



Let There Be Salad

There's no end to the creative and delicious things you can do with packaged salad greens — if you use your imagination.

By DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL

Like everybody, I have weeks when my best intentions wilt and rot in the crisper drawer of my real day-to-day life. I don't just mean this figuratively: If I had a dollar for every lovely, crisp bag of arugula or Italian baby greens I have shamefully let decay while I supped upon stale pretzels and chocolate bars, I'd certainly have enough money to buy another bag of greens and put them to good use with recipes from Jennifer Chandler's inspiring *Simply Salads: More Than 100 Delicious Creative Recipes Made From Prepackaged Greens and a Few Easy-to-Find Ingredients* (Thomas Nelson, 2007).

Of course, I don't have any really good excuse for letting perfectly good bags of salad rot in my refrigerator. I think I just succumb to a failure of imagination. Chandler's book, though, is just the opposite — a sheer triumph of imagination opening worlds of possibility for the healthy modern convenience of bagged salad greens.

"The people who invented prewashed, prepackaged salad greens are geniuses, in my book," Chandler told me on the phone from her Memphis kitchen. "They have revolutionized the way Americans can eat salad. They have made it possible to be a working mom, eat healthy, use fresh ingredients and put together fresh flavors in just minutes." *Really? In minutes?* Yes.

Chandler's super-fast salads include an arugula salad with watermelon and feta cheese that's dressed with a light vinaigrette (see *Web Extra!*) and a baby lettuce salad with orange, fennel and Niçoise olives. If you have a couple more minutes, Chandler can show you how to turn a bag of greens into a full-scale destination supper: warm goat-cheese medallions, fresh salmon and asparagus (see *Web Extra!*), and all sorts of chicken, seafood, beef or pork additions turn bags of greens into dinner entrées worthy of a fine neighborhood bistro. And she does it all with ingredients from regular old grocery stores.

"I live in Memphis, and my sense is that most American grocery stores are similar to what we have here," Chandler said. "Not everyone lives in New York City with a Dean & DeLuca, and my rule of thumb with this book was: If it's not in a grocery store here, it didn't go in the book."

Once she grounded her recipes in easily accessible ingredients, she considered the whole world her inspiration, assembling recipes that drew on European, Asian, Mexican and other exotic flavors. "Salads are surprising, and great, because they're a medium for almost any food," she said. "A lot of Americans think, 'Oh, salad is just a boring diet food,' but if you look around the world, you find people putting fruit, meat, seafood, grains, beans, vegetables raw and cooked, and just everything you could think of in salads. I have things you might never think of in a salad — like the Japanese-inspired salad with fresh ginger and wasabi-coated peas. I wanted to make sure there were enough flavor combinations that I never got bored having a salad, and the reader never got bored having one either."

I confessed that some of my salad failure comes about because of my lack of imagination. There's still hope for me, Chandler said. "If you're eating the same flavors over and over again, you probably will get bored with them." But, she added, even keeping the idea of potential boredom in mind can be a spur to creativity: "My husband was my taste-tester for these recipes," she recalled, "and it was really important to me that he not get bored and feel like he was eating bland diet food — or he might have stopped being my taste-tester."

Imagine what my life would look like if I actually ate the greens in my crisper drawer instead of just feeling guilty about them, Chandler suggested. "You might start to lose weight and feel healthier because you're eating all sorts of fresh, real ingredients."

I'll admit it's an appealing thought, since I can't say I much enjoy those dinners of stale pretzels and chocolate bars. And yet, if I manage to carry out my best intentions with salads, will this mean I'll be forced to move on and fulfill my best intentions regarding cleaning out my closets? Oh, well, I suppose life will always supply me with new best intentions to fulfill, but it would be mighty nice to enjoy some super-tasty salads while I'm at it. ●

Dara Moskowitz Grumdahl is a celebrated food and wine critic. Nominated seven times for James Beard Foundation Awards — the Oscars of the food world — she has received four awards for her restaurant and wine columns. Since 2001, her work has been regularly featured in the *Best Food Writing* anthologies.

