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SALAD.

I live in constant fear of the night that my wife wakes up in an empty bed and pads slowly out to the kitchen to catch me with a squeeze bottle of vinaigrette in one hand and a bowl of arugula in the other. I try to suppress my need for greens by forcing myself to cook more vegetables, but just as sometimes I don't feel like emptying the dishwasher and some days I just don't feel like talking to my wife during that long seventeen-floor elevator ride, there are days when laziness overwhelms me and I just can't get myself to cook *real* vegetables. Why should I, when that head of lettuce is just sitting there in the vegetable crisper, taunting me, whispering to me, "*I'm eeeeeeasy. Dress me, Kenji. Just reach out and dress me.*"

And then I give in. Who could resist salad's temptations? Who could deny that it's the unchallenged champion of easy, well-balanced meals, able to swoop in at moment's notice to add color, flavor, vibrancy, and all-important fiber to your dinner table? All it takes is some fresh greens and a good dressing (and no, it doesn't have to be store-bought).

But what exactly is a salad? It's these sorts of metaphysical questions that can really keep you preoccupied in the bath, so I'll make it easy. Whether they

are mixed greens, vegetables, or meats, whether they are served cold, warm, or hot, there are two things that all salads have in common: they don't require any cutting or knife work at the table and they come with dressing—a sharply flavored mixture that is designed to coat the main ingredients, adding moisture and acidity. At its simplest, a salad can be tossed fresh greens, and from there, salad can go on to become as complex as you'd like, but don't worry—it's really not all that hard.

For those of you who are afraid of dipping your feet into the crazy world of salads, I've designed a six-step program that'll have you developing your *own* salad recipes in no time. The rules are basic and, as with all rules, are meant to be broken. And several of them are optional:

- 1. Find the best, freshest greens you can get and treat them with care.** Nothing can ruin a salad like greens that are past their prime. Decide what type of greens you'd like (see "Picking Salad Greens," [here](#)), trim, wash, and store them carefully, and serve them before they even begin to expire.
- 2. Pick a dressing style appropriate to your greens.** Salad dressings can be creamy or thin, mild and delicate, or sharp and pungent. Make sure that the dressing you're using enhances instead of competes with or overwhelms your greens.
- 3. Add strongly flavored or aromatic**

garnishes (optional). These are ingredients that give interest to the salad by releasing a burst of flavor in your mouth as you eat. My favorites are:

- *Thin shavings of pungent cheeses like Parmigiano-Reggiano, Pecorino Romano, or aged Gouda, or crumbled blue, feta, or goat cheese*
- *Tender herbs like parsley, basil, cilantro, dill, or chives*
- *Dried fruit such as raisins, currants, or cranberries*
- *Pungent vegetables such as raw onions or shallots*
- *Cured meats, like matchsticks of salami, Spanish chorizo, ham, or cooked bacon*
- *Pickled or cured things like olives, capers, or anchovies*

4. Add “crunchies” for textural contrast (optional).

Well-seasoned croutons (see [here](#)) are great for this, as are toasted nuts or seeds, like almonds or sunflower seeds. To toast nuts or seeds, spread them on a rimmed baking sheet and pop them into the oven (or toaster oven) for about 10 minutes at 350°F, until they've taken on a bit of color and have an awesome, well, nutty aroma.

5. Add supporting ingredients like raw or cooked fruits and vegetables or meat and seafood (optional).

Raw vegetables, such as thinly sliced peppers, grape tomatoes split in half, radish wedges, or grated carrots, make great

accents for green salads, as do sliced chilled meats (like leftover steak or chicken) or bite-sized pieces of cold seafood (like shrimp, lobster, or squid). Roasted apples or pears are easy additions that can turn a simple salad into a full-on lunch entrée. Vegetables can, of course, completely supplant the greens in a salad, as in some chopped salads, salads of roasted vegetables (see the beet salads [here](#) and [here](#)), salads of blanched and chilled vegetables (see Asparagus Salad, [here](#)), or salads made with cooked white or other dried beans (see [here](#)).

6. Dress your salad properly and serve it immediately.

Greens begin to wilt the instant they are dressed. Wait until the last possible second to dress and season them, then toss them as gently as possible to coat. That means using a bowl and tossing with your hands (see “Dressing Salads,” [here](#)).

As you go through these stages of salad development, it’s important to keep in mind that more often than not, less is more. Does your salad really need cheese, anchovies, salami, onions, tomatoes, toasted nuts, *and* herbs? Probably not. I’ve provided a number of recipes for salads in this chapter, but I prefer to think of them more as blueprints—as a means of learning how to design your own salads to suit your own tastes.

{ PICKING SALAD GREENS }

I categorize salad greens into four different basic groups: crisp, peppery, mild, and bitter. In most cases, any member of one of these groups can be substituted for another member. So, for example, you can make a Caesar salad with iceberg lettuce without significantly altering the flavor profile, but you can't make it with hot and peppery arugula or bitter radicchio. Here are the most common lettuce varieties you'll find in these categories.

Crisp Lettuces

Best served with creamy mayonnaise or dairy-based dressings.

- **Iceberg** got a bad rap in the 1990s when arugula came into vogue and it was suddenly seen as provincial or low-class. Not so. No other lettuce is as crisp or refreshing. While it may not deliver powerful flavor, it maintains its crunch even under duress. I can't think of anything else that can stand up so nicely to blue cheese dressing or a hot hamburger patty. The fact that it keeps for a couple of weeks in the fridge makes it a useful staple to have on hand.
- **Romaine**, also referred to as **Cos lettuce**, is the classic

choice for Caesar salad. The pale yellow inner leaves are crisper and sweeter than the outer green leaves, and some people like to discard the darker leaves. It holds up nicely to creamy mayonnaise-based dressings. Closely related is **Little Gem** or **Sucrine** lettuce, a smaller, more tender variety.

- **Green leaf and red leaf**, along with other loose-leaf lettuces like **oak leaf**, **Lollo Rosso**, **Lollo Bionda**, and **Salad Bowl**, are far more delicate than Romaine or iceberg, with loosely packed leaves that are tender around the edges. Most varieties have a very mild flavor. Creamy dressings will work fine, but you'll want serve the salad as soon as possible after dressing, before the leaves turn limp. Mild vinaigrettes also work well.



Peppery arugula greens in a vinaigrette.

- **Butter (Boston) lettuce and its close cousin Bibb lettuce** are the most tender of all, with large cup-shaped, mildly sweet leaves. As with green-leaf lettuces, you'll want to serve butter or Bibb lettuce as soon as possible after dressing.

Peppery Greens

Best served with sharp or mild vinaigrettes.

- **Arugula**, sometimes called rocket, is the most widely available peppery green, and it ranges from relatively small, mild, and tender leaves to large, robustly peppery behemoths. **Sylvetta**, a wilder, spicier cousin, is more and more available these days. Arugula goes best with sharp vinaigrettes that won't get overwhelmed by its pepperiness. I buy my arugula prewashed in plastic clamshells so that I never have an excuse not to throw a quick side salad together for dinner.
- **Watercress** is a perennial weedy green well loved for its spicy bite. Its stems are quite hearty, but its leaves wilt relatively quickly after being picked—you should buy watercress no more than a day or two before you intend to use it. Other cress varieties like **garden cress** and **upland cress** can sometimes be found in high-end supermarkets in dirt-filled containers to be snipped and added to salad mixes as desired.
- **Mizuna**, also known as **Japanese mustard** or **spider mustard greens**, has texture similar to arugula but a much milder bite. When mature, it's best used for stir-fries, but the small greens are excellent in salads, dressed with a mild vinaigrette.

Mild Greens

Best served with a mild vinaigrette.

- **Spinach** is one of my favorite greens to have on hand, as it's excellent either as a salad or quickly sautéed or steamed for a side dish. I prefer the milder, sweeter, more tender flat-leaf spinach (either the baby variety sold in

plastic clamshells or the adult flat-leaf sold in bunches) to the tougher, more fibrous curly, which is better for cooking.

- **Tatsoi**, also called spinach mustard, has a mild, cabbage-like pungency faintly reminiscent of bok choy. It has small, round, tender leaves very similar in texture to spinach.
- **Mâche** is the French name for lamb's lettuce. It usually comes in tiny florets of 4 to 5 leaves attached at the roots. It's got a very mild flavor and is delicate, so it should be dressed lightly just prior to serving.

Bitter Greens

Work well with any flavorful dressing, either creamy or vinaigrette-based.

- **Dandelion greens**, or the very similar Italian *puntarelle*, can range from mildly spicy to more-bitter-than-Mr.-Burns-on-tax-day. It's not always easy to tell, but, in general, paler, more tender leaves will have a milder flavor and larger, feathered, deep green leaves will be too bitter and tough to use in salads.
- **Belgian endive** is watery with a mild bitterness. It's great in chopped salads or served as individual leaves on a crudité platter alongside a bowl of creamy dip or dressing.
- **Curly endive**, also known as *frisée* or **chicory**, comes in small, feathery heads with deep- to pale-green fibrous outer leaves surrounding sweet, tender pale yellow center leaves. Obsessive-compulsive types or those with willing

lackeys like to carefully pick away all but the most tender inner leaves. This is a great way to keep overzealous but undertalented helpers busy, though, really, a simple trim of the toughest green leaves will do.

- **Radicchio** resembles a small head of red cabbage. It's got an intensely bitter flavor that can be quite powerful in salads, though it also has an underlying sweetness that cuts through. Its sweetness can be amplified by grilling it or roasting it in a hot oven to caramelize it. One of my favorite salads is cold grilled radicchio with herbs and a simple vinaigrette.
- **Escarole**, or **broad-leaf endive**, vaguely resembles a larger version of curly endive and has a similarly faintly bitter flavor. As with curly endive, the tender pale green or yellow leaves are best. The heartier deep green leaves should be discarded.



WASHING SALAD GREENS

Aside from careful selection and some basic trimming all you'll have to do with most salad greens is a quick wash to remove any dirt, sand, or bugs. By far the easiest way to do this is with a salad spinner. I like to use a large one—at least one gallon—so that you can prepare enough greens for four people at the same time.

To properly wash greens, remove the top of the salad spinner, leaving the basket in place. Fill it up with cold water, then submerge your greens and swish them around for 10 to 15 seconds. Carefully lift the basket out of the spinner. Any dirt and sand should be left behind in the bottom. Dump it out, and repeat the rinsing steps until the water is completely clear, then spin your greens until completely dry.

Whole head lettuces should be stored intact, but loose leaves should be washed immediately after purchase and stored in either their plastic clamshell container or rolled up in a paper towel and placed inside a plastic bag left slightly open.



GREEN VEGETABLES IN SALADS

Green vegetables for salads should be blanched in boiling salted water, then shocked in ice water, so that they retain their bright color. Blanching them improves their texture and takes away their raw edge. Make sure to dry them carefully before adding them to a salad—excess water can ruin a balanced vinaigrette.

FRUITS IN SALADS

Fruits offer many ways to add textural and flavor contrast to a regular green salad (as opposed to a fruit salad). Here are the categories I usually consider:

- **Raw fruits** are best when crisp and slightly acidic, like thinly sliced apples, pears, or young mangoes. Citrus suprêmes (citrus segments that have been cut away from the membranes; see “How to Cut Citrus Suprêmes,” below) are delicious in salads.
- **Dried fruits** are quick and easy, providing concentrated bursts of sweetness and flavor in a green salad. I especially like the sweet-tart chew of dried cranberries, but don’t overlook raisins, currants, dried apples, apricots, figs, and prunes.
- **Pan-roasted fruits** caramelized in a bit of butter and sugar (see [here](#)) add richness and complexity to lighter salads. I particularly like the combination of pan-roasted apples and pears with spicy greens. Use compact, crisp fruit, like apples, pears, quinces, or firm stone fruits.

HOW TO CUT CITRUS SUPRÊMES

There are several reasons to cut your citrus fruits into pith-free segments, or suprêmes.

- The pith is bitter and can ruin the flavor of the fruit. I'm sure many a grapefruit hater would change his mind after tasting sweet pith-free segments the way they were intended.
- The membranes between the segments are papery, get stuck in your teeth, and add nothing to the flavor of the fruit.
- The slices can be incorporated much more attractively into a finished dish. Fruit salads will be tastier. Relishes and vinaigrettes can be eaten without having to pick out bits of membrane.
- Knowing how to do it makes you look way cool.

STEP 1: REMOVE THE TOP AND BOTTOM OF THE FRUIT Start by slicing the top and bottom off your fruit, exposing the flesh.

STEP 2: START REMOVING THE SKIN Stand the fruit on one of its cut surfaces and carefully cut away the skin with a sharp chef's or santoku knife, following the contours of the fruit to remove all the white pith

but as little flesh as possible.

STEP 3: REPEAT Continue removing the skin and pith in this manner, working all the way around the fruit.

STEP 4: TRIM AS NECESSARY Once all the skin is removed, scan the fruit once more and remove any bits of pith left behind.

STEP 5: SLICE ALONG THE MEMBRANES Pick up the fruit, hold it over a bowl, and use your knife to make a single incision along the side of the membrane separating two segments.

STEP 6: SLICE ALONG THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEGMENT Make another cut along the membrane on the other side of one segment. This should release the segment into the waiting bowl.

STEP 7: REPEAT Continue cutting along both sides of each segment until all of them have been released.

STEP 8: JUICE Squeeze the remaining membranes with your hands, or use a potato ricer, to extract any remaining juice. To store citrus segments, keep them in a sealed container in their juice.

STEP 9: DRAIN AND USE Before using the citrus segments, drain away the juice and reserve it for another use, such as mixing into the dressing or drinking alongside the salad. Cut the segments into smaller pieces, if desired





DRESSING SALADS

A properly dressed salad is beautiful. There are few things that get my goat more than when a restaurant serves you undressed greens with a small dish of dressing on the side. For salads, “on the side” simply does not work, no matter how much of a control freak you are. Drizzling dressing over a salad delivers some leaves that are overloaded and others that have almost no dressing at all. What’s

the point of making a perfectly balanced, well-emulsified vinaigrette if its balance gets thrown off by poor distribution?

To properly dress a salad, start with a really large bowl—at least three times the volume of the amount of salad you are planning on dressing. Add the greens and less dressing than you think you need (you can always add more), along with a tiny pinch of salt and a few cracks of pepper (even salads should be seasoned properly). Gently toss the salad by scooping it up from underneath with your clean hands (never use harsh tongs on delicate greens), allowing the greens to both rub around the sides of the bowl and cascade down on top of one another. Once everything is thoroughly coated, taste the salad and add more dressing, salt, and/or pepper if necessary. Now *that* is what a salad is supposed to taste like.



{ SALAD DRESSINGS }

While fresh leafy greens and vegetables may be the stars of a salad, it's the dressing that makes it. Think of dressing as the vermouth in lettuce's gin martini. It's not necessary, but it sure makes the whole thing go down much more smoothly.

Salad dressing comes in three basic categories:

- **Vinaigrettes** are emulsified mixtures of oil and acid—usually either vinegar or citrus juice—with other flavoring agents.
- **Mayonnaise-based dressings** begin with an emulsion as well, this time aided by egg yolks. Because egg-yolk emulsions are extremely stable, mayonnaise-based dressings tend to be thicker and creamier.
- **Dairy-based dressings** start with a bacterially thickened dairy product like sour cream, crème fraîche, or buttermilk and add other flavoring agents to it.

When it comes to making any of these dressings, technique rules. Once you've got the basic methods and ratios down, they become infinitely adaptable.

DRESSING Family #1: VINAIGRETTES

For me, the big question about vinaigrettes has never really been “how?” but “why?” Is emulsifying the oil and acid *really* necessary? Can’t I just drizzle olive oil and vinegar over my greens, toss ’em in the bowl, and get the same result? *Why* must my vinaigrette be so carefully constructed? To get the answers to these questions, a bit of hard-core kitchen work was in order.



