

Salad days



quick, refreshing combos that are ready in a pinch make the perfect light summer meal

by jennifer chandler • photographs by langdon clay



fresh fruit salad
recipe, p. 81

Packaged salad blends have changed the way I enjoy salads. With all the varieties of greens now available at the grocery store, it has never been easier to make a great and tasty (and quick) salad. Dozens of prewashed salad blends allow home cooks the ease and convenience of picking the perfect mixture for their salad without all the hassle.

I can't remember the last time I purchased a head of leaf lettuce or sifted through a big pile of wilting mesclun greens searching for the freshest ones. Specialty greens such as arugula and mâche, once only enjoyed in restaurants, have found their way to my dining table.

Before bagged blends, I would never have bought four different types of lettuce to hand-blend a perfect salad just for my husband and me. Now there are more than 50 different combinations of lettuces, packaged in just the right size, from which to choose.

In my book, whoever decided to make these blends “ready-to-eat” was a genius. Cleaning all the sand and dirt out of fresh spinach is an inconvenience I have not experienced since I found the prewashed packaged variety. Assuming I could still even find it, I can guarantee that my salad spinner is coated in a layer of dust.

And lest you wonder why I am waxing so poetic about a few green leaves before a meal, you should realize that a salad can be so much more than just a precursor to the main event! Dishes made from leafy greens can make a delicious—and healthy—meal unto themselves. For a heartier version, just add your favorite protein. Top the salad with a warm piece of grilled meat or fish or even shredded, chilled chicken. Toss in some of your favorite veggies, fruits, grilled tofu or tempeh, nuts, seeds, or crumbled or grated cheeses.

Here's my first of just two simple rules: Experiment! These recipes are meant to be guidelines to show you how to turn a bag of greens into a spectacular dish. I encourage

Keeping a well-stocked kitchen will make salad preparation an ease. Here's a list of a few items that are always on hand in my kitchen.

basic kitchen utensils

salad bowl (of course!)
mixing bowls (large and small)
set of graduated, straight-edge measuring cups made for dry ingredients



set of measuring spoons
glass liquid measuring cup
small whisk
salad tongs
good, sharp knives (a small paring knife and a 6- to 8-inch chef knife are a must)
cutting boards (at least two)
pepper mill
large ovenproof skillet (I prefer cast iron)
8-quart stockpot
2-quart saucepan
baking dishes (one 8 x 8-inch and one 13 x 9-inch)
large rimmed baking sheet
colander
vegetable peeler (the rubber-handled ones are easier on your hands)
traditional four-sided cheese grater
blender or food processor
can opener



resealable containers (several for leftovers) and baggies



pantry items

kosher salt
black peppercorns for your pepper mill
extra-virgin olive oil
vegetable or canola oil
toasted sesame oil
red balsamic vinegar
white balsamic vinegar
red wine vinegar
white wine or Champagne vinegar
rice wine vinegar
Dijon mustard
whole-grain Dijon mustard
soy sauce
Worcestershire sauce
granulated sugar
light and dark brown sugars

perishable/ refrigerator items

bag of your favorite salad blend
mayonnaise
sour cream
reduced-fat buttermilk
garlic
Parmigiano-Reggiano (Parmesan) cheese
Maytag blue cheese
red onions
lemons and limes
red bell peppers
fresh herbs (e.g., basil, cilantro, or flat-leaf parsley)
pine nuts
your favorite bottled salad dressing (for the days you feel like taking a shortcut!)

you to make substitutions or changes to create your own original, delicious dish.

The second rule is more like a law of nature: The key to delicious salads—to all good food, actually—is using the best ingredients. Always buy the freshest produce and, when possible, use locally grown (and when practical, organic) products. Invest in a good extra-virgin olive oil and flavorful vinegars. Quality ingredients will ensure perfectly scrumptious salads.

A few things to know: Salad blends are available in either bags or clamshell packaging in the refrigerated section of the supermarket's produce section. On the front of each package is a "Best if used by" date stamp. I always purchase salad blends with "best by" dates a minimum of three days away. If the lettuce shows signs of aging or mishandling (such as limp or wilted leaves with brown or yellow edges or dark, slimy spots) or is excessively wet, do not purchase that package.

Manufacturers of salad blends have developed unique packaging that helps ensure a "just-picked" freshness and crispness of salads without the use of preservatives. Salad blends should be kept refrigerated in their original bags until use. Store the bags in the refrigerator crisper or drawer.

Speaking personally, in addition to a healthy diet, I believe in regular exercise, and Pilates is a key ingredient in my wellness routine. I began taking Pilates classes two years ago and my practice has not only given me strength and toned my body but has also helped me overcome a back injury. A healthy lifestyle does not mean you need to sacrifice flavor or convenience, nor should it cost you a fortune. You can make delicious, healthful meals easily, using fresh, widely available ingredients from your local grocery store. And best of all, as you can see from my salad recipes, it takes hardly any effort.



