

INVITING IDEAS

Before you toss,
dress your saladRUTH MOSSOK
JOHNSTON

Today's salads come dressed in as many flavors as Baskin-Robbins. Years ago they would say — "As many as Carter's has pills." What does this generation know of Carters? Bucolic America of yesteryear knew Carter's and they also knew that they enjoyed vegetables as vegetables, with little concern over how to "dress them up."

In the '50s, salad was an accompaniment, or maybe a first course among some. In the '90s it is not only main course material, it may be void of greens and based with rice, pasta, exotic fruits, or spicy beef. I remember the days when salads were just salads and the big four dressings were — French, Thousand Island, Blue Cheese and Italian. The explosion of multi-flavors for greenery seemed to hit after the "Ranch Dressing Craze." Well, it seems "Ranch" has stood the test of time — it still appears as a principle option on every salad bar.

Grocery stores, specialty food shops, and even discount department stores have a multitude of salad dressing choices. From every exotic oil imaginable to no-fat products laden with every herb in the book — all lined up like a casting call, and waiting for direction. Some of those no-fat dressings really scare me — I love the concept, it's what's in them that has me worried.

I must admit, while I do have parties with salad themes, the shelves of my refrigerator have never been graced with prepared bottled dressings. I just prefer to make my own.

Have a party using salads as your theme — it's fun and simple. Incorporate different types of salad — some with chunky vegetables, some with pasta and julienne strip veggies. Try a flavored pasta with a whimsical shape, mushrooms and paper thin veal with a light pesto based dressing, or a fruit, nut and poached tuna or chicken with mango yogurt topping. Make a salad with crunchy unusual rice — wild or Wehani, or couscous.

SPICY THAI BEEF SALAD

- 1 boneless beef top sirloin steak cut 1-inch thick (approximately 1 1/4 pounds)
- 1/2 medium red onion, cut into thin wedges
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro leaves
- 4 cups torn mixed salad greens or thinly sliced nappa cabbage
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped peanuts

Dressing:
2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon sugar
2 teaspoons dark sesame oil

- 1 green serrano chili pepper, seeded, finely chopped
- 1 large clove garlic, crushed

Place beef steak on rack in broiler pan so surface of meat is 3 to 4 inches from heat. Broil approximately 16-18 minutes for medium rare to medium doneness, turning once. Let stand 10 minutes. Trim fat from steak. Carve steak crosswise into slices. Into medium bowl, combine beef, onion and cilantro.

In small bowl, whisk together dressing ingredients. Pour over beef mixture; toss to coat.

To serve, arrange salad greens on serving platter; top with beef mixture. Sprinkle with peanuts. Serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.

Recipe from Beef Industry Council.

GREEN GODDESS DRESSING

- 2 anchovy filets, drained and chopped
- 1/4 cup mayonnaise
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon tarragon wine vinegar
- 3 tablespoons chives, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons parsley, finely chopped
- 5 tablespoons yogurt or heavy strained yogurt (Leban)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

In a bowl mash the anchovies to paste consistency — add garlic and mayonnaise. Stir in the lemon juice and vinegar. Add the chives and parsley. Whisk in yogurt and add salt and pepper to taste. Yield 1 1/4 cups.

Serve with cold potatoes, fish, shellfish or vegetables.

APPLE WASABI MAYONNAISE

- 2 large Macintosh apples, peeled and chopped into 1/2-inch dice
- 1/4 cup white table wine
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- Wasabi (Asian horseradish)
- Sea salt and white pepper to taste

Over medium high heat — cook apples gently with white wine in a covered non-reactive pan until soft. Press the mixture through a food mill or lightly process in a food processor using the steel blade on pulse. Return the fruit puree to the pan and simmer gently over low heat, stirring constantly. When the fruit mixture appears to have absorbed the excess liquid, remove from the heat and let cool completely.

Whisk the apple puree by hand, into the mayonnaise and add the Wasabi, salt and pepper to taste. Makes 1 1/4 cups.

This dressing is delicious on shredded cabbage and cold potatoes. It's also a good match with poached chicken.

Ruth Mossok Johnston is an author and food columnist who lives in Franklin. To leave a Voice Mail message for Ruth, call (615) 853-2047, Mailbox 1802.

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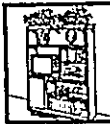
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