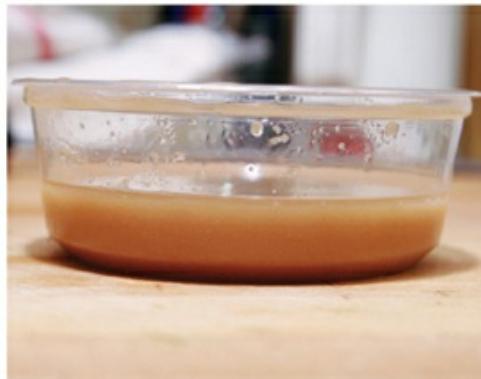
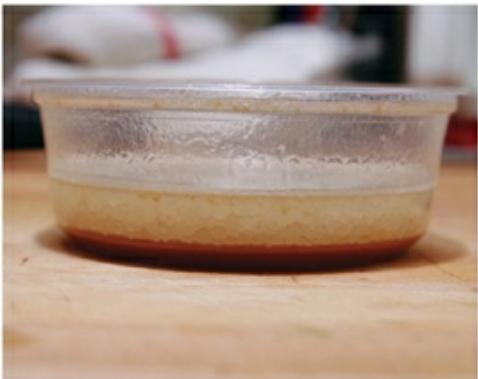
First things first: What exactly is an emulsion? At its most basic, it’s what you get when you force two things that don’t

easily mix to form a homogeneous mixture. In cooking, this most often occurs with oil and water (and, for all intents and purposes, vinegar or lemon juice can be considered water, as they behave in the same way). You can put them in a container together and stir them up, but eventually, like cats and dogs, they will separate and stick with their own kind. There are a couple of ways around this. The first is to disperse one of the two—the oil, say—into fine-enough droplets that water can completely surround them. Kind of like putting a single cat inside a ring of dogs—there's no way for it to escape and rejoin its feline friends. A common example of this kind of emulsion is homogenized milk, in which whole milk is forced at high pressure through a fine screen, breaking up its fat molecules into individual droplets that are suspended in the watery whey. This is called an oil-in-water emulsion, because the fat molecules are separated and completely surrounded by water molecules. Most familiar culinary emulsions are of this type, the most common exception being butter, which is a water-in-oil emulsion: tiny drops of water are completely suspended in butterfat (of course, once you incorporate that butter into a hollandaise sauce, you've converted it into an oil-in-water emulsion; see [here](#) for more on hollandaise).

Simply mixing oil and vinegar forms an extremely unstable emulsion—no matter how thoroughly you mix them, no matter how much you separate the oil molecules, eventually they regroup and your emulsion will break. In order to form a stable emulsion, you need to add an emulsifying agent known as a surfactant.

Remember that cartoon CatDog? The one with the head

of a cat on one end and the head of a dog on the other? Well, CatDog is kind of like a surfactant: he's got something that's attractive to both cats *and* dogs, which makes him a kind of feline-canine ambassador, allowing the two to mix together a little more easily. Culinary surfactants are molecules that have one end that is attractive to water (*hydrophilic*) and one that is attractive to oil (*hydrophobic*). Common kitchen surfactants include egg yolks, mustard, and honey, and it's easy to see the work of a surfactant in action.



The container on the left contains oil and balsamic vinegar mixed in a ratio of 3:1. The one on the right has the same ingredients, with the addition of a small amount of Dijon mustard. Both containers were sealed and shaken vigorously until the vinaigrette looked homogeneous. I then allowed them to rest at room temperature for 5 minutes. As you can see, the vinaigrette without the mustard separated much more rapidly than the one with mustard.

At this point, you're probably thinking what I'm thinking: this is all very neat, but what difference does it make to my salad? Good question.

I'd always been under the impression (and I'm not the only one) that a dressed salad eventually wilts because the acid in the vinegar attacks the leaves. To test this theory, I dressed $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce of fresh salad greens with 1 teaspoon distilled white vinegar (5% acetic acid), another $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce with plain water (as a control), and a third $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce with olive oil, then let the leaves sit at room temperature for 10 minutes.



Oil-dressed greens.



Vinegar-dressed greens.

Surprise! Turns out that vinegar was not the culprit after all. The greens dressed with plain oil wilted significantly faster than those dressed with vinegar. In fact, the vinegar-coated greens fared pretty much just as well as those dressed with water!

The truth is that salad greens, like any leaf, spend their time exposed to the elements, and as such, need to be able to protect themselves from the rain. They do this via a thin, waxy cuticle: it's like a little built-in raincoat. But, this oily cuticle makes it very easy for the olive oil to penetrate the spaces between cells, causing damage to the leaf. It's the *oil*, not the vinegar, that causes greens to wilt (a fact that can actually be used to our advantages with certain tough greens like kale—see Marinated Kale Salads, [here](#)). So, to prevent

your salad from turning soggy, you need to figure out a way to protect the leaves from the oil. An oil-in-water emulsion, where the oil is completely surrounded by vinegar molecules, should provide just that kind of protection.

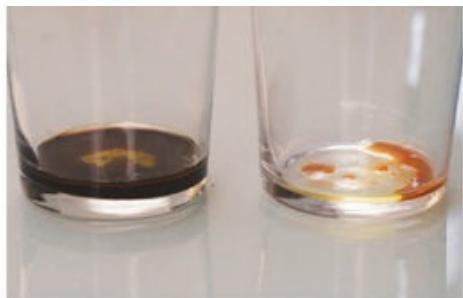
I dressed another batch of salad greens with a shaken mixture of oil and vinegar and took an up-close-and-personal look at the results. Here's what I saw:



That's right. Drops of vinegar suspended above the surface of the leaves by larger drops of oil, like little blobs sitting in beanbag chairs. Lifting these leaves caused a cascade of vinegar to fall off the leaves, and examining the bottom of the bowl confirmed my fears: the oil stuck to the leaves and caused them to wilt, while the vinegar all sank to the bottom. Clearly, I needed a surfactant to keep my oil and

vinegar emulsified.

I set up one last experiment, this time dressing two 1-ounce portions of salad greens side by side. The first was dressed with a homogenized mixture of 1 tablespoon olive oil, 1 teaspoon vinegar, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Dijon mustard. The second was dressed with just the oil and vinegar. After tossing the greens, I immediately placed each batch inside a funnel set over a small glass to catch any drippings.



Draining salad greens in a funnel allows us to see the difference between a properly emulsified vinaigrette and a poor one.

Almost immediately, the nonmustardy batch started dripping a steady trickle of vinegar into the glass, while the well-emulsified dressing stayed firmly in place. After only 10 minutes, the oil-and-vinegar glass had nearly a full teaspoon of vinegar in the bottom—almost the entire amount that I had put on the greens in the first place—and was starting to drip a few drops of oil as well. The other glass had shed at most a dozen drops.

The results were irrefutable: if you don't emulsify your vinaigrette, you end up with a pile of leaves wilting in oil

and a pool of vinegar at the bottom of the salad bowl. An emulsified vinaigrette, on the other hand, uses the power of surfactants to help both the oil *and* the vinegar cling tightly to the leaves, giving you balanced flavor in every mouthful.

OBSESSIVE-EMULSIVE



What about the ratio of oil to vinegar? I tried various ratios, everywhere from 1:4 to 4:1 oil to vinegar. In the end, the classic French recipe of three parts oil to one part vinegar proved to form the strongest, most stable emulsion with a nice, viscous, leaf-coating consistency. In some cases, I

found the amount of vinegar a little too aggressive. But you can easily replace some of the vinegar with water to tone it down—or, if you want to bring a bit of a meaty bite to your salad (I often do), replace part of it with soy sauce.

As for the best emulsifier for the job, mustard is the most common surfactant, and it works best when you have at least 1 teaspoon per tablespoon of vinegar (you can add more if you'd like). Mayonnaise works even better, easily forming a creamy sauce, though it lacks the pleasant tang of mustard. For a sweeter dressing (say, on a beet salad or an asparagus salad), honey also works very well. Try adding honey and toasted crushed nuts to a basic vinaigrette. It rocks in more ways than one.

As for mixing, some advocate slowly whisking in the oil. Others shake it up in a jam jar. Still others insist on the blender. Well, after testing, I found that, not surprisingly, a blender will give you the tightest emulsion, though it can cause your olive oil to turn extremely bitter (see “The Bitter Blend,” [here](#)) while the shake-it-in-a-jar version will be the weakest, lasting for only 30 minutes or so. But the truth of the matter is, your vinaigrette only needs to stay stable for the length of time it takes you to eat a salad.

I put the ingredients for my vinaigrette into a 1-pint squeeze bottle in the fridge and shake it up right before I use it. Or, as is more often the case, I take it out of the fridge and realize that, once again, my wife has finished off all but the last drop, forcing me

to make more.

ALL ABOUT OLIVE OIL

How to Buy Olive Oil

Asking what olive oil you should buy is similar to asking what knife you should use, what car to drive, or what Beatles album to listen to: it's largely a matter of personal taste. Once you get past a certain base threshold of quality, whether to choose an oil that is buttery and rich or bright and grassy is largely up to you.

Olive oil comes in several different grades:

- “Virgin” and “Extra-Virgin” are standards set by the International Olive Oil Council, and they reflect a mark of quality. Virgin olive oils can contain up to 2 percent oleic acid. *Extra-virgin* olive oil contains no more than 0.8 percent oleic acid and it is subjectively deemed superior in flavor to standard virgin olive oil. Neither of these oils can be made from olives that have been heated to extract oil. The extra-virgin production of most countries accounts for between 5 and 10 percent of their total output, hence the relatively high price.
- “First Cold Press” indicates that the olive oil

was pressed from unheated olives and that the oil came from their first pressing. To a large degree, this label overlaps the extra-virgin label.

- “Pure” or “Light” has nothing to do with olive oil’s calorie content—it is only an indication of flavor. These olive oils are made from subsequent pressing of olives, or from olives that have been heated to extract more oil. The oil is then refined, so that none of the flavorful compounds found in virgin or extra-virgin oil are present—leaving you with a neutral oil with a high smoke point. Light olive oils tend to be far more expensive than vegetable or canola oils, which will work just as well or better for cooking. Leave these on the shelf.

Extra-virgin is pricey, so how do you find a good one? My advice is to locate a store that will let you try the oils before you buy, and taste at first without paying attention to sticker price. You may well find that the cheapest bottle in the shop suits you just fine. If you have the time, budget, and inclination, it can be fun to collect olive oils from various parts of the world. In the United States, it’s now fairly easy to find olive oil imported from Italy, Spain, France, Morocco, and South America, along with our own domestic olive oils (mainly from California). I like to keep a few of my favorite bottles on hand: a sunny and grassy Spanish olive oil from Extremadura, like Merula or Oro San Carlos; a buttery, rich Italian

oil, like Columela or Colavita; and a pungent and spicy one from California, like McEvoy Ranch, DaVero, or Séka Hills (you can order all of these online). One thing to note is that there have been reports that many olive oils claiming to be Italian are actually only *bottled* in Italy, the oils being sourced from other Mediterranean countries. I don't let these reports bother me: if I like the flavor of what's in the bottle, that's good enough for me.

If I were marooned in a strange city with only a supermarket in front of me and no chance of tasting before I buy, the brand I'd tend to gravitate toward is Colavita, which has a fine buttery, spicy nose and very little bitterness.

How to Taste Olive Oil

In Deborah Krasner's fine book *The Flavors of Olive Oil*, she classifies olive oil into four distinct groups. Thinking of these flavors is an exercise that I find useful when shopping around. Her groups are: delicate and mild, fruity and fragrant, olivey and peppery, and leafy green and grassy. To these great descriptors, I'd also add buttery and rich.

When you taste olive oil, start by smelling it, noting its aroma, then place a bit on your tongue. Swirl it around your tongue to coat each part and try to pinpoint what it's doing to each section. Is that a hint of sweetness you detect? Are there bitter notes? How spicy is it? Finally, inhale a bit of

oxygen through your mouth and draw it across your tongue to pull the aromas back to your soft palate and up into your nose. You should get an entirely new wave of flavors, which again multiply when you finally swallow the oil. Tasting good olive oil is not unlike tasting good wine.

How to Store Olive Oil

You wouldn't believe the number of home kitchens I've walked into where the olive oil was stored next to or directly above the stove. In every single case, when I opened the bottle and smelled it, the olive oil was rancid.

As with all fats, the enemies of olive oil are heat, light, and air. When exposed to oxygen, long-chained fatty acids can break down into shorter pieces, lending the oil an off aroma. Heat and light both hasten the process. For the longest shelf life, olive oil should be stored in a dark container (preferably a metal can) in a cool, dark cabinet, as far away from the radiator or oven as possible. If you like to buy your olive oil in bulk, get it in gallon (or larger) cans and transfer some of it to a smaller container for daily use. I use carefully washed-and-dried dark-green wine bottles with small metal pizza-parlor-style olive oil pourers, so I can choose between different flavors depending on my mood.

If you plan on using a very special extra-virgin olive oil only on rare occasions, it's best to store it in

the fridge. It may turn cloudy and solidify, but don't worry—it'll return to normal once it warms up to room temperature.

Cooking with Olive Oil

You often hear that extra-virgin olive oil should only be used for flavoring and finishing, never for cooking. And this is true to a degree—you don't want to heat extra-virgin to the point where it starts to break down and develop bitter flavors. But cooking at relatively low temperatures with it—say, gently sweating onions or vegetables for the base of a sauce or soup—is totally fine, and, indeed, you can taste the difference in the finished product. That said, if you want to save a bit of cash, finishing a dish with extra-virgin oil is definitely the most efficient way to go.

So, for best flavor, cook with extra-virgin in gentle situations and finish the dish with some more drizzled on at the end. For best value, cook with a more neutral oil (such as canola, vegetable, or light olive oil), saving the extra-virgin until the very end. Never heat extra-virgin to shimmering or smoking temperatures.

The Bitter Blend

The food processor may seem like the logical choice for making your vinaigrettes and mayonnaises more

stable, and using high-quality extra-virgin olive oil seems like a no-brainer as well, but combine the two, and you've got a problem. You see, extra-virgin olive oil droplets are composed of many tiny fat fragments, many of which are bound tightly together, preventing our taste buds from picking them up. But whip the olive oil with enough vigor, by, using a food processor or blender, and you end up shearing those bitter-tasting fragments apart from each other. The result is a vinaigrette or mayonnaise with a markedly bitter taste. Not only that, but these tiny fragments actually *decrease* the efficacy of emulsifiers like mustard or lecithin, making your sauce more likely to break.

So what if you want to have an ultra stable mayonnaise that's strongly flavored with extra-virgin olive oil but has no bitterness? The key is to use a neutral-flavored oil like canola or vegetable to start your mayonnaise in the food processor. Once it's stable, transfer it to a bowl and whisk in some extra-virgin olive oil by hand. You'll get plenty of flavor but none of the bitterness.

VINAIGRETTE RATIOS

Here's the really awesome thing: now that you

know how a vinaigrette works, you'll never have to follow a recipe. As long as you get the ratio of your ingredients right and use the proper technique, you can flavor your vinaigrette any way that you'd like. Here's the most basic recipe for a cup of vinaigrette, in table form. One note: if you want to add herbs to your vinaigrette, it's best to add them just before use —they'll wilt and turn brown if you store the vinaigrette in the fridge.

ACID (1 part)	EMULSIFIER ($\frac{1}{3}$ part)	O F
White or red wine vinegar	Mustard	Mi
Balsamic vinegar	Mayonnaise	Mi
Sherry vinegar	Honey	Mi
Rice vinegar	Egg yolk	To
Cider vinegar		
Lemon juice		Gr

(or a combination of lemon and another citrus)

Verjus

Soy sauce (in combination with an acid)

Ma

To make any amount of the most basic vinaigrette, combine 1 part acid (or a combination of acid and water as desired), $\frac{1}{3}$ part emulsifier, and any other flavorings you might like (the amount will vary by taste, but generally I go with around $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ part), 3 parts neutral oil (or substitute up to 1 part of the neutral oil with a flavored oil. Neutral oil can be replaced 100% with extra-virgin olive oil, if desired). Shake everything in a sealed container, season with salt and pepper, and you're ready to get dressed.

