

INVITING IDEAS

# Cool as a cucumber dishes summer delight



**RUTH MOSSOK JOHNSTON**

The last days of summer are to be savored — cucumbers ebbing from the garden, and the weather still steamy. You can use these crispy vegetables for a cool appetizer or light luncheon treat.

Use long English (seedless) cucumbers or the typical garden variety in all kinds of quick, cool sumptuous

treats. Mix cucumber slices with Laban (heavy strained yogurt), sour cream, or ranch dressing.

Toss cucumbers with fresh dill for an easy side dish or snack. Marinate cucumber slices in olive oil and fruit flavored vinegars, mix with your favorite herbs, or splash with Balsamic vinegar and top with chopped chives.

Slice cold cucumbers paper thin and add to tea sandwiches made with herbed cream cheese and topped with a sprig of fresh dill. Use cool thin slices of cucumber to garnish tomato or vegetable juices. Hollow out a whole cucumber and stuff it with cream cheese and smoked salmon — then slice it in fairly thick slices and serve as a cool summer appetizer.

Keep your cucumber dishes cool and lively — splash with a little wine!

Here are two of my favorite cool as a cucumber summer first courses.

I love this recipe — it's cool, delicious and tastes like you are drinking a salad — this mixture is fairly thick, you may want to provide a spoon to avoid drips and spills on your guests shirts and blouses! Because it is so colorful, you may want to serve it in a clear glass or crystal pitcher — it can be topped with a sprig of fresh herbs, slices of lemon or croutons — serve in clear, chilled glasses (no plastic!).

**MY FAVORITE GAZPACHO**

- 1 (28 ounce) can seasoned diced tomatoes (Del Fratelli if possible)
- 1 large green pepper, stem removed, seeded & deveined, and chopped
- 1-2 jalapeno pepper(s), stem removed, seeded & deveined, and chopped
- 1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and chopped
- 1 cup shredded zucchini (use the firm part, avoid the seeded section)
- 1 cup Spanish onion, peeled and chopped (small dice)
- 4 tablespoons light olive oil

6 tablespoons strawberry wine vinegar

- 1 1/2 to 2 teaspoons sea salt
- 2 teaspoons sugar (you can use sugar substitute)
- Dash of Tabasco sauce

In a large bowl, mix all of the ingredients together; adjust seasonings — cover and chill in the refrigerator 6-8 hours. Serve well chilled, and top with croutons if desired. Yield: 12 servings

This delicious chilled soup is the perfect addition to any first course. Spicy and complex in flavor — usually more compatible to adult palates.

**CHILLED CUCUMBER AND SPINACH SOUP**

- 2 tablespoons light olive oil
- 2 onions (Vidalia if possible), peeled and sliced
- 2 leeks, white part only, washed thoroughly, and thinly sliced
- 1 hot pepper (long green or red finger pepper), stem removed, deveined and chopped
- 2 large potatoes, peeled and sliced
- 6 cups of chicken stock — home-made or prepared
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1 bunch fresh spinach (approximate-

ly 10 ounces), washed and stems removed

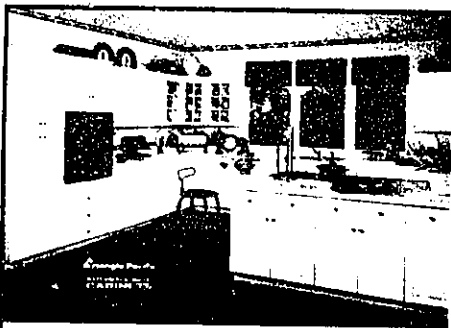
- 4 medium sized cucumber, peeled, seeded and sliced
- 1 cup Laban (heavy strained yogurt)
- 2 tablespoons light mayonnaise
- 2 teaspoons horseradish
- Juice of 4 lemons (freshly squeezed)
- Salt and freshly ground white pepper

In a large heavy stock pot, Dutch or French oven, add olive oil, cook over medium heat until hot — add the onion and leeks. Cook until transparent, then add hot pepper.

Saute briefly and add the potato. Continue to saute for 6-8 minutes, add the chicken stock, parsley, and spinach. Bring to a boil.

Reduce the heat and continue to cook the soup for 30 minutes until the potato is tender. Let the soup cool — puree in a blender, food processor or Vita Mix. Chill for 2 hours.

Add the cucumber, Laban (heavy strained yogurt), mayo, horseradish and lemon juice — reprocess through the blender, food processor, or Vita Mix. Adjust seasonings — chill thoroughly and serve. Yield: 8 servings



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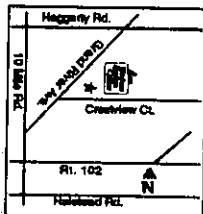
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