**cobb salad
with buttermilk
garlic dressing**

cobb salad with buttermilk garlic dressing

*Who could have imagined that one of America's most famous salads would be invented by a restaurant manager making a quick bite to eat using leftovers? Thank goodness that Bob Cobb of the Brown Derby Restaurant in Hollywood was resourceful, or we wouldn't have this delicious salad today.
Makes 4 dinner salads*

buttermilk garlic dressing

½ cup sour cream
½ cup mayonnaise

¼ teaspoon minced garlic
¼ teaspoon paprika
½ teaspoon dry mustard
1 tablespoon sugar
¼ cup reduced-fat buttermilk
kosher salt and freshly
ground pepper

salad

1 bag (8 ounces) hearts of romaine
salad blend
1½ cups cooked chicken (baked or grilled),
chilled and cut into 1-inch cubes
½ pound bacon (about 10 slices), cooked
and crumbled
6 hard-boiled eggs, peeled and diced
6 Roma tomatoes, seeded and diced
2 ripe avocados, peeled and diced

1 cup crumbled blue cheese (preferably
Maytag)

- 1.** Place the sour cream, mayonnaise, garlic, paprika, dry mustard, sugar, and buttermilk in a blender. Blend until the sugar has dissolved and the dressing is smooth. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
- 2.** Place the romaine in a large salad bowl. Add the dressing to taste and gently toss.
- 3.** Divide the salad among individual plates. In rows, top the salad with the chicken, bacon, eggs, tomatoes, blue cheese and avocados. Serve immediately.

TIP: When making the dressing, be



shrimp tossed with herb salad and lemony ginger vinaigrette

sure to purée the ingredients in a blender to fully incorporate that wonderful garlic flavor into the dressing.

shrimp tossed with herb salad and lemony ginger vinaigrette

With the abundance of fresh herbs and the lemony vinaigrette, this salad just sings of springtime. If you can't find the fresh herb salad in your market, just add a mixture of fresh herbs, such as cilantro and dill, to your spring mix.

Makes 4 dinner or 6 appetizer salads

lemony ginger vinaigrette

- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ¼ teaspoon peeled, grated fresh ginger
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 6 tablespoons canola oil

kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

salad

- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 lemon, cut into quarters
- 1 pound medium shrimp, peeled, tails removed, and deveined
- 1 bag (5 ounces) fresh herb blend salad
- 1 carrot, peeled and shaved into wide ribbons with a vegetable peeler
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded and cut in thin strips
- 6 fresh chives, cut into ¼-inch pieces

1. In a small bowl whisk together the vinegar, lemon zest, lemon juice, ginger, sugar and canola oil until the sugar has dissolved. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

2. Fill a large pot with water and add the salt and lemon quarters. Bring to a boil. Add the shrimp and cook until opaque throughout, 3 to 5 minutes. Be careful not to overcook. Drain the

shrimp and cool to room temperature. Discard the lemon quarters.

3. In large salad bowl toss the fresh herb blend, carrot, bell pepper, chives and shrimp. Add the vinaigrette to taste and gently toss. Serve immediately.

TIP: To save time, substitute peeled, cooked shrimp from your grocery store's seafood department.

crunchy asian salad with peanut dressing

Combining traditional greens with a crunchy slaw, this Asian salad is bursting with strong flavors and textures.

Makes 8 side salads

peanut dressing

- ¼ cup rice wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons creamy peanut butter

1 teaspoon finely grated fresh peeled ginger
 1 tablespoon soy sauce
 1 tablespoon honey
 2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil
 ½ cup canola oil
 a pinch of red pepper flakes (optional)
 kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

salad

bag (10 ounces) hearts of romaine
 salad blend
 bag (10 ounces) angel-hair cole slaw
 3 carrots, peeled, halved lengthwise,
 and sliced into thin matchsticks
 ½ cup thinly sliced scallions
 ¼ cup coarsely chopped fresh
 cilantro leaves
 ¾ cup rice noodles
 kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

1. In a small bowl whisk together the vinegar, peanut butter, ginger, soy sauce, honey, sesame oil, canola oil and red pepper flakes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
2. In a large bowl toss together the romaine, angel-hair cole slaw, carrots,

scallions, cilantro and rice noodles. Add the dressing to taste and gently toss. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve immediately.

TIPS: To easily cut the carrots into thin matchsticks, also known as julienne, use a mandoline. A mandoline is a manual kitchen utensil that can be used to thinly slice, julienne, shred or waffle-cut vegetables. In addition to the traditional French varieties, there are now inexpensive varieties available in Asian supermarkets. If you use natural peanut butter, you may need to add a little sugar to sweeten the flavor.

fresh fruit salad with poppy seed dressing

*Serve this light and fruity salad for a ladies' luncheon with orange blossom or lemon poppy seed mini muffins.
 Makes 4 dinner or 6 appetizer salads*

poppy dressing

3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
 ⅓ cup sugar
 1 teaspoon dry mustard
 ¾ teaspoon kosher salt
 ⅓ cup vegetable oil
 1 tablespoon poppy seeds

salad

½ cantaloupe, peeled, seeded and diced
 ½ honeydew, peeled, seeded and diced
 ½ cup fresh strawberries, hulled and thinly sliced
 ½ cup fresh raspberries
 ¼ cup fresh blueberries
 1 bag (8 ounces) hearts of romaine salad blend

1. In a blender combine the vinegar, sugar, dry mustard, salt and oil. Purée until well combined. Fold in the poppy seeds. Makes about 1 cup.
2. In a large salad bowl, gently toss together the cantaloupe, honeydew, strawberries, raspberries and blueberries. Add the dressing to taste and gently toss to coat.
3. To serve, arrange the romaine on individual plates and top with a generous spoonful of the fruit salad.

TIP: For a quick alternative, whip up a creamy vanilla-honey dressing for your fruit salad by whisking together 1 cup vanilla yogurt with 1 tablespoon honey and a dash of ground cinnamon. 🌀



crunchy asian salad with peanut dressing

The recipes featured in this story are just a tiny sampling of the 100 salad recipes found in the book Simply Salads by Jennifer Chandler (2006), reprinted with kind permission from Thomas Nelson Publishers. To order, go to cookwithjennifer.com.

Salad days