MILD LEMON- OR RED WINE–OLIVE OIL VINAIGRETTE

NOTE: Citrus-based vinaigrettes don't keep as long as vinegar-based ones do—the citrus juice will begin to ferment after about a week or so of refrigeration—so make them in smaller batches. Use this on mild or peppery greens or on simple blanched vegetables.

MAKES ABOUT $\frac{1}{2}$ CUP

**4 teaspoons lemon juice (from 1 lemon) or red wine
vinegar**

2 teaspoons water

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

**1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane
(about 1 teaspoon)**

1 small shallot, finely minced

6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Combine all the ingredients in a small jar or squeeze bottle. Seal it and shake vigorously until emulsified. The vinaigrette will keep in the refrigerator for up to 1 week if made with

lemon juice, or up to 6 months if made with vinegar. Shake vigorously before each use.

KNIFE SKILLS: How to Mince a Shallot

Finely minced shallots are the secret ingredient of fancy restaurants. They go into everything from salad dressings to sautéed vegetables. Here's how you do it.



STEP 1: TRIM, SPLIT, AND PEEL Trim the non-root end off the shallot, then split it lengthwise. Remove the papery skin. Place the shallot half cut face down on the cutting board.



STEP 2: MAKE THE VERTICAL CUTS Holding a shallot half firmly in place and using your knuckles as a guide, make a series of very fine vertical cuts with the tip of a very sharp chef's, santoku, or paring knife, keeping the shallot intact at the root end.



STEP 3: MAKE THE HORIZONTAL CUTS Hold the shallot from the top (never from the sides!) and make one or two horizontal incisions, keeping the shallot intact at the root end.



STEP 4: MINCE Make another series of vertical slices at a 90-degree angle to the original series. To chop it even finer, rock the knife back and forth across the minced shallot until reduced to the desired consistency.

BASIC MIXED GREEN SALAD

SERVES 4

12 ounces (about 3 quarts) mixed salad greens, washed and dried

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup Mild Lemon- or Red Wine–Olive Oil Vinaigrette ([here](#)), vigorously shaken

Combine the greens with a pinch of salt, a few cracks of pepper, and the vinaigrette in a large bowl and gently toss with clean hands until evenly coated. Serve immediately.

ASPARAGUS SALAD WITH TOASTED ALMONDS AND GOAT CHEESE

NOTE: Asparagus skin can sometimes be tough or stringy. I like to peel my asparagus stalks, starting about 2 inches below the tips.



SERVES 4

Kosher salt

1½ pounds asparagus, ends trimmed, stalks peeled (see Note above), and cut into 2-inch pieces

½ cup toasted slivered almonds
1 medium shallot, finely sliced (about ¼ cup)
Freshly ground black pepper
½ cup Mild Lemon- or Red Wine–Olive Oil Vinaigrette (here), vigorously shaken
4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Add the asparagus and cook until bright green and tender but still with a bit of bite, about 3 minutes. Drain in a colander and run under cold water until cool. Drain and dry in a salad spinner.
2. Transfer the asparagus to a large serving bowl and season with salt and pepper. Add the almonds, shallots, and half of the dressing and toss to coat. Sprinkle with the goat cheese and serve immediately, passing extra dressing at the table.





HOW TO TOAST NUTS

Toasting nuts improves their flavor by adding a layer of complexity and their texture by making them crunchier. There are two ways to do it.

To toast nuts in a skillet, place the nuts in a dry skillet and cook over medium heat, tossing and stirring constantly, until the nuts darken a few shades. The more constantly you stir and flip, the more evenly they'll toast. Transfer to a bowl and allow to cool.

To toast nuts in the oven, spread the nuts on a rimmed baking sheet and bake in a preheated 350°F oven, giving them a stir every few minutes, until they darken a few shades about 10 minutes. Nuts toasted in the oven cook more evenly than those toasted in a skillet.

SPRING VEGETABLE SALAD

The greatest part of a dish like this is that you can do pretty much everything ahead of time: blanch your vegetables, make the optional puree (see the Note), make the vinaigrette, even poach the eggs, and store them in the fridge. When you're ready to eat, just mix your vegetables (I add a few tender raw pea shoots to the salad as well) and toss them in the vinaigrette until coated. Lay them on top of your puree, add your eggs, and drizzle with a bit more vinaigrette (or just straight-up olive oil), and you're ready to dig in.

NOTES: Feel free to use whatever fresh green vegetables you can find. Young broccoli stalks, Brussels sprouts, fava beans, or fiddleheads would all work fine.

If desired, the asparagus peelings can be blanched until tender, then pureed in a blender with 2 tablespoons water and 1 tablespoon olive oil until smooth and used as an additional sauce for the dish.



- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Mild Lemon- or Red Wine–Olive Oil Vinaigrette
[\(here\)](#)**
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest plus a few dozen strips zest
(from 1 lemon)**
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley**
- Kosher salt**
- 1 cup shelled fresh peas or defrosted frozen peas**
- 2 cups sugar snap peas, strings removed, ends trimmed,
and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces on the bias**

1 pound asparagus, ends trimmed, peeled, and cut into 2-inch pieces (see Note, [here](#))

2 cups tender pea or snow pea shoots, thick stems removed

Freshly ground black pepper

4 poached eggs (see [here](#))

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped mixed fresh herbs, such as parsley, tarragon, and chives

1. Combine the dressing with the lemon zest and parsley. Set aside.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Prepare an ice bath. Blanch the peas in the boiling water until bright green and just tender, about 1 minute. With a wire-mesh strainer, transfer to the ice bath. Add the snap peas to the boiling water and cook until bright green and just tender, 1 to 1½ minutes. Transfer to the ice bath with the strainer. Add the asparagus to the boiling water and cook until bright green and just tender, about 1 minute. Drain and transfer to the ice bath.
3. Remove all the vegetables from the ice bath, drain, and transfer to a rimmed baking sheet lined with paper towels or a clean kitchen towel to dry.
4. Toss the peas, snow peas, asparagus, and pea shoots with three-quarters of the dressing in a large bowl. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Divide the salad evenly among four bowls. Top each with a poached egg. Spoon the remaining dressing over the eggs and season them with salt. Garnish the salads with the lemon zest strips and herbs. Serve immediately.

THE RULES OF BLANCHING

There are no set rules for what vegetables to use in spring or summer salads, but there are some basics to bring them together perfectly. Here are the rules I go by when blanching those vegetables. This method will work for many of spring's finest green vegetables, including but not limited to peas, fava beans, asparagus, fiddlehead ferns, snow peas, and snap peas.

Rule #1: Use a Big Pot with Lots of Water at a Rolling Boil



When you drop a green vegetable into a pot of boiling water, a number of changes occur. First, blanching destroys enough cellular structure to just barely tenderize the vegetable to the point that it has lost its raw, fibrous edge but still retains crunch. Second, intercellular gases expand and escape from the vegetable (you'll notice small bubbles coming out of, say, your asparagus stalks for a moment or two after dropping them into the hot water). This initial escape of gas is what causes the color of a vegetable to change from pale green to a vibrant bright green —the gas pockets that had been diffusing light suddenly disappear, allowing the full color of the chlorophyll pigment to stand out. At the same time, enzymes that would naturally break green pigments down into brown ones are destroyed.

This is why blanched vegetables appear brighter

green and, more important, stay bright green much longer than raw vegetables. Of course, continue cooking too long, and the chlorophyll will eventually break down and your vegetables will go from bright green to a drab olive green or even brown. The goal is to effect those changes as quickly as possible, without allowing time for the chlorophyll to begin breaking down. That's why you want to use plenty of water—it retains its temperature better after you add the vegetables, which subsequently cook faster.*

Rule #2: Blanch Each Vegetable Separately



Asparagus isn't exactly like snap peas. Snow peas are thinner than fiddleheads. Vegetables all take a slightly different amount of time to cook, depending on their size, density, etc. The only way to get all of your vegetables cooked perfectly is to cook them separately, though you can use the same pot and same water, of course. This takes us to . . .

Rule #3: Cut All the Vegetables the Same Size

Each vegetable should be trimmed to pieces that are all the same basic size and shape so that they will cook evenly. With snap peas, for instance, I remove the strings, cut off the tips, and then slice them on a bias into nice pea-sized pieces that cook quickly and evenly.

For asparagus, I'll often trim off the tips and cook them separately from the stalks, as the tips are so much narrower and more fragile. Fiddleheads can be cooked as is, as can shelled peas or fava beans. If you want to go real hard-core with your peas and favas, blanch them, then peel off the thin skin around each individual pea or fava. It's time-consuming, but you'll end up with pretty results.

Rule #4: Trust Nothing Except Your Own Senses

When blanching vegetables, do not rely on a timer, do not rely on past experience—trust no one and nothing save your own eyes and mouth. Despite the best efforts of Big Ag, vegetables are still real, living organisms that are naturally diverse. The asparagus you're cooking today is different from the asparagus you cooked last week and will take a slightly different cooking time.

Watch carefully as the vegetables cook. Fish out pieces and taste them often, and as soon as they are ready, remove them with a wire mesh strainer and drop them into your ice bath.

Rule #5: Shock the Vegetables in Ice Water and Dry Carefully



I've recently been reading conflicting reports on whether or not shocking in ice water is essential. It is, and it's easy enough to prove: Blanch a big ol' pile of peas, take them out, and put them into a bowl without shocking them in ice water. Let them cool. You'll find that the peas at the bottom and center of the pile will be overcooked by the time you dig 'em up.

This is because the reactions that cause a pea to

lose its bright green color are not instantaneous. The peas have to be above a certain temperature for a certain amount of time to lose color. A single pea cooling at room temperature will rapidly cool to a safe zone. A pea in the middle of a pile of other really hot peas, however, may stay hot for a good fifteen minutes to half an hour, depending on the size of the pile. That's plenty of time for the pea to lose its color.

Moral of the story: if you are blanching more than one pea at a time, you should shock them in an ice bath, or at the very least spread them onto a large plate or rimmed baking sheet in a single layer to cool.

Then, as soon as the vegetables are chilled, remove them from the ice bath, let them drain, and lay them on paper towels or a clean kitchen towel to dry. The dressing you're going to apply to them sticks better to dry ingredients.

FINGERLING POTATO SALAD WITH CREAMY VINAIGRETTE

I've made simple vinaigrette-dressed potato salads in the past—they tend to work pretty well with the firm low-starch fingerling-style potatoes you find in the spring. I actually like the cleaner, sharper flavors, which really allow the potatoes to shine. But they're never quite as satisfying as a real creamy, mayo-based potato salad texture-wise (like the [Classic American Potato Salad here](#)). What to do? Why not use the power of the potatoes themselves to creamify† my dressing?

I knew that the starch granules naturally present in a potato could be a powerful natural thickener, adding richness and creaminess to otherwise thin sauces. I initially tried mashing a few of my cooked fingerlings to see if I could get them to form a creamy coating, but it didn't work. Those small, young potatoes are so low in starch and so firm textured that they never really get smooth and creamy unless you go so far as to pass them through a tamis or fine-mesh strainer.

Much easier was to just add a single Yukon Gold potato to the mix and then fish out a few pieces of it after cooking all the potatoes, along with a bit of the starchy cooking liquid. I added the chunks and the liquid to the base for my dressing (a simple vinaigrette made with the

vinegar, whole-grain mustard, shallots, and sweet pickle relish), then started smashing. Once the potatoes were relatively smooth, I slowly whisked in some extra-virgin olive oil. I ended up with a semi-loose yet creamy vinaigrette that had the advantage of bright, fresh acidity and a texture that didn't dilute any of the wonderful, subtle flavors of the fingerling potatoes.

Just a few more seasonings and textural elements—sugar, pepper, celery, parsley, capers, and sliced shallots—and my new light fingerling potato salad was born. And what a delicious baby it was.



1



2



3



4

SERVES 4 TO 6

1½ pounds fingerling potatoes (such as La Ratte or Russian Banana), cut into ½-inch disks

1 large Yukon Gold potato (8 ounces), peeled, quartered lengthwise, and cut into ½-inch slices

Kosher salt

2½ tablespoons white wine vinegar

1 tablespoon whole-grain mustard

1 tablespoon pickle relish

1 tablespoon sugar, plus more if desired

2 small shallots, 1 minced (about ¼ cup), 1 thinly sliced (about ¼ cup)

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon capers, rinsed, drained, and roughly chopped

2 stalks celery, finely diced

¼ cup roughly chopped fresh parsley

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Place the potatoes, 1 tablespoon salt, 1 tablespoon of the vinegar, and 3 cups tepid water in a large saucepan and bring to a boil over high heat, stirring occasionally, until the salt is dissolved. Reduce to a bare simmer and cook until the potatoes are completely tender and show no resistance when poked with a paring knife or cake tester, about 17 minutes. Drain, reserving ½ cup of the cooking liquid. Immediately toss the potatoes with ½ tablespoon of the vinegar in a bowl; set aside.
2. Combine the reserved cooking liquid with the remaining

1 tablespoon vinegar, the mustard, relish, sugar, and minced shallot in a large bowl. Add 5 to 6 pieces of cooked Yukon Gold potato and mash with a potato masher until smooth. Whisking constantly, add 3 tablespoons of the olive oil. Fold in the capers, celery, sliced shallot, parsley, and potatoes. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and more sugar if desired. Serve immediately, drizzling with the remaining tablespoon of olive oil. Or refrigerate, covered, for up to 3 days; allow to come to room temperature before serving.

SQUEEZE BOTTLES WITH BUILT-IN RECIPES

My wife loves salad dressing, particularly the soy sauce–balsamic vinaigrette that I keep in constant supply in a squeeze bottle in the fridge. I know the recipe by heart, but problems arise when I'm out of town, my wife has a brand-new box of arugula, and the dressing's just run out.

Here's a little trick I devised to make sure that never happens again: I just write the recipe directly on the squeeze bottle. Since good vinaigrettes are all about the ratio of ingredients, it doesn't really matter if you measure them out precisely using measuring spoons and cups. Rather, I draw a line on the side of my squeeze bottle with a permanent marker indicating the proportions of ingredients. All

my wife has to do is read the labels from the bottom of the bottle to the top, filling it as she goes along. Voilà! Perfect vinaigrette, no recipe to memorize, no measuring spoons or cups to clean.

I've started a collection of these built-in-recipe bottles, so that I'll always have an easy-to-refill supply of sauces and vinaigrettes on hand.





ARUGULA AND PEAR SALAD

WITH PARMIGIANO-REGGIANO AND SHARP BALSAMIC-SOY VINAIGRETTE

This recipe adds two elements to a basic green salad. I always like to serve a sweet element and a salty element along with peppery greens for contrast. This is one case where a slightly underripe pear is preferable—it keeps its shape better while caramelizing in the butter and sugar mixture.



SERVES 4

2 ripe but firm Bosc pears, halved, cored, and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slices

2 tablespoons sugar

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

2 quarts (about 8 ounces) baby arugula, mizuna, or watercress, washed and dried

2 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano, shaved with a vegetable peeler into slivers

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

**$\frac{1}{2}$ cup Sharp Balsamic-Soy Vinaigrette; (recipe follows)
vigorously shaken**

1. Toss the pear slices with the sugar in a medium bowl until evenly coated. Heat the butter in a 12-inch nonstick

skillet over medium-high heat until the foaming subsides. Add the pear slices in a single layer and cook, shaking the pan gently, until browned on the first side, about 1 minute. Carefully flip the slices with a thin flexible offset spatula and continue cooking until the second side is browned, about 1 minute longer. Slide the pears onto a large plate and allow to cool for 5 minutes.

