

Tzatziki (Cucumber-Yogurt Salad)

Ingredients

English cucumber	1	Fresh dill, chopped	2 Tbsp.
Full-fat goat milk yogurt ...	3 cups	Fresh mint, chopped	2 Tbsp.
Garlic cloves	5	Kosher salt	1½ tsp.
Red wine vinegar	1½-2 Tbsp.	Red pepper flakes	¼ tsp.
Extra virgin olive oil	3-4 Tbsp.		

Full-fat Greek yogurt (cow's milk) may substitute for goat milk yogurt

Directions

Grate **cucumber** on large holes of box grater — Very finely mince **garlic** — Chop **dill** and **mint**

1. Grate **cucumber** on the large holes of a box grater. Transfer to a fine-mesh strainer set over a bowl. Toss with 1 tsp. **kosher salt** and let drain for 30-40 minutes, stirring 2-3 times to encourage drainage.
2. After draining, gather **cucumber** in a clean kitchen towel (or multiple layers of cheesecloth) and squeeze aggressively to extract maximum liquid. Wring and twist until you cannot extract any more. You should remove ¾-1 cup liquid. The **cucumber** should feel almost dry when finished.
3. Grate or very finely mince **garlic**. For more even distribution and less harsh bite, grate on a microplane. For stronger garlic punch with some texture, mince very fine with a knife. Optionally, crush **garlic** with a pinch of **salt** and **pepper** to create a paste.
4. In a medium bowl, add **goat milk yogurt** and prepared **garlic**. Begin adding **olive oil** gradually, 1 tablespoon at a time, while stirring vigorously. Alternate with small additions of **red wine vinegar**. This slow incorporation prevents the oil from pooling on top and creates a smooth, emulsified texture. Add ½ tsp. **kosher salt** and mix thoroughly.

5. Add thoroughly drained **cucumber**, chopped **dill**, and **mint** to **yogurt** mixture. Fold together until evenly combined. The mixture should be very thick.
6. Taste and adjust aggressively. The tzatziki should be punchy with **garlic**, tangy with **vinegar**, and well-salted. Remember that flavors will meld and mellow slightly during rest time. Add more **salt**, **vinegar**, or **garlic** as needed.
7. Cover and refrigerate for at least *2-3 hours*, preferably overnight. This allows the **garlic** to permeate, herbs to hydrate, and flavors to marry. The mixture will thicken slightly as it chills.
8. About *30 minutes* before serving, remove from refrigerator and let sit at cool room temperature—this improves flavor expression and makes the texture more scoopable.
9. Before serving, stir well and taste again. Adjust final seasoning if needed. Transfer to serving bowl, create a shallow well in the center with the back of a spoon, and drizzle with **olive oil**. Sprinkle with **red pepper flakes** and garnish with fresh **dill** leaves.

Equipment Required

- Box grater with large holes
- Fine-mesh strainer
- Medium bowl (for straining)
- Clean kitchen towel or multiple layers of cheesecloth
- Medium mixing bowl
- Whisk or sturdy spoon
- Microplane or garlic press (optional)
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Cutting board and sharp knife
- Serving bowl
- Rubber spatula

Mise en Place

- Begin **cucumber** draining *30-40 minutes* before assembly
- Allow *2-3 hours* minimum for resting before serving (overnight is ideal)
- Remove from refrigerator *30 minutes* before service
- All ingredients should be ready before beginning—once assembly starts, it moves quickly
- Prepare serving **cucumbers** during rest time

Ingredient Tips

- English (hothouse) **cucumbers** have fewer seeds and less water than standard cucumbers
- **Goat milk yogurt** provides authentic tangy flavor; traditional Greek tzatziki uses sheep or goat milk

- Full-fat yogurt is essential—low-fat versions are too thin and tangy
- If using cow's milk **Greek yogurt**, choose Fage Total 5% or similar thick, strained yogurt
- **Red wine vinegar** is traditional in Greece; lemon juice is an American adaptation
- Fresh **garlic** is critical; pre-minced or powdered won't provide the same punch
- Use young, fresh **dill** and **mint**—older herbs can be bitter
- **Dill** is the primary herb; **mint** is secondary or optional
- High-quality, fruity **extra virgin olive oil** makes a significant difference
- **Aleppo pepper** provides mild heat and fruity notes; substitute with mild red pepper flakes if unavailable
- For serving **cucumbers**, Persian varieties provide best crunch and minimal seeds

Preparation Tips

- Aggressive **cucumber** squeezing is the single most critical step—insufficient draining yields watery tzatziki
- Salt the grated **cucumber** generously to draw out moisture through osmosis
- Grating **garlic** on microplane creates smoother distribution; mincing creates pockets of stronger flavor
- Crushing **garlic** with **salt** into a paste mellows the bite slightly
- Slow incorporation of **olive oil** is essential—add gradually while stirring to prevent separation

- Alternate **oil** and **vinegar** additions for proper emulsification
- The mixture should taste quite assertive when first made—flavors mellow significantly during rest
- Overnight resting allows **garlic** to fully infuse and creates more unified flavor
- Bringing to cool room temperature before serving is essential—cold dulls flavor perception

Make Ahead & Storage

- Optimal make-ahead time is overnight in refrigerator
- Can be made up to *2 days* ahead; **garlic** intensifies over time
- Traditional Greek cooks make tzatziki in the morning to serve at lunch or dinner
- Store covered in refrigerator
- If making more than *1 day* ahead, reserve some **olive oil** and fresh **dill** for refreshing before serving
- Drain any accumulated liquid before serving if made well ahead
- **Garlic** acts as a preservative—tzatziki keeps up to *1-2 weeks* refrigerated

- Does not freeze well—**yogurt** separates and texture degrades
- Flavor becomes more garlicky over time; some prefer this aged flavor

Serving Suggestions

- Serve alongside rich, spiced stews and grilled meats for cooling contrast
- Essential accompaniment to souvlaki, gyros, and all grilled meats
- Excellent with warm flatbread, pita, or crusty bread
- Traditional pairing with fried foods like fried potatoes, zucchini fritters, or eggplant
- Persian or English **cucumber** spears make ideal dippers
- Can be used as a sauce for grilled vegetables or fish
- Garnish serving bowl with additional fresh **dill**, **olive oil**, and **Aleppo pepper**
- Pairs well with other mezze-style dishes
- Drizzle with **olive oil** and top with an olive for traditional presentation