the vegetables down to beans and corn, omitting the tomatoes, add cucumbers. Increase the beans from 8 ounces to 12 ounces if omitting any of the other vegetables.

Adapted from *Fresh & Fast Vegetarian* by Marie Simmons (Houghton Mifflin April 2011)

Lemon and Ginger Granita

Granita is a frozen ice served throughout Italy where they are in every imaginable flavor from espresso to campari. Some of my favorites are made with fresh fruit. In this one I use lemon juice and ginger, but it is equally good with strawberries, peaches, apricots, even figs. Agave, a caramel flavored sweetener, can be adjusted for sweetness. In Rome granita is always served with a dollop of unsweetened whipped cream. I like to sweeten plain yogurt with agave and spoon it over the top. The directions below are for freezing it in a shallow pan directly in the freezer, but if you have an ice cream maker feel free to use it.

- 1 cup very cold water
- ½ cup fresh lemon juice, chilled
- ½ cup agave syrup, or to taste
- 1 teaspoon grated ginger or more to taste
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest

— preparation —

Chill a 13x9 inch metal baking pan in the freezer.

Meanwhile combine the water, lemon juice, agave, ginger and lemon zest and stir to blend. Taste and adjust flavors adding a bit more agave if it needs more.

Pour into the chilled pan. Freeze 30 minutes or until the edges begin to freeze. Stir the edges into the soft center and freeze, stirring every 30 minutes until all the liquid is frozen, about 2 hours.

To serve scrap the ice into dishes and top with sweetened yogurt (below).

Agave Yogurt

Combine 1 cup plain yogurt, 2 tablespoons agave and ½ teaspoon vanilla extract and stir until blended. Serve cold.

Recipe by Marie Simmons