2. Combine the pears, arugula, cheese, a pinch of salt, a few cracks of pepper, and the vinaigrette in a large bowl and gently toss with clean hands until evenly coated. Serve immediately.



Sharp Balsamic-Soy Vinaigrette

NOTE: Use on simple salads made with spicy or bitter greens like arugula, watercress, or mizuna or a mesclun

mix.

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar

1 tablespoon soy sauce

4 teaspoons Dijon mustard

1 small shallot, minced or grated on a Microplane (about 1 tablespoon)

1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane (about 1 teaspoon)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup canola oil

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Combine all the ingredients in a small container or squeeze bottle. Seal the container and shake vigorously until emulsified. The vinaigrette will keep in the refrigerator for up to 3 months; shake vigorously before using.

TOMATO AND MOZZARELLA SALAD WITH SHARP BALSAMIC-SOY VINAIGRETTE

Salting the tomatoes before adding them to the salad draws out some of their juices, intensifying their meatiness. I like to then add this extracted juice to my vinaigrette, along with some extra-virgin olive oil, to make use of every last drop of flavor.

NOTE: Use only the absolute ripest, peak-of-the-summer tomatoes and fresh mozzarella (preferably mozzarella di bufala, made from water buffalo milk) for this salad.



SERVES 4

- 1 small red onion, finely sliced (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup; optional)**
- 2 pounds very ripe tomatoes (about 3 large), cut into $1\frac{1}{2}$ - to 2-inch chunks**
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Sharp Balsamic-Soy Vinaigrette ([here](#)), vigorously shaken**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 pound fresh mozzarella cheese, preferably mozzarella di bufala, cut or torn into 1-inch chunks**
- 1 small bunch basil, leaves removed and roughly chopped or torn (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped leaves)**
- Freshly ground black pepper**

1. If using the onion, place in a medium bowl and cover with cold water. Set aside for 30 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, toss the tomatoes with the salt. Transfer to a colander or strainer set over a large bowl and set aside for 30 minutes.
3. Combine the vinaigrette with 2 tablespoons of the juices from the tomatoes in a large bowl and whisk to combine (discard any remaining juices). Whisking constantly, slowly add the olive oil in a steady stream to emulsify. Drain the onions, if using, and add to the bowl. Add the tomatoes, cheese, and basil, season with plenty of pepper, and toss to combine. Serve.

1





GREEN BEAN SALAD WITH RED ONION AND HAZELNUT VINAIGRETTE

Green beans and nuts are a classic French combination. Here I use crisply blanched green beans with a honey-sweetened hazelnut vinaigrette. You can substitute almonds for the hazelnuts if you prefer. Red onions add pungency and freshness—soaking them in cold water removes a bit of their bite.

SERVES 4

1 medium red onion, finely sliced (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)

Kosher salt

1½ pounds green beans or haricots verts, end trimmed

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup Hazelnut Vinaigrette (recipe follows)

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Place the onion in a medium bowl and cover with cold water. Set aside for 30 minutes, then drain.
2. Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil. Prepare an ice bath. Add the green beans to the pot and cook until bright green and tender but still with a bit of bite, about 3 minutes. Drain and transfer to the ice bath to cool. Drain again and dry in a salad spinner.
3. Combine the drained onions, green beans, and vinaigrette in a bowl. Season to taste with salt and pepper

and toss to combine. Serve immediately.

Hazelnut Vinaigrette



MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

- 2 ounces (about ½ cup) hazelnuts, toasted and roughly chopped**
- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon water**
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- 1 tablespoon honey**
- 1 small shallot, minced or grated on a Microplane (about 1 tablespoon)**
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh tarragon**
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ cup canola oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**

Combine the hazelnuts, vinegar, water, mustard, honey, shallots, and tarragon in a medium bowl and whisk to

combine. Set the bowl over a medium heavy saucepan lined with a dish towel to stabilize it and, whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in the olive and canola oil. The dressing should emulsify and thicken significantly. Season with the salt and pepper. The dressing will keep in a sealed container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks; shake vigorously before using.

This recipe uses a trio of emulsifying agents—mustard, honey, and nuts—and winds up extra-tight as a result.

ROASTED PEAR SALAD WITH MIXED BITTER LETTUCES, BLUE CHEESE, POMEGRANATE, AND HAZELNUT VINAIGRETTE

This is my mother's favorite salad. She asks for it at every holiday meal. I would be a bad son if I didn't include it in this book, since she's been begging for the recipe for years and I've never given it to her. This one's for you, Ma.



SERVES 4

- 2 slightly underripe Bosc pears, halved, cored, and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slices**
- 2 tablespoons sugar**
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter**
- 2 Belgian endives, bottoms trimmed and separated into individual leaves**
- 2 heads frisee, pale inner yellow leaves only, pulled apart by hand, rinsed and spun dry**

3 cups (about 8 ounces) baby arugula leaves, rinsed and spun dry

3 to 4 tablespoons Hazelnut Vinaigrette ([here](#))

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 ounces Gorgonzola, Stilton, or Cabrales cheese, crumbled

About $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pomegranate seeds (from 1 medium pomegranate)

1. Toss the pear slices with the sugar in a medium bowl until evenly coated. Heat the butter in a 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until the foaming subsides. Add the pear slices in a single layer and cook, shaking the pan gently, until browned on the first side, about 1 minute. Carefully flip the slices with a thin, flexible offset spatula and continue cooking until the second side is browned, about 1 minute longer. Slide the pears onto a large plate and allow to cool for 5 minutes.
2. Combine the endive, frisée, arugula, and pears in a large bowl, drizzle with 3 tablespoons of the vinaigrette and season to taste with salt and pepper. Gently toss with clean hands until evenly coated with vinaigrette. Taste and add more vinaigrette, salt, and/or pepper as necessary. Add the cheese and pomegranate seeds and toss briefly. Serve immediately.

TWO ROASTED BEET SALADS

Beets get their fair share of criticism from children and adults alike, and it's easy to understand why if you, like me,

were exposed to the canned variety as a kid. Those are not easy to like. A freshly roasted beet, on the other hand, is something quite different. Sweet as candy, rich and earthy, with a great sorta-soft-sorta-crisp texture, they're one of my favorite vegetables. I make one or another form of beet salad a few times a year, and these two are among my wife's favorites. Just like her, they are pretty, colorful, and best at room temperature.

You can boil beets, but the process will rob them of flavor (notice how pink that water gets?—that's flavor going right down the drain). I've found that the best way to cook them is in the oven, in an airtight foil pouch. They steam as they cook, heating up the air in the pouch, which allows them to cook faster, with minimal moisture loss. Because you're using a dry cooking method, they barely lose any juices or flavor. And the foil pouch is a great way to add aromatics: a few sprigs of thyme or rosemary, some black pepper and olive oil, and perhaps some citrus zest. After roasting, they are extremely easy to peel—their skins slip right off under cool running water. To prevent staining your wooden cutting board, line it with a sheet of plastic wrap before working with beets.

ROASTED BEET AND CITRUS SALAD WITH PINE NUT VINAIGRETTE

Beets and citrus are a classic combination, and, luckily, they're in season together. This salad combines grapefruit, orange, roasted beets, rosemary, and bit of arugula for some peppery kick (you can use whatever herb or salad green you prefer). I like nuts with my beets, and pine nuts fit the bill just fine. A vinaigrette made with sherry vinegar, shallots, walnut oil, and a touch of agave nectar sweetens the whole thing.



SERVES 4

2 pounds beets, greens and stems removed, scrubbed under cold running water

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

4 sprigs fresh rosemary or thyme

1 recipe Pine Nut Vinaigrette (recipe follows)

1 grapefruit, peeled and cut into segments

**1 orange, zest cut into thin strips, fruit cut into suprêmes
(see [here](#))**

1 cup loosely packed arugula leaves, washed and spun dry

- 1.** Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and preheat the oven to 375°F. Fold two 12- by 18-inch squares of heavy duty aluminum foil crosswise in half. Crimp the open left and right edges of each one together to form a tight seal; leave the top open. Toss the beets with the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Divide evenly between the foil pouches. Add 2 herb sprigs to each pouch, then tightly crimp the tops of the pouches to seal together.
- 2.** Place the pouches on a rimmed baking sheet and place in the oven. Cook until the beets are completely tender—a cake tester or toothpick inserted into a beet through the foil should show no resistance—about 1 hour. Carefully open the pouches and allow the beets to cool for 30 minutes.
- 3.** Peel the beets under cold running water (the skin should slip right off) and pat dry. Cut into rough 1½-inch chunks.
- 4.** Toss the beets with half of the dressing in a large bowl, then transfer to a serving plate. Add the grapefruit, orange, and arugula to the bowl, along with 1 more tablespoon dressing, toss, and season to taste with salt and pepper. Transfer to the serving plate. Drizzle the remaining dressing around the beets, top with the orange zest, and serve.

Pine Nut Vinaigrette

MAKES ABOUT $\frac{1}{2}$ CUP

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar

1 tablespoon agave nectar (or honey)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup toasted pine nuts

1 small shallot, finely minced (about 1 tablespoon)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon walnut oil

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the vinegar, agave nectar, pine nuts, and shallots in a small bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in the olive oil, followed by the walnut oil. The dressing should emulsify and thicken significantly. Season to taste with salt and pepper. The dressing will keep in a sealed container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks; shake vigorously before using.

ROASTED BEET SALAD WITH GOAT CHEESE, EGGS, POMEGRANATE, AND MARCONA ALMOND VINAIGRETTE

Beets make me think of honey, and honey makes me think of Marcona almonds, so into the dressing they go, with a handful of pomegranate seeds to give you distinct bursts of sweet juiciness as you work your way through your bowl. Celery leaves are an underused part of this staple vegetable. Let's put 'em to use here. And for some sharp bite, slices of mild white onion. I love the way they turn pale pink when you toss them with the beets.

Just those five ingredients, perfectly dressed, would be enough for a nice balanced side dish, but the point here is a salad you can eat for lunch or dinner. Quarters of hard-boiled egg and a few chunks of creamy goat cheese round out the plate. Eat it fresh, or let it sit overnight and eat it the next day (make sure to add the eggs at the end, though, unless you don't mind pink beet-stained eggs)—either way, it'll be delicious.



SERVES 4

- 2 pounds beets, greens and stems removed, scrubbed under cold running water**
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 4 sprigs fresh rosemary or thyme**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pomegranate seeds**
- 2 small white onions, finely sliced (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup), rinsed in a sieve under warm water for 2 minutes**
- 1 recipe Marcona Almond Vinaigrette (recipe follows)**
- 4 ounces goat cheese, crumbled**
- 2 to 3 hard-boiled eggs, (see [here](#)), quartered**

½ cup leaves from the center of 1 bunch of celery

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and preheat the oven to 375°F. Fold two 12- by 18-inch squares of heavy-duty aluminum foil crosswise in half. Crimp the open left and right edges of each one together to form a tight seal; leave the top open. Toss the beets with the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Divide evenly between the foil pouches. Add 2 herb sprigs to each pouch, then tightly crimp the tops of the pouches to seal.
2. Place the pouches on a rimmed baking sheet and place in the oven. Cook until the beets are completely tender—a cake tester or toothpick inserted into a beet through the foil should show no resistance—about 1 hour. Carefully open the pouches and allow the beets to cool for 30 minutes.
3. Peel the beets under cold running water (the skin should slip right off). Cut into rough 1½-inch chunks.
4. Toss the beets, pomegranate seeds, onion, and dressing together in a large bowl. Transfer to a serving plate. Garnish with the goat cheese, hard-boiled eggs, and celery leaves. Serve immediately.

Marcona Almond Vinaigrette

I like to accentuate the natural dirt-candy sweetness of beets with a lightly sweetened dressing, and honey is the natural choice. It makes a great emulsifier, which means that your oil and vinegar should come together into a nice sauce-like consistency without you having to strain your wrist.

NOTE: Marcona almonds can be found in many specialty food shops. Regular almonds can be used in their place.

MAKES ABOUT $\frac{1}{2}$ CUP

2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

1 tablespoon honey

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup toasted Marcona almonds

1 small shallot, finely minced (about 1 tablespoon)

5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the vinegar, honey, almonds, and shallots in a small bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in the olive oil. The dressing should emulsify and thicken significantly. Season to taste with salt and pepper. The dressing will keep in a sealed container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks; shake vigorously before using.

ENDIVE AND CHICORY SALAD WITH GRAPEFRUIT, CRANBERRIES, AND FIG AND PUMPKIN SEED VINAIGRETTE



SERVES 4

- 1 head chicory, dark green leaves removed and discarded, pale white and yellow sections washed, spun dry, and torn into 2-inch pieces**
- 2 Belgian endives, bottoms trimmed, separated into**

leaves, and cut lengthwise into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-wide strips
1 ruby red grapefruit, cut into suprêmes (see [here](#))
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup dried cranberries
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Fig and Pumpkin Seed Vinaigrette (recipe follows)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the chicory, endive, grapefruit, cranberries, and dressing in a large bowl and toss to coat. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve immediately.

Fig and Pumpkin Seed Vinaigrette

NOTE: Fig preserves can be found in most cheese shops and in the cheese section of many supermarkets. If unavailable, substitute any not-too-sweet fruit preserves, such as orange or grapefruit marmalade, apricot jam, or sour cherry jam.

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons fig preserves (see Note above)
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup toasted pumpkin seeds
1 medium shallot, finely minced about 2 tablespoons
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the vinegar, preserves, pumpkin seeds, and shallots in a small bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in the olive oil. The dressing should emulsify and thicken significantly. Season to taste with salt and pepper. The

dressing will keep in a sealed container in the fridge for up to 2 weeks; shake vigorously before using.

KNIFE SKILLS: How to Prepare Chicory for Salads

Bitter greens like chicory and frisée are sweetest and best tasting at their pale yellow core. The dark greens should be discarded or saved for braises and soups, as they can be tough and intensely bitter.



STEP 1: TRIM THE BOTTOM. Trim just as much as you need to to release the leaves.



STEP 2: SORT BY COLOR. Find the yellowest bits and locate the point at which they begin to turn dark green.



STEP 3: TEAR OFF THE GREENS. Tear off the dark green bits and discard or save to add to soups.



STEP 4: WASH AND USE.



KNIFE SKILLS: How to Prepare Endive for Salads

Bitter endive leaves can be added to salads whole or sliced into slivers.



STEP 1: TRIM THE END



STEP 2: SEPARATE THE LEAVES Only remove the ones that come off easily.



STEP 3: TRIM AGAIN AND REPEAT Continue trimming the bottom a little at a time and removing the released leaves until you get to the very core.



STEP 4: READY TO WASH AND ADD WHOLE If you want slivers, go on.



STEP 5: STACK THE LEAVES Stacking the leaves in neat piles makes it easier to cut them evenly.



STEP 6: SLICE Slice the leaves into slivers of the desired thickness.



STEP 7: WASH Place the endive in a salad spinner and wash under cold water.



STEP 8: SPIN-DRY



STEP 9: READY TO USE



DRESSING Family #2: **MAYONNAISE-BASED DRESSINGS**

Pivotal, life-changing moments come in all forms. For some, it may be the day they slurped down their first littleneck

clam at their father's side on Cape Cod, or perhaps the day they found out that Darth Vader was Luke's father. Maybe it was when they learned that playing outside can actually be *more* fun than watching *He-Man*, or when they discovered that light behaves as both a wave *and* a particle. For me, it was the first time I saw mayonnaise being made.‡

When I was a kid, I never once thought about where mayonnaise came from. I mean, it's that kind of creamy, jiggly stuff that comes in a jar with a blue lid, right? I'd always just assumed it came from . . . some gigantic pump-action mayonnaise dispenser, perhaps in Wisconsin or Nebraska, one of those states that to my preadolescent mind seemed most likely to produce tons of mayo. I remember the very first time I saw mayonnaise being made. It was during a late-night infomercial for handheld immersion blenders (a new technology at the time, and the *It* kitchen gadget). The host put an egg in the bottom of a cup, poured some oil on top, placed the immersion blender in there, pushed the button, and, within a matter of seconds, the egg and oil came together into creamy, opaque, white mayonnaise.