MAKES FOUR DINNER OR
SIX APPETIZER SALADS

SALAD

- 3/4 lb. medium shrimp, peeled, tails removed and deveined
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- 3 oranges, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1/2 cup sliced Spanish green olives
- 1 tsp. finely grated orange peel
- 1 bag (5 ounces) baby arugula

SHERRY VINAIGRETTE

- 1 shallot, minced
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 tbs. sherry wine vinegar
- 6 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

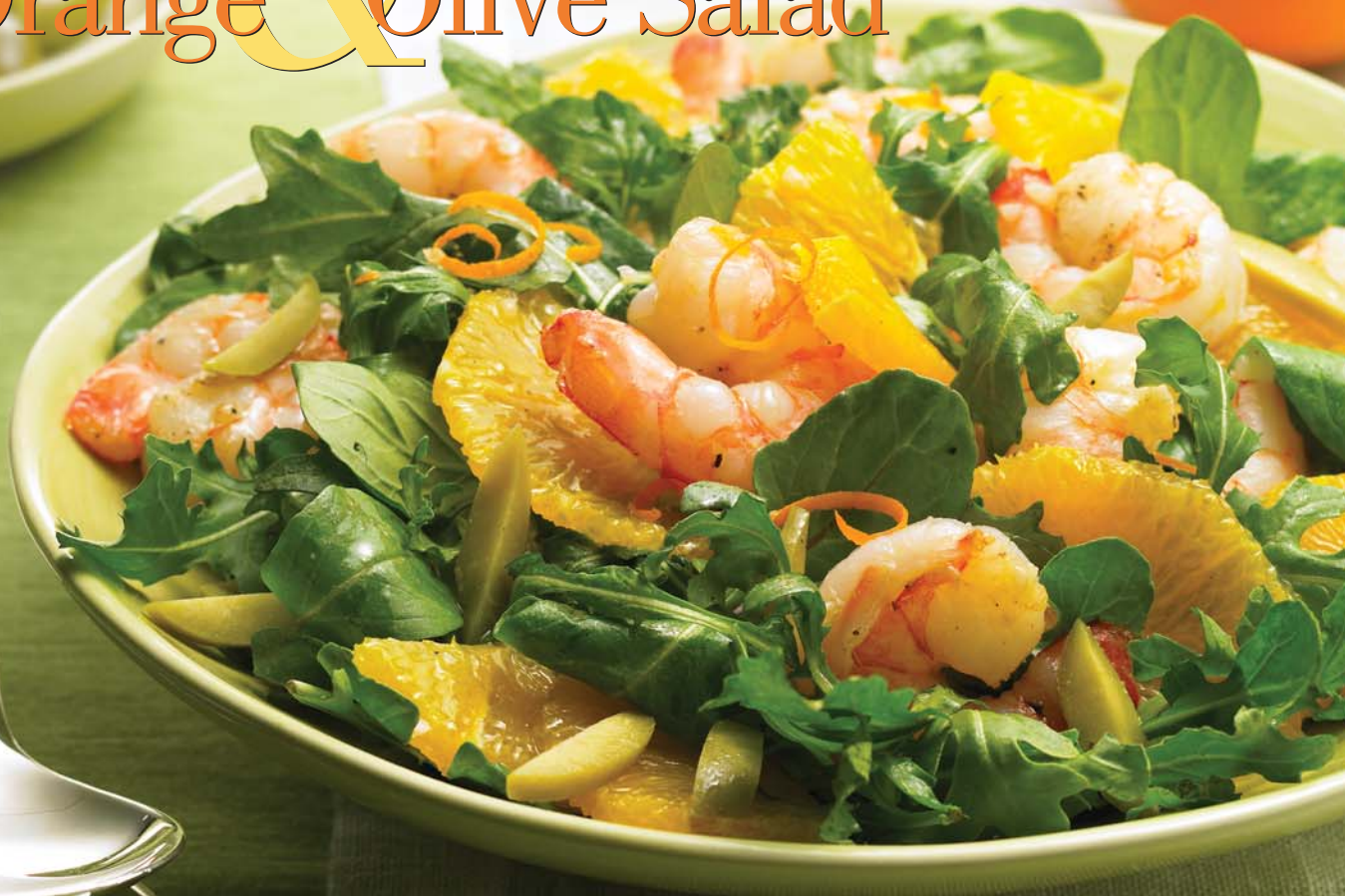
In a small bowl, whisk together the shallot, mustard and vinegar. Slowly add the olive oil in a stream, whisking to emulsify. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Makes about 1/4 cup.

Season the shrimp with salt and pepper. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, warm the oil until a few droplets of water sizzle in the pan. Add the garlic and shrimp and cook, stirring occasionally, until the shrimp are opaque in the center, three to five minutes. Set aside and cool to room temperature.

In a large bowl, toss the shrimp, orange slices, olives, orange peel and baby arugula. Add the sherry vinaigrette to taste, and gently toss. Serve immediately.

Recipe excerpted from *Simply Salads* by Jennifer Chandler (Thomas Nelson, 2007).

Spanish Shrimp, Orange & Olive Salad



WEB EXTRA!

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