My wife and I have recently been discussing what we'd like to name our children. She, being South American, wants our firstborn daughter to have the beautiful Spanish name Salomé. I told her that she can name our first daughter Salami as long as I can name my first son Mayonnaise in honor of my favorite condiment. We'll see who gives in first.

As a sandwich spread or sauce, mayonnaise is a big divider. I used to be firmly on the "death before mayo" side

of the divide—keep it away from the bread at all costs—but after having been slowly weaned onto it by means of excellent homemade versions, I've come to love it so much that I'll even abide the blue-topped jarred stuff from time to time. At its best, it is creamy, tangy, and light on the palate, with the ability to add richness to a dish without weighing it down. More often than not, though, it's either a poorly made, heavy, greasy, underseasoned goo or overly sweet, gloppy stuff from a jar. OK in a pinch, but hardly something you'd want to, say, dip your asparagus into or use as the base of a Caesar salad dressing or tartar sauce.

So what is it that transforms two ingredients—egg yolks and oil—that are kind of icky (that's a technical term) to eat on their own into a luxuriously rich, tangy, creamy spread that's not greasy in the slightest, despite consisting of over 75 percent oil? It's called an *emulsion*, and it's one of the most important concepts to understand in the kitchen. An emulsion is what keeps your vinaigrettes clinging to your lettuce. It's what keeps your cheese smooth and stretchy when it melts (we touched a bit on cheesy emulsions in Chapter 7). An emulsion is, quite literally, what keeps your gravy boat flowing. Let's take a closer look at this fine stuff, shall we?

Mayo Basics

In its loosest definition, mayonnaise is a flavored emulsion of minute particles of fat suspended in water. The tiny globules of suspended fat have a very difficult time flowing around once they are separated by a thin film of water, which is what gives mayonnaise its viscosity. For the record,

small bits of fat will refract light to a much greater than a big pool of fat, which is what gives mayonnaise its opaque-white appearance. Think of it like the windshield of a car. When it's whole, light passes through it easily. But get a few cracks in it, and it becomes difficult to see through. Crack it enough times into small enough pieces, and it becomes opaque. Same thing with the fat in mayonnaise.

Normally when you mix fat molecules with water, no matter how thoroughly you combine them, like MIT nerds at an all-girls-college mixer, they eventually separate themselves and regroup. Because of their shape and electrical charges, fat molecules are mutually attracted to each other while simultaneously being repelled by water. This is where egg yolks come in. Egg yolks—which are complex fat and water emulsions in themselves—contain plenty of emulsifiers (agents that aid in getting fat and water to behave), the most important of which is lecithin, a phospholipid found in both the low-density lipoproteins (LDLs) and high density lipoproteins (HDLs) abundant in eggs. Emulsifiers are long molecules that have a hydrophilic (water-loving, fat-hating) head, and a hydrophobic (water-hating, fat-loving) tail.



Setting your mixing bowl on top of a towel-lined pot will stabilize it during heavy whisking.

When egg yolks, water, and oil are whisked together, the fat-loving heads of the lecithin molecules bury themselves in the minute droplets of fat, leaving only their tails exposed. These tails repulse each other, preventing the fat droplets from coalescing and suddenly making the water seem much more attractive to them—a bit like adding a few kegs of beer to that nerd fest to mix things up a little. To make a traditional mayonnaise, egg yolks, water, salt, and a few flavorings—usually Dijon mustard and lemon juice or vinegar—are whisked together vigorously while the oil is simultaneously slowly drizzled into the mixture (a food

processor makes this process nearly foolproof). As the oil falls into the bowl, the rapid action of the whisk quickly breaks it up into tiny droplets, which are kept suspended with the help of the emulsifiers in the egg yolk.

Here's what happens to that mayonnaise in the bowl as you add more and more oil to it:

- **When the oil and water is at a 1:1 ratio**, or one with less oil, there is no possibility of a stable emulsion forming. The fat won't break up and get coated by the water, nor will the water be able to suspend the fat within it. At this stage, your mayonnaise looks like a thin, cloudy liquid.
- **As the oil to water ratio approaches a 3:1**, your mixture begins to resemble a mayonnaise, albeit one that flows more like a vinaigrette. As more and more oil is incorporated into the emulsion, the mayonnaise starts to become opaque, because the tiny drops of oil refract light differently than a liquid mass of oil.
- **As the ratio passes a 5:1**, the mayonnaise begins to get much thicker—thick enough that the peaks will hold when you pull the whisk out of it. It seems counterintuitive: mayonnaise is thick, oil is thin, so adding oil to mayonnaise should make it thinner, right? Wrong. We know that oil droplets in a sea of oil can swim around and float past each other quite freely and that in an emulsion, they are trapped in a tight matrix of droplets separated by water. In order to flow, that water needs to be able to move freely around the system. As you add more and more oil to the mayonnaise, the water separating each droplet of oil gets stretched thinner and thinner, severely

limiting its movement. Eventually, if you keep adding oil, the mayonnaise will start to turn from creamy and luscious to pasty and overly thick. Try it now, and it will coat your mouth like candle wax—there isn’t enough water in the emulsion to adequately coat each of the oil droplets, and they end up spilling out and breaking. Your mayonnaise turns greasy.

So, the key to a nice, creamy mayonnaise is to adjust the ratio of oil to water until you get the exact consistency you’re looking for. Since I already know that, flavorwise, I like to use about 1 egg per cup (see “How Much Mayo Can I Make from One Egg?” [here](#)), the rest is just a matter of adding a little water a drop at a time to the finished product until it thins out to the consistency I’m after.

Foolproofing

The rate at which the oil is added is a key factor in determining whether or not your mayonnaise will be successful. Looking back at the metaphor of a college mixer, imagine that only one or two MIT boys trickle into that girls-college mixer at a time. The emulsifiers have a fairly easier time of separating them from each other and getting them into the mix of things, completely surrounding them with girls. A steady stream of nerds is easy to mix, so long as they trickle into the party slowly. Now imagine the opposite: a whole group of them suddenly shows up at once, clinging tightly to each other. Suddenly it’s much harder to get them to mix nicely. Not only that, but any nerds who have already been inserted into the fray will see

this large group of nerds who just entered and have a strong desire to join them.

So it is with oil. Trickle it into the egg yolk base slowly, and you can form a strong, stable emulsion. Pour it in too rapidly, and you'll never be able to separate it into droplets small enough, and, what's worse, even if you've already formed a stable emulsion, you run the risk of breaking it. This is the great difficulty when it comes to mayonnaise, and it vexes even the best of cooks.



Mayo breaks if you try to add oil too fast.

Mayonnaise is one of my favorite foods. I'm not one of those folks who wakes up in the middle of the night and pulls a jar out of the fridge to eat with a spoon—at least not yet—but I've made a lot of it in my life. Some people swear by the food processor, but the easiest method by far is the

very method that I witnessed on that infomercial all those years ago: using an immersion blender. By placing the egg yolks and other flavorings (usually mustard and lemon juice along with a splash of water to lighten the texture) in the bottom of a tall, narrow cup and carefully pouring oil on top, you create two distinct layers: water-based liquid with the fat floating on top of it. If you then slowly plunge the head of the blender to the bottom—into the water part—and flip the switch, you create a vortex that slowly but surely pulls the oil down into it, so the oil is fed into the blended egg yolks in a slow, steady stream. Before your very eyes, you see a creamy mayonnaise forming, starting from the bottom of the container and slowly working its way toward the top. If you don't own an immersion blender, get one, if only for this purpose!

Foolproof Mayo Without a Hand Blender

OK, you're stubborn and you flat out refuse to buy an immersion blender. What then? Well, you could make your mayonnaise by hand (it's really, really tough), but if you've got a food processor, you're in luck. With enough practice, you can easily make mayonnaise in the food processor by dumping your eggs and flavorings in, then slowly trickling in the oil with the machine running. Problem is, it doesn't always work, particularly for small batches. The egg yolks ride up the sides of the processor bowl, which makes any attempt to form an emulsion with them an exercise in futility. But is there a foolproof way, one that ensures that the oil and the egg yolks all mix up nicely?

As I was scraping down egg yolks from the sides of my

processor bowl and pondering this very question, a thought occurred to me: rather than stopping the processor every few seconds to scrape down egg yolks, why didn't I just introduce an element to the bowl that would scrape them down *for* me as the processor was running? And, on top of that, why didn't I make sure that the element I introduced *also* added oil to the mix at a very slow, steady rate? If I could do that, then the mayonnaise should basically make itself once I've added all the ingredients to the bowl, right?

Here's what I was thinking: frozen cubes of oil. By freezing the oil, I transformed it from a liquid into a solid that releases liquid at a slow and steady rate in the processor, all the while bouncing around against the walls to ensure that the egg yolks and flavorings don't stay perched up where the blades of the processor can't reach them.

I tested my theory by mixing up a batch of mayonnaise in the food processor, simply dumping all the other ingredients into it along with a few frozen cubes of oil. I switched on the processor and watched everything jump around. It was a little erratic at first as the oil cubes bounced around their prison, and then slowly but surely, things started to smooth out, and within moments, I had a full-on creamy, tangy, perfect mayonnaise.

The only other thing to think about is flavorings. A basic mayonnaise needs nothing more than some mustard and lemon juice, but more often than not I'll add garlic to the mix (a clove per egg is about right), as well as some extra-virgin olive oil. (Extra-virgin olive oil should *always* be whisked in by hand. Using an immersion blender or food processor will turn it bitter—see “The Bitter Blend,” [here](#).)

Jump ahead to [here](#) for some more flavored mayonnaise ideas.



1



2



3



4

HOW MUCH MAYO CAN I MAKE WITH ONE EGG?

Because lecithin is such a powerful emulsifier, you can create a very large amount of mayonnaise using a single egg yolk. The mayonnaise manufacturers

gleaned this fact long ago, which is one of the reasons mayonnaise is so cheap: the most expensive component—the eggs—makes up only a tiny percentage of the finished product. In order to do this without the emulsion breaking, you need to be mindful of the ratio of oil to water. As the mayonnaise becomes thicker and thicker and is on the verge of breaking (just after the “pasty” stage), if you incorporate some water into the mix to reestablish the correct ratio, you can then continue to add more oil. Using this process, I’ve managed to make over a gallon of mayo with a single egg yolk.

That said, the ideal mayonnaise needs to have a certain amount of egg yolk in it for flavoring purposes—a mostly oil mayo just doesn’t taste right. I find that the ideal ratio is a single large egg yolk for each cup of mayonnaise.

MAYONNAISE VERSUS AIOLI

Any time I dine out at a fancy restaurant and see the chef using the word “aioli” when he or she really means “mayonnaise,” I make it a point to inform the waiter, my wife, and perhaps a few of the surrounding tables of the chef’s loose lexical morals and the liberties he or she is taking by obfuscating two of the world’s great sauces. The word “aioli” comes from the Occitan and is a contraction of *ai*

(garlic) and *oli* (oil). A true aioli is made by smashing garlic cloves in a mortar with a pestle, then slowly drizzling in olive oil a drop at a time until a smooth emulsion is formed. It's an intensely spicy, pungent sauce often served with seafood and croutons or boiled potatoes. The Spanish version, *alloli*, is commonly served with olives, grilled meats, or grilled vegetables.

These days, it's perfectly acceptable to call a garlic-flavored mayonnaise made with egg yolks and mustard "aioli," but it must contain *some* garlic. So why do restaurant menus refer to a creamy, emulsified, egg-based sauce as aioli when there's not a hint of garlic in it? It's a matter of public perception. Despite the fact that mayonnaise at one point was considered a staple of *haute cuisine*, its use on menus fell out of fashion because it became associated too strongly with cheap everyday food. I'm a fancy restaurant chef—I can't very well serve the same stuff people are slathering on their sandwiches!

Luckily, this silliness seems to be disappearing, with more and more chefs unafraid to love mayonnaise for what it is: creamy, rich, and delicious. I am certain that my midmeal lectures to waitstaff—despite the dirty looks it earns me from my lovely wife—have played no small role in effecting this change, and I intend to soon move on to ensuring that bruschetta is never again pronounced with a soft "sh" sound.



FOOLPROOF HOMEMADE MAYONNAISE

NOTES: You can whisk in additional lemon juice to taste after the mayonnaise is finished if desired. Make sure to season it pretty aggressively: mayonnaise tastes very flat and greasy without enough salt. This mayonnaise can also be made in a regular blender or in a standing mixer fitted with a whisk attachment.

MAKES 2 CUPS

2 large egg yolks

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

1 tablespoon lemon juice (from 1 lemon) or more to taste

**1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane
(about 1 teaspoon; optional)**

About 2 tablespoons water

1 cup canola oil

1 cup extra-virgin olive oil

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

TO MAKE THE MAYONNAISE WITH AN IMMERSION BLENDER

1. Combine the egg yolks, mustard, lemon juice, garlic (if using), and 1 tablespoon water in a tall, narrow cup just

wide enough that the head of the blender fits in the bottom. Carefully pour the canola oil on top. Slowly submerge the head of the blender, reaching the bottom of the cup. Holding the cup flat and steady, turn on the blender. It should create a vortex, slowly pulling the oil down and creating a smooth, creamy mayonnaise.

2. Slowly lift the head until all the oil is incorporated. Scrape the mixture out into a medium bowl set in a heavy saucepan lined with a towel to stabilize it. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in the olive oil. Add salt and pepper to taste and whisk to combine. Whisk in up to 1 tablespoon more water, until the desired consistency is reached. The mayonnaise can be stored in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

TO MAKE THE MAYONNAISE WITH A FOOD PROCESSOR

1. Pour the canola oil into 4 to 6 compartments of an ice cube tray and place in the freezer until fully frozen.
2. Combine the egg yolks, mustard, lemon juice, garlic if using, and 1 tablespoon water in the bowl of a food processor. Add 2 of the frozen oil cubes and run the machine until the large chunks are broken down, about 5 seconds. Remove the lid and scrape down the lid and sides with a rubber spatula. Add the remaining frozen oil cubes and run the machine again until the mayonnaise is smooth, about 5 seconds longer.
3. Transfer the contents to a medium bowl set in a heavy saucepan lined with a towel to stabilize it. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in the olive oil. Add salt and

pepper to taste and whisk to combine. Whisk in up to 1 tablespoon more water, until the desired consistency is reached. The mayonnaise can be stored in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.

FLAVORED MAYONNAISE

Once you've got the basic process for constructing a mayonnaise down, it opens up the possibilities for a world of flavor variations. Here are a few of my favorites:

TYPE OF MAYONNAISE	PROCEDURES	B
Garlic Mayonnaise (see “Mayonnaise Versus Aioli” here)	Combine 1 cup mayonnaise, and 2 to 4 cloves garlic minced or grated on a Microplane, in a food	

processor and pulse to combine.

Roasted Red Pepper Mayonnaise

Thoroughly drain and dry $\frac{1}{2}$ cup roughly chopped jarred roasted red peppers. Add to a food processor, along with 1 cup mayonnaise and

2 cloves minced or grated garlic, and process until smooth.

Caesar Salad Dressing

When making the mayonnaise in a food processor, add 4 anchovy fillets, 2 cloves minced or grated garlic, 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce, and 2 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano finely grated.

Garlic-Herb Mayonnaise

Combine 1 cup mayonnaise, 2

cloves minced or grated garlic, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup mixed fresh tender herb leaves, such as parsley, tarragon, chervil, dill, and/or basil in a food processor and process until the herbs are finely chopped, then add 2 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh chives and pulse briefly to combine.

Horseradish Mayonnaise

Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup drained prepared horseradish and 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard to 1 cup mayonnaise and whisk to combine.

Chipotle-Lime Mayonnaise

Combine 1 cup mayonnaise, 1 tablespoon fresh lime juice, and 2 chipotle chiles packed in adobo sauce, along with 2 tablespoons of the adobo sauce

to a food processor and process to combine. Mix in 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro if desired.

Tartar Sauce

Combine 1 cup mayonnaise, 3 tablespoons chopped rinsed capers, 1 medium shallot, finely diced, 2 tablespoons minced cornichon pickles (or 2 tablespoons sweet pickle relish), 1

teaspoon sugar, and a couple of tablespoons of chopped fresh parsley in a medium bowl. Stir to combine and season to taste with pepper.

Bacon Mayonnaise

Replace $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the canola oil in the basic mayonnaise recipe with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup rendered bacon fat. Once the mayonnaise is formed, add 4 strips cooked bacon,

crumbled, and blend or process to combine. Stir in 2 scallions, finely sliced.

Sun-Dried Tomato Mayonnaise

Combine 1 cup mayonnaise, 2 cloves minced or grated garlic, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup drained sun-dried tomatoes in a food processor and process until nearly smooth. Blend in 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley if desired.

Spicy Garlic-Chili Mayonnaise

Whisk together 1 cup mayonnaise, 2 cloves minced or grated garlic, and 3 tablespoons of your favorite Asian chile sauce, such as gochujang, Chinese chile-garlic sauce, sambal oelek, or Sriracha.

Honey-Miso Mayonnaise

Whisk together $\frac{3}{4}$ cup mayonnaise, $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white miso paste, 2

teaspoons rice
wine vinegar,
and 2
tablespoons
honey in a bowl
until smooth.

WINTER GREENS SALAD

WITH WALNUTS, APPLES, AND PARMESAN-ANCHOVY DRESSING

Ever since I tasted April Bloomfield's awesome fall green salad at The John Dory, that combination of crisp, bitter greens and savory anchovy dressing has been one of my favorites.

Winter greens by their very nature are hearty in both texture and flavor. Radicchio, with its dark purple, frilly, cabbage-like leaves, is the bitterest of the lot, so I like to cut it with sweeter greens like Belgian endive. The latter are grown completely underground to induce a process called *etiolation*, a natural occurrence in plants that grow in low-light conditions. In their effort to reach the light, rapid growth takes place, resulting in weaker cell structure and no chlorophyll formation. This is good for us when more tender leaves and a less bitter flavor are what we're after. Tight pale yellow or pure white endives are what to look for.

Similarly, frisée (or curly endive) is sweetest at its core, which was protected from sunlight, so the small leafy stems are still pale yellow and tender. For the best-tasting frisée salads, discard the tougher dark green outer leaves

(or save them for soup) and use just the pale green and yellow centers.

The dressing is a heavy-on-the-anchovy variation of a classic Caesar dressing: mayo-based, with lemon juice and Worcestershire sauce adding acidity and bright depth. With a few slivers of apples for sweetness and some crunchy toasted walnuts, it is a simple salad that manages to hit you with enough levels of flavor and texture to serve as a full-on meal.



SERVES 4

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup mayonnaise, preferably homemade ([here](#))

1 ounce Parmigiano-Reggiano, finely grated (about $\frac{1}{2}$

cup)

6 anchovy fillets, mashed into a paste with the back of a fork

2 teaspoons lemon juice (from 1 lemon)

1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 Belgian endives, core removed and leaves cut into $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch slivers

1 head radicchio, cored and finely sliced

4 cups loosely packed pale green and yellow frisée (curly endive) fronds (from about 2 heads)

1 large tart apple, such as Fuji or Granny Smith, cored and cut into $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch-thick matchsticks

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh parsley

2 cups toasted walnuts

1. Combine the mayonnaise, Parmesan, mashed anchovies, lemon juice, and Worcestershire sauce in a small bowl and whisk together. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
2. Toss the endive, radicchio, frisée, apples, and parsley in a large bowl with dressing to taste. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add the nuts and toss briefly. Serve immediately.

KNIFE SKILLS: How to Prepare Radicchio for Salads



1

STEP 1: CUT IT IN HALF Split the radicchio along its vertical axis.



2

STEP 2: START CUTTING OUT THE CORE Cut around the core in one half, angling the knife blade in toward the center of the head.



3

STEP 3: REMOVE THE CORE Cut around the other side at a 90-degree angle to the first to remove the core in a single wedge-shaped piece. Repeat with the other half.



4

STEP 4: SLICE THE RADICCHIO



5

STEP 5: READY TO DRESS



CLASSIC AMERICAN POTATO SALAD

Potato salad—big deal, right?

It's kinda like background music in a restaurant—something to keep you and your fellow diners distracted and occupied during the awkward silences before the main course arrives. You put an obligatory spoonful on your paper plate and

poke at it with a plastic fork until the burgers are done. At least that's what **most** potato salad is. The problem is, it's such a simple dish that it's often made without thought. Boil the potatoes, toss them with some mayo, add a few dollops of whatever condiment catches your fancy, and throw it into a bowl.

But a well-constructed potato salad can be as interesting as the burger it precedes (and you know by now how I feel about burgers). Tangy, salty, and sweet, with a texture that's simultaneously creamy, crunchy, and fluffy, a perfect potato salad should taste featherlight, despite being made with potatoes and mayo, two of the heaviest ingredients around.

The way I see it, there are three things that can go wrong with a potato salad. Screw up any one of these, and you're quickly going south:

- **The potatoes are not flavored all the way to the center.** In a good potato salad, the pieces of potato should be seasoned all the way through. Their hearty, earthy flavor does fine on its own or with a bit of salt when hot—but when cold, it comes across as heavy and bland. Without plenty of acid and a bit of sweetness to brighten it up, potato salad is dead in the water.
- **The potatoes are under- or overcooked.** If there's one thing I can't stand, it's al dente potatoes. Potatoes should *not* be crunchy or firm. Nor do you want your potato salad to be cold mashed potatoes. The perfect piece of potato should be tender and fluffy all the way through, with the edges just barely beginning to break down, adding a bit of potato flavor and body to the dressing.

- **The salad is underseasoned.** Foods that are served cold need to be seasoned more aggressively than foods that are served hot—our taste buds are less receptive at colder temperatures. Combine this with the heaviness of potatoes, and it makes sense that a potato salad needs to have more vinegar, sugar, spice, and salt than most other dishes. But balance is key. All the elements need to come together, instead of competing.

Hot and Cold

The first step is getting the texture just right. Potatoes are made up of a series of cells that contain starch granules. These cells are glued together with pectin. As the potatoes cook, the pectin slowly breaks down and the starch granules start absorbing water. When you overcook them, the first thing that happens is the pectin breaks down too much. The potato cells start falling away, and the whole thing turns mushy. Welcome to cold-mashed-potato city, population: you. Overcook them even more, and the starch granules will swell so much that they'll begin to burst, turning a mildly offensive bowl of cold mashed potato salad into an outright disrespectful bowl of gluey, inedible goo. Undercook potatoes, on the other hand, and they remain crunchy, and crunchy potatoes are grounds for immediate ejection from the backyard.

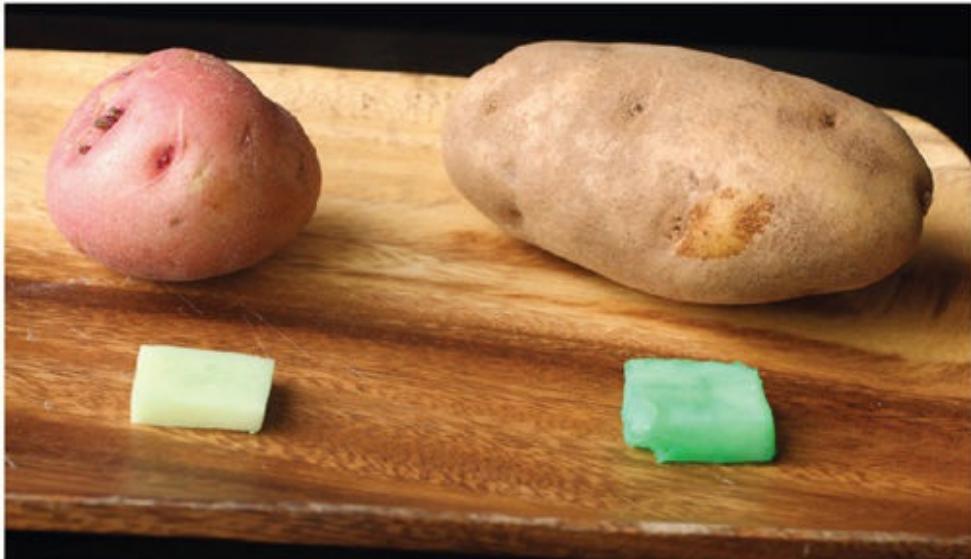
It gets even more complex: since potatoes heat up from the exterior toward the center, it's possible to have a potato that's simultaneously overcooked *and* undercooked. The best way to accomplish this feat of culinary indecency is to drop your cut potatoes into a pot of already-boiling water.

When potatoes start in hot water, the outside will rapidly overcook before the center has even got the chill off it. Make a salad with these, and you'll have crunchy nuggets of uncooked potato swimming in a sea of gluey mash. No thanks. If you start the potatoes in cold water, the potatoes heat up evenly right along with the water, so that by the time they are perfectly cooked in the center, the edges have just barely started to break apart—which is not a bad thing. I like a little bit of broken-up potato to thicken and flavor the dressing. This, by the way, is the best method *any* time you boil potatoes.

Of course, even with a cold start, one problem remains: potatoes require constant vigilance—they can go from undercooked to overcooked in an instant. Get distracted for just a minute (say, to chase after your puppy who's just peed on your backpack, then hidden your notebook under the couch), and you've got gluey potatoes on your hands. There is a way to solve this problem, which we'll get back to, but first . . .

'Tis the Season

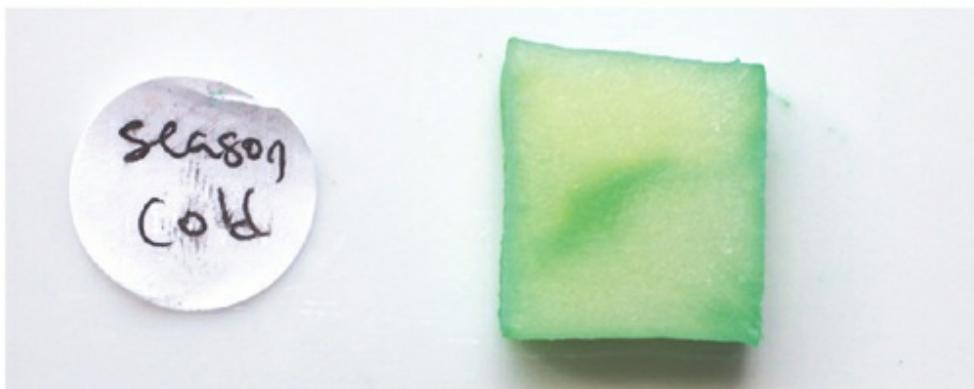
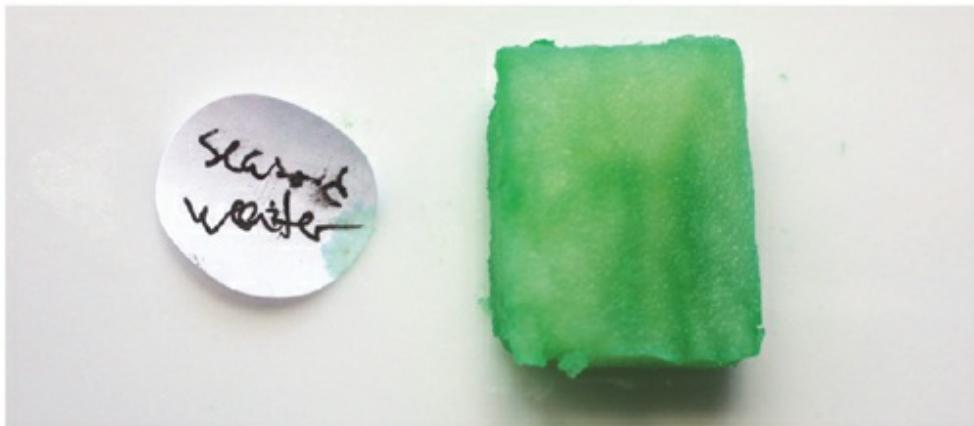
Using russet potatoes is key for this style of potato salad. Not only do they absorb dressing more easily, but their starches actually help to bind the salad better. To prove that they do absorb seasoning better, I boiled russet and red potatoes, cut them into cubes, and tossed them with a dressing tinted with a bit of green food coloring. You can see for yourself which absorbed it better:



For some time, I'd thought that it's better to season your potatoes when they are hot, but I'd never actually figured out *why*. Do they actually absorb more seasoning, or could it just be a psychosomatic effect? To find out, I cooked three separate batches of potatoes, this time using green food coloring as a stand-in for the salt and vinegar. The first batch I cooked in green-colored water. The second batch I cooked in plain water, then "seasoned" with green-colored water after draining them, while they were still hot. I allowed the last batch to cool completely before tossing with green water. After all the batches cooled completely, I cut a cube from each one in half to see how far the food coloring had penetrated.

The potato that was cooked in seasoned water and the one that was "seasoned" while still hot were a light shade of green all the way to their centers, while the potato that was seasoned after cooling was mostly pale in the center, with a single green streak where a natural fault in the potato

existed.



The reason for this is twofold. First, the cooked starch on the surface of the potatoes hardens and gelatinizes as it cools, making it harder for anything to penetrate. Second, as the potatoes cool, they contract and tighten up slightly, making it harder for any seasoning to work its way into the center, even if it manages to make it past the gelatinized starch sheath on the exterior.

As you will have noticed, whether the potatoes were cooked in seasoned water or seasoned immediately after

coming out of plain water made very little difference in terms of flavor penetration. So, you might as well just add the vinegar to the potatoes after they're cooked, right? But there's actually a very good reason to add a little vinegar to the potatoes cooking water: it helps prevent them from overcooking, something we'll see again when exploring French fries in Chapter 9 ([here](#)). Pectin breaks down much more slowly in acidic environments. I found that adding a tablespoon of vinegar per quart of water to my potato pot prevented the potatoes from becoming mushy, even when slightly overcooked.



Potatoes boiled in plain water break down.



Potatoes boiled in water with vinegar retain their shape.



I make my dressing while my boiled potatoes are cooling.



Balancing Act

Once the potatoes were perfectly cooked, light, and bright, the rest was simple: balancing flavors. Nothing too hardcore nerdy here. Rice wine vinegar is my favorite all-purpose vinegar, and it works well in potato salad. Two tablespoons in the cooking water, another to dress the hot potatoes, and a final two in the mayonnaise mixture added plenty of layered brightness. Mayonnaise—be it store-bought or homemade ([here](#))—is a must. A cup and a quarter is less than average for 4 pounds of potatoes, but I like to keep the mayo a little light. By stirring the salad vigorously, you can bash off the corners of the potatoes, which get mashed up and increase the ratio of creamy dressing to tender potato chunks. For heat, I added a few tablespoons of whole-grain mustard (Dijon or even yellow

would work fine if you prefer).

Pickles are a point of contention in potato salad. I like to use chopped cornichons in mine, mostly because that's the type of pickle I usually have in my fridge. Chopped dills, bread-and-butters, or even a couple scoops of pickle relish also work just fine. Chopped celery and red onions add necessary crunch to the mix. To be honest, though, once the potatoes are properly cooked and seasoned, the dressing itself is very much a matter of personal taste. I like sugar in mine, others don't. Then again, whether or not it needs black pepper is not a matter of taste—put in the pepper.

There are few dishes much humbler than potato salad, but if you want to gussy it up a bit, you could do worse than to add a handful of chopped fresh herbs. Parsley and chives work great. I sometimes add scallion greens, because they seem to spontaneously generate in my vegetable drawer. If you've saved your celery leaves, you can go fancy by using them. Now I know that there are those who like to add pickle juice. Those who like to add garlic. Those who add sour cream. Really, all those things could be great, and as far as flavorings go, there's no right way to make a potato salad. The keys to remember are:

- Use russet potatoes.
- Cut them evenly and start them in cold water, seasoned with salt, sugar, and vinegar (1 tablespoon of each per quart of water).
- Season the potatoes again with vinegar as soon as they come out of the water.
- Use bold flavors, because cold food tastes bland without

them (see “Cold Confusion,” [here](#)).

With these four simple tips in mind, you’re free to do whatever the heck you like with your potato salads. Well, whatever you want within the boundaries of the law.

EXPERIMENT: Cold Confusion

Our taste buds are extremely sensitive to the temperature of foods being served. How many times have you eaten cold pizza out of the fridge the next morning and thought to yourself, “How could this cold, clammy, bland thing be the remains of the well-seasoned flavor bomb I was eating last night?” OK, admittedly, on the mornings I’m eating cold pizza, it’s usually because I’m too hungover to care. But to prove to yourself that seasoning *is* temperature-dependent, try this little experiment yourself.

Materials

- 3 pounds carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
- 3 tablespoons butter
- Kosher salt

- Blender

Procedure

1. Put the carrots in a large saucepan and cover them in cold water (do not add salt). Bring to a boil over high heat and cook until the carrots are very tender.
2. Drain the carrots, reserving about 2 cups of the liquid. Place the carrots and butter in a blender, add the liquid, and puree (make sure to start out slow and gradually increase the speed to avoid a blowout). You should have about 4 cups carrot puree.
3. Divide the puree into 4 even parts. Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt into the first batch, 1 teaspoon into the second, $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons into the third, and 2 teaspoons salt into the final batch. Have a panel of tasters taste each one and write down which they feel is the best seasoned (not the saltiest, but the best according to their own palate).
4. Refrigerate the puree overnight and repeat the tasting when the puree is cold.

Results

If your friends are anything like mine, then they will have on average chosen a saltier batch when the puree was served cold than they did when it was

served hot. This is because hot foods stimulate your taste buds (not to mention create aromatic vapors) more easily than cold foods do. Cold foods need to be seasoned more aggressively than hot foods. So when seasoning your food, always make sure to taste it *at the temperature it is going to be served.*

CLASSIC AMERICAN POTATO SALAD DONE RIGHT

SERVES 8 TO 10

4 pounds russet (baking) potatoes, peeled and cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cubes

Kosher salt

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar

6 tablespoons rice wine vinegar

3 stalks celery, finely diced (about 1 cup)

1 medium red onion, finely diced (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup)

4 scallions, green parts only, thinly sliced (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup; optional)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup fresh parsley leaves, minced (optional)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped cornichons

2 tablespoons whole-grain mustard, or to taste

1 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups mayonnaise, preferably homemade ([here](#))

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Put 2 quarts water in a large saucepan, add the potatoes, 2 tablespoons salt, 2 tablespoons of the sugar, and 2 tablespoons vinegar, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are completely tender, about 10 minutes. Drain the potatoes and transfer them to a rimmed baking

sheet. Spread into an even layer, then sprinkle with 2 more tablespoons vinegar. Allow to cool to room temperature, about 30 minutes.

2. Combine the remaining 2 tablespoons sugar, the remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar, the celery, onion, scallions, if using, parsley, if using, pickles, mustard, and mayonnaise in a large bowl. Stir with a rubber spatula to combine. Fold in the potatoes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Cover and let rest in the refrigerator for at least 1 hour, and up to 3 days, before serving.



KNIFE SKILLS: How to Cut Celery

I had a friend in college who believed that celery was the worst vegetable, and I admit it—as sticks, it isn't all that exciting.

Add some blue cheese or Green Goddess dressing, and I'll happily eat them, but it's really only when you start adding celery to other dishes that it reveals its true purpose: Best Supporting Role.

My celery-hating friend enjoyed eating at restaurants, and many of them were undoubtedly flavoring any number of sauces, stews, salads, soups, and braises with the vegetable. Combined with pungent onions and sweet, earthy carrots, celery, with its slight bitter edge, forms the backbone of half the dishes in the Western repertoire. Potato salad or a lobster roll wouldn't be the same without its distinctive crunch and fresh flavor, and the Chinese learned long ago that celery is particularly good in a spicy stir-fry. Even the leaves can be used as a flavorful garnish.

This guide will help teach you to cut celery into all of the major shapes and sizes.

Shopping and Storage

When buying celery, look for heads with tightly bundled stalks still attached at the root and a bright green to yellowish-green color. Skip any that have bruised brown spots or look overly fibrous. Avoid those in sealed packs, which can often hide blemishes. A good grocery store will keep its celery stalks lightly misted with water to keep them fresh and crisp.

Once at home, celery can wilt in a matter of days. It's best to store it in a slightly open plastic bag or a perforated plastic bag to help it retain moisture but still give it room to breathe. Use the vegetable crisper drawer if you've got one. Properly stored, celery should last up to a week and a half. Stalks that have started to go limp can be revived by cutting them off and standing them cut end down in a cup of water in the fridge.

If you want to use the leaves as garnish, pick the pale

yellow ones closest to the center of the bunch (darker green leaves can be tough or fibrous) and store them in a container of water with a few ice cubes in the fridge until ready to use. They make a great addition to mixed green salads.

STEP 1: EQUIPMENT (See photo [here](#).) You'll need a sharp chef's knife or santoku knife and, if you want to get extra fancy, a vegetable peeler.



2

STEP 2: SEPARATE THE STALKS Separate the individual stalks by gently pulling them out from the bottom until they snap off.



3

STEP 3: CLEAN AND TRIM Wash the stalks under cold running water to remove any dirt and debris, then trim the large white section off the bottom of each stalk (reserve for stock, compost, or discard as you wish).



4

STEP 4: PEEL THE STALKS (optional) When using celery for gently cooked preparations or in larger batons or chunks, the fibrous skin on the outer surface can be distracting. Using a vegetable peeler, peel each stalk by holding the base against the cutting board and pulling the peeler down the length with a smooth, even motion. Repeat until the entire outer surface is clean.



5

STEP 5: TO CUT LARGE CHUNKS Large chunks are primarily used for stocks and sauces that will eventually be strained, or for rustic stews. Using your chef's knife, cut the stalks into 1- to 1½-inch pieces.



6

STEP 6: TO CUT THIN SLICES For slices to use in salads or sautés, cut the stalks into ¼- to ⅛-inch half-moons.



7

STEP 7: TO CUT BIAS SLICES Slicing the half-moons on a bias (at an angle) will yield slightly larger pieces perfect for things like stir-fries or hearty sautés.



8

STEP 8: TO CUT FINE DICE Use the tip of your chef's knife to split the stalk lengthwise, keeping it attached at the leaf end (cutting it crosswise into 2 or 3 shorter sections can help if this step is difficult for you at first).



9

STEP 9: CONTINUE TO SPLIT Split the stalk a few more times: the total number of splits will determine the size of your dice. For medium dice, just split the stalk in half. For finer dice, split into quarters. For brunoise, split into $\frac{1}{8}$ - to $\frac{1}{16}$ -inch-wide strips.



10

STEP 10: TO CUT DICE Rotate the stalk and cut crosswise in to dice. The split section of the stalk should hold together as you cut, keeping the strips together.



STEP 11: TO CUT BATONS To make batons for soups or salads, split the stalk lengthwise as you would for fine dice, then cut crosswise into 1½- to 2-inch pieces.



12

STEP 12: DONE Batons, large dice, slices, and fine dice, ready to cook or incorporate into salads.

THE BEST EGG SALAD

The best egg salad starts with perfect hard boiled eggs, with yolks that are just set, but not chalky or dry. Luckily, we've got those eggs covered. The key is to start them in boiling water, then quickly drop the temperature down so that they cook gently and evenly through to the core (see [here](#)). Once you've got those eggs, all it takes is some mayo to bind them, along with celery, red onion, parsley, and a hint of lemon juice to flavor them.

To chop the eggs, I tried several different methods, including pressing them through a grater to get very fine bits, pulsing them in the food processor, and mashing them with a potato masher or a whisk. In the end, the most primal method produced the best end results: wash your hands well, then get right into that bowl, squishing the eggs between your fingers to get a roughly textured salad.



SERVES 4

6 hard boiled eggs, chilled and peeled
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup mayonnaise, homemade ([here](#)) or store-bought
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon zest and $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons fresh juice from 1 lemon
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup finely diced celery (about 1 small stalk)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup finely diced red onion
1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley leaves or chives

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the eggs, mayonnaise, lemon zest and juice, celery, red onion, and parsley or chives in a medium bowl. Using your hands, squeeze the eggs through your fingers, mixing the contents of the bowl until reduced to the desired consistency; alternatively, smash and mix with a firm whisk or potato masher. Season generously with salt and pepper. Serve immediately or store in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.



1



2



3

CREAMY COLESLAW

Most of the coleslaw I ate growing up was of the wet variety. Soggy and dripping, it left a pool in the bottom of the serving bowl and a runny puddle on your plate, inevitably contaminating your fried chicken or macaroni and cheese. Now, where I come from, “wet” is not an adjective that any self-respecting man would like applied to his food. So what’s the key to great, flavorful, nonwet coleslaw? Yep, you guessed it, *osmosis*.

Osmosis is the transfer of liquids across a permeable membrane. It occurs when the concentration of solutes (that’s science-speak for “stuff dissolved in liquid”) on one side of the membrane is higher than on the other. Water will shift across the membrane to try and balance out this difference. Despite its firm appearance, cabbage is actually one of the wettest vegetables around—a whopping 93 percent of its weight is made up of water. Compare that to say, 79 percent in peas or potatoes, and you begin to get an idea of why coleslaw is always so wet. Getting rid of this excess water is a simple procedure: just salt the cabbage and let it rest for an hour or so, then squeeze it dry.

The remaining ingredients in my coleslaw are pretty standard. Carrots and onions add a bit of sweetness and pungency to the base, while the dressing is a balanced sweet, creamy, tangy blend of mayonnaise (preferably homemade), sugar, cider vinegar, and Dijon mustard.



MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS, SERVING 6 TO 8

- 1 medium head green or white cabbage, cored and shredded (about 8 cups)**
- 1 large carrot, peeled and shredded on the large holes of a box grater**
- Kosher salt**
- 1 medium red onion, halved and finely sliced**

1 cup mayonnaise, preferably homemade ([here](#))

2 tablespoons sugar, or to taste

¼ cup cider vinegar

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Toss the cabbage and carrots with 2 tablespoons salt in a large bowl. Transfer to a colander, set it in the sink, and allow to drain for at least 1 hour, and up to 3 hours.
2. Rinse the cabbage and carrots thoroughly and place in the center of a clean kitchen towel. Gather the corners of the towel into a bundle and twist over the sink (or a large measuring cup or bowl) to wring the cabbage and carrots completely dry. Transfer to a large bowl.
3. Add the red onion, mayonnaise, sugar, vinegar, mustard, and a generous sprinkling of pepper to the cabbage and toss thoroughly. Season to taste with salt and more pepper and or sugar if desired. The coleslaw can be served immediately, but for better flavor, refrigerate for at least 2 hours, and up to overnight, to let the flavors mingle and the cabbage to wilt. Retoss just before serving.



Salting the shredded vegetables and squeezing them in a clean kitchen towel removes excess water for better texture and more intense flavor.

CAESAR SALAD

It's Fourth of July, 1924, in Tijuana. Caesar Cardini, an Italian-Mexican restaurateur who recently left San Diego to run his eponymous restaurant south of the border, where Prohibition laws haven't stemmed the flow of booze-related revenue, is under pressure from a crazy holiday-related rush on the restaurant. The hungry patrons have wiped out his larder, so, the story goes, Caesar is forced to invent a dish on the spot based on the ingredients he has on hand. He decides to serve simple leaves of Romaine lettuce tossed with croutons in a dressing made tableside with egg yolks, Worcestershire sauce, olive oil, garlic, lemon juice, and Parmesan cheese. The dish is a hit, and history is made.

While this account may contain much that is apocryphal, or at least wildly inaccurate, my question is this: why is it that all of these semimythical food-origin stories—burgers, Caesar salad, Buffalo wings—have to involve sort some shot-in-the-dark form of recipe development akin to winning the lottery? For once, couldn't we have a great dish that was created through years of hard research and perfection? Whatever happened to the American dream, the hard work and the payoff at the end?

Suffice it to say, the dish was in fact invented in Mexico, and it was not named after a Roman emperor as I'd always thought growing up. And there's no denying that it's an awesome salad, packed with savory umami notes

from the Worcestershire, Parmesan, and anchovies (not one of the original ingredients, but widely accepted these days as necessary—hey, maybe there *is* something to perfecting recipes, even those that come like a bolt of lightning, after all!), with a satisfying crunch from the Romaine and crisp croutons, it's the type of salad that even a hard-core meatatarian could enjoy. While the original dressing may have been a loosely-whisked-together vinaigrette made tableside, I like to make my Caesar dressing with a base of a strongly emulsified mayonnaise. It coats the leaves much better and doesn't end up in the bottom of the bowl. Caesar dressing, by the way, makes a great dip too.



SERVES 4

2 to 3 romaine lettuce hearts, separated into individual leaves, larger leaves cut in half crosswise

$\frac{1}{2}$ recipe (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup) Caesar Salad Dressing (recipe follows)

1 recipe Garlic Parmesan Croutons (recipe follows)

1 ounce Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup)

1. Wash the lettuce, and dry carefully by laying out on a paper towel-lined baking sheet.
2. With clean hands, gently toss the lettuce and dressing together in a large serving bowl. Add the croutons and toss gently to combine. Sprinkle with the cheese and serve immediately.

Caesar Salad Dressing

MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS



1 cup mayonnaise, preferably homemade ([here](#))

2 ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano, finely grated (about 1 cup)

2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

4 anchovy fillets

2 medium cloves garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane (about 2 teaspoons)

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the mayonnaise, cheese, Worcestershire, anchovies, and garlic in the bowl of a food processor and process until homogeneous, about 15 seconds, scraping down the sides once or twice during processing as

necessary. Using a rubber spatula, transfer the mixture to a medium bowl. Whisking constantly, slowly drizzle in the olive oil. Whisk in water a teaspoon at a time until the dressing is just thin enough to flow slowly off a spoon. Season to taste with salt and pepper. The dressing will keep in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

Garlic Parmesan Croutons

These croutons make a great addition to chopped salads, as well as to soups. The croutons can be stored at room temperature in a zipper-lock bag for up to 2 weeks; wait until they are completely cool before bagging them.

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

**1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane
(about 1 teaspoon)**

**$\frac{1}{2}$ loaf ciabatta or hearty Italian bread, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch
cubes (about 4 cups)**

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 ounce Parmigiano-Reggiano, grated (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup)

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and preheat the oven to 350°F. Whisk the olive oil and garlic together in a large bowl until thoroughly mixed. Toss the croutons in the oil until evenly coated. Season with salt and pepper and spread out on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake, flipping halfway through cooking, until dry and lightly browned, about 20 minutes.

2. While the croutons are hot, transfer to a large bowl and toss with the cheese to coat.



1



2



3

MARINATED KALE SALADS

I'm not sure exactly when or where marinated kale salads became a thing, but if forced to guess, I'd put my wager on 2009, in Brooklyn.

That's certainly where I first started seeing it on menus. These days, it's common enough that even friends who don't cook and don't believe in Brooklyn have heard about it and probably tried it.

Kale leaves are roughly chopped, massaged with dressing and salt, and allowed to sit. The beautiful thing about these salads is that kale is robust enough that the salad stays crisp and crunchy even after sitting in the fridge for days. You can make it and eat it over the course of a few days with no loss in quality.

Try a Little Tenderness

To make marinated kale salads, I start by removing the

major stems from a bunch of kale, then shredding the leaves into bite-sized strips.

Some folks make the false assumption that it's the acid in the dressing or marinade that causes the tough leaves to tenderize. Actually, it's the oil that does the job. (See "Vinaigrettes," [here](#), for more on this.) Plant leaves naturally have a waxy cuticle on them in order to protect them from rain. Haven't you seen rainwater falling on a leaf? It rolls straight off, like water off a duck's back. But this cuticle is oil soluble, so when you massage oil into a pile of kale leaves, it removes the coating, allowing the cells underneath to acquire some controlled damage, thereby softening them. The question then is this: is it necessary to pretenderize the greens with straight oil before dressing them, or can the dressing alone do the job?

I tried it both ways, making a couple big batches at the office for folks to try (any day when there are extra greens in the office is a happy one). The first I tossed with olive oil, salt, and pepper, massaging the oil into the leaves and letting the kale rest for half an hour before tossing it with the dressing. The second one I tossed with the dressing alone (adding extra olive oil, salt, and pepper to compensate) and served it up immediately.



As kale sits dressed in oil it slowly softens, turning from tough to tender, until it is salad-ready.

The results were pretty conclusive: presoftened greens have a superior texture, coming out tender and crisp, as

opposed to fibrous and chewy. The difference was not so great that anyone rejected the unsoftened batch, though, so if I'm in a real rush, I'll go with the direct-dressing route.



Presofterened kale on the left, fresh, fibrous kale on the right.

HOW TO PREPARE KALE FOR SALADS

To prepare kale for salad, start by cutting or tearing out the large central stems and discarding them. Next, hold a bunch of leaves in one hand and slice through them at the desired thickness. Repeat with the remaining leaves. Wash the greens carefully and spin dry.



MARINATED KALE SALAD WITH CHICKPEAS AND SUMAC ONIONS

NOTES: Like all kale salads, this one keeps very well, retaining its crunch and developing flavor in the fridge over a couple days.

Sumac (see [here](#)) can be found in spice stores or Middle Eastern grocers. Simply omit it if unavailable.



SERVES 4

1 pound (about 2 bunches) Tuscan or curly kale, tough stems removed and leaves roughly chopped (about 4 quarts loosely packed)

3 tablespoons olive oil

Kosher salt

1 small red onion, thinly sliced (about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup) and rinsed in a sieve under warm water for 2 minutes

1 teaspoon ground sumac (see Note above)

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon toasted sesame seeds

1 tablespoon lemon juice (from 1 lemon)

1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane (about 1 teaspoon)

2 teaspoons Dijon mustard

One 14-ounce can chickpeas, drained and rinsed

Freshly ground black pepper

1. Massage the kale with the olive oil and 1 teaspoon salt in a large bowl, making sure to coat all the surfaces and kneading to help break down the tougher pieces, about 2 minutes. Set aside at room temperature until the kale is softened, at least 15 minutes, and up to 1 hour.
2. Combine the onions with the sumac and sesame seeds. Season to taste with salt. Combine the lemon juice, garlic, and mustard in a small bowl.
3. Once the kale is wilted, add the lemon juice mixture and chickpeas and toss to combine. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve topped with the sumac onions. Leftovers will keep in a sealed container in the

refrigerator for up to 5 days; retoss before serving.



MARINATED KALE SALAD WITH SHALLOTS AND KIDNEY BEANS

Massage the kale with the olive oil and 1 teaspoon salt as directed above and let stand until softened. Combine 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar, 1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane, and 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard in a small bowl. Toss the wilted kale with the vinegar mixture, 1 large shallot, thinly sliced (about 1 cup) and rinsed in a sieve under warm water for 2 minutes, and one 14-ounce can kidney beans, drained and rinsed. Season to taste with salt and pepper and serve. Leftovers will keep in a sealed container, refrigerated, for up to 5 days. Retoss

before serving.

KALE CAESAR SALAD

The idea of a kale Caesar salad is a natural extension of the marinated kale salad (see [here](#)). Caesar dressing, which naturally pairs with slightly bitter, very crunchy lettuces, seems like a perfect partner in crime. And it is.

A typical Caesar salad comes with large, crunchy croutons. In this version, rather than large chunks, I break up the bread into very small pieces using a food processor. Once tossed with a bit of olive oil and baked until crisp, the croutons become ultra crunchy because of their increased surface area. When you toss them with the salad, they adhere to the greens. Every bite you take includes these little bits of sweet, toasty, olive oil-coated crunch.

And the greatest part of the recipe? Store the dressed kale in the fridge and the croutons in a sealed container on the countertop (they get soggy if you store them with the salad). The dressed kale will stay crisp for at least three days, meaning whenever you want a perfectly dressed, crisp and crunchy salad, it's as easy as opening the container, sprinkling on the croutons, and serving.

It's dangerously simple, but overindulging in kale has never been a great fear of mine.



SERVES 4

1 pound (about 2 bunches) Tuscan or curly kale, tough stems removed and leaves roughly chopped (about 4 quarts loosely packed)

5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Kosher salt

5 ounces hearty bread, roughly torn into 1-inch pieces (about 3 cups)

Freshly ground black pepper

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup mayonnaise, preferably homemade (see [here](#))

6 anchovy fillets

1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane (about 1 teaspoon)

1½ ounces Parmigiano-Reggiano, finely grated (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)

2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

2 tablespoons lemon juice (from 1 lemon)

1 small white onion or 2 shallots, finely sliced

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and preheat the oven to 350°F. Massage the kale with 3 tablespoons of the olive oil and 1 teaspoon salt in a large bowl, making sure to coat all surfaces and kneading to help break down the tougher pieces, about 2 minutes. Set aside while you prepare the croutons and dressing.
2. Combine the bread pieces with the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil in the bowl of a food processor and pulse until broken down into pea-sized pieces. Season to taste with salt and pepper and pulse once or twice to

combine. Spread out on a rimmed baking sheet and bake until the croutons are pale golden brown and crisp, about 20 minutes. Set aside.

3. Meanwhile, wipe out the food processor bowl. Add the mayonnaise, anchovies, garlic, cheese, Worcestershire sauce, and lemon juice and process until smooth. Season to taste with salt and pepper if necessary.
4. Add the onions, dressing, and half of the croutons to the bowl of wilted kale. Toss with your hands until thoroughly coated. Serve sprinkled with the remaining croutons.

TAMING ONION'S BITE



Soaking onions doesn't remove much pungency.



Rinsing under hot water is the best way to remove an onion's bite, leaving behind just its sweetness.

Let's say you happen to have an extra-pungent onion—it happens to the best of us—is there a way to tame it?

I tried out a few different methods, from submerging onions in cold water for times ranging from 10 minutes to 2 hours, to chilling them, to letting them air out on the counter.

Soaking the onions in a container just led to onion-scented liquid in the container, without much of a decrease in the aroma of the onions themselves

—perhaps if I'd used an unreasonably small amount of onion in an unreasonably large container it would have diluted it more efficiently. Air-drying led to milder flavor, but also to dried out onions and a papery texture.

The best method turned out to be the fastest and easiest: just rinse away all those extra-pungent compounds under running water—warm water. The speed of chemical and physical reactions increases with temperature. Using warm water causes onions to release their volatile compounds faster—about 45 seconds is enough to rid even the most pungent onions of their kick.

The next question on your mind might be, but doesn't hot water make the onion go all limp?

Nope. Even if you use the hottest tap water, it generally comes out at around 140° to 150°F or so. Pectin, the main carbohydrate “glue” that holds plant cells together, doesn't break down until around 183°F. There are other bits of the onion that, given enough time, will begin to soften at hot tap water temperatures, but it takes a long, long time.

Don't worry, your onions are safe here.

DRESSING Family #3:

DAIRY-BASED DRESSINGS

These dressings are by far the easiest to make, because dairy products, as a general rule, come preemulsified. That's right—the creamy milk you're drinking is creamy precisely because it has fat distributed through it in tiny, tiny droplets. With a dairy-based dressing, you never have to worry about it breaking. On the flip side, dairy-based dressings don't have nearly as long a shelf life as constructed emulsions like a vinaigrette or a mayonnaise.

Cultured milk products, like sour cream, yogurt, or crème fraîche, are the best bases—their thickness makes them ideal for coating leaves and vegetables evenly, while their tanginess is a natural in salads.

ICEBERG WEDGE SALAD

The iceberg salad is the exception that proves the rule. According to my definition of a salad, an iceberg wedge is technically *not* one, since it needs to be cut with a knife and fork at the table. But it's close enough, and I'll take delicious over pedantic any day of the week.



SERVES 4

1 head iceberg lettuce, cut into quarters, core removed

1 recipe Three-Ingredient Blue Cheese Dressing (recipe follows)

4 ounces grape tomatoes, cut in half (about 1 cup)

8 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled

Place the iceberg wedges on individual serving plates.

Drizzle each wedge with one-quarter of the dressing. Divide the grape tomatoes and bacon evenly among the plates.

Serve immediately.

Three-Ingredient Blue Cheese Dressing

This is about the simplest blue cheese dressing you can make, but it relies on high-quality, really sharp and flavorful blue cheese. Do *not* try this with the cheapest Danish blue you can find—you will be disappointed. To maximize texture and chunkiness in the dressing, I like to form a base with the tangy buttermilk, creamy mayonnaise, and half of the blue cheese, reserving the other half to crumble and mix in.

NOTE: Use a sharp blue cheese like Gorgonzola, Roquefort, Fourme d'Ambert, or Stilton.



MAKES ABOUT 1½ CUPS

½ cup buttermilk

½ cup mayonnaise, preferably homemade ([here](#))

8 ounces sharp blue cheese (see Note above), finely crumbled (about 2 cups)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the buttermilk, mayonnaise, and half the Gorgonzola in the bowl of a food processor and process until smooth, about 15 seconds. Transfer to a medium bowl and fold in the remaining Gorgonzola with a rubber spatula. Season to taste with salt and pepper. The dressing will keep in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

CHOPPED SALADS

Chopped salads are a lot like the A-Team:

. . . a ragtag group of individuals with totally conflicting personalities that somehow manage to come together in a beautiful way to make the world a better place.

And there're no buts about it—a chopped salad takes more time to put together than a simple green salad. First you've got an ingredients list that's a good three to five times longer, and then you've got to chop, drain, and dress all the vegetables. But what it lacks in brevity, it makes up for in heartiness. Nothing beats a chopped salad for lunch on a picnic (bring all the prepared ingredients with you, with the dressing in a separate container, and toss just before serving), or as a simple but tasty meal on a warm summer night.

Good chopped salads are all about balancing flavors and textures. Obviously you want plenty of crunchy elements—crisp lettuces and vegetables—along with intensely flavored bites like cheese, nuts, and cured meats. I've included some complete recipes for a few of the most classic chopped salads, but I sincerely hope it won't end there! With their minimal fuss and inexpensive ingredients, chopped salads are one of the best forums for beginning cooks to experiment in terms of combining flavors and textures to discover a style that suits them best. I hope you take the chance. The following chart will show you the best way to treat chopped salad ingredients so you can put together your own combinations. When constructing a chopped salad, I

always try to mix together two to three base ingredients and a secondary ingredient or two that contrasts the base ingredients texturally and flavorwise, along with a couple of flavorful accents.

The real key to a successful chopped salad is controlling moisture. Here's what happens if you don't:



Undrained vegetables leave a pool of watered-down dressing in the salad bowl.

Very moist ingredients like tomatoes and cucumbers should be salted in advance and left to drain in a strainer for at least half an hour before being blotted dry.



CHOPPED SALAD INGREDIENTS

INGREDIENT	HOW TO PREPARE	ROLE IN SALAD
Romaine or iceberg lettuce, radicchio, escarole, Belgian endive, or curly endive	Wash, dry, and chop into 1-inch pieces.	Base ingredient
Cucumbers	Peel, split lengthwise in half, remove the seeds with a	Base or secondary ingredient

sharp spoon, and chop into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces. Toss with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt per pound and let drain in a colander for 30 minutes.

Tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, and grape tomatoes

Split small tomatoes in half or into quarters. Remove the seeds from larger tomatoes and chop

Base or secondary ingredients

into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice. Toss tomatoes with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt per pound and let drain in a colander for 30 minutes.

**Canned beans
(black beans,
cannellini
beans,
chickpeas,
kidney beans,
etc.)**

Drain, rinse, and carefully dry.

Base or secondary ingredients

Radishes

Scrub and

Base or

	quarter.	secondary ingredients
Crisp vegetables like celery, zucchini, squash, fennel, jicama, or hearts of palm	Peel if necessary and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice.	Base or secondary ingredients
Nuts and seeds (walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, peanuts, macadamia nuts, sunflower seeds, etc.)	Toast, then roughly chop if larger than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch: leave whole if small.	Base or secondary ingredients

Avocado	Halve, pit, peel, and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes.	Base or secondary ingredient
Cabbage	Shred or cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice. Toss with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt per pound and let drain in a colander for 30 minutes.	Base or secondary ingredient
Corn	Cut from the ears, blanch in boiling salted water	Base or secondary ingredient

for 1 minute, drain, and cool.

Pasta

Use bite-sized shapes.
Cook, drain, and cool.

Base or secondary ingredients

Green vegetables like broccoli, asparagus, snap peas, and green beans

Blanch in 1 gallon boiling water with ½ cup kosher salt until just tender-crisp; cool under cold running

Base or secondary ingredients

	<p>water, then drain and carefully dry.</p>	
Red onions, sweet onions, or scallions	<p>Thinly slice and soak in cold water for 30 minutes; drain.</p>	Secondary ingredient
Bell peppers (green, red, yellow, orange)	<p>Cut into $\frac{1}{2}$-inch cubes.</p>	Secondary ingredient
Carrots	<p>Peel and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$-inch cubes or $\frac{1}{4}$-inch, thick matchsticks, or shred on</p>	Secondary ingredient

the large holes of a box grater.

Citrus fruit

Cut into suprêmes (see [here](#)).

Seconda
ingredie

Crisp acidic fruits like apples, pears, and young mangoes

Cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes.

Seconda
ingredie

Eggs

Hard-boil and roughly chop.

Seconda
ingredie

Poached or roasted chicken, turkey, or

Cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes.

Seconda
ingredie

ham

Canned tuna

Drain and roughly shred.

Secondary ingredient

**Salami,
pepperoni,
soppressata,
chorizo, ham,
or other dry-
cured meats**

Cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch cubes.

Flavorful accent

Olives

Buy prepitted (or pit them yourself) and split in half or into quarters.

Flavorful accent

Capers	Rinse and dry.	Flavorful accent
Tender herbs like parsley, chives, basil, mint, chervil, tarragon, cilantro, or dill	Wash, dry, and roughly chop.	Flavorful accent
Jarred hot peppers (peperoncini), roasted red peppers, sun-dried tomatoes, or other pickled or preserved jarred vegetables	Roughly chop.	Flavorful accent

Semi-firm cheese like feta, provolone, Manchego, or cheddar—see “Cheese Chart,” here–here

Cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes.

Flavorful accent

Bacon

Cook until crisp (see [here](#)) and crumble.

Flavorful accent

Cured fish like anchovies or sardines

Roughly chop.

Flavorful accent

Dried fruits

If larger than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch, roughly

Flavorful accent

chop.

Depending on the ingredients, a chopped salad can be dressed with any of the three basic salad dressing styles. A lemony vinaigrette best brings out the fresh flavors of a light cucumber-and-tomato-based Greek salad, while a mayo-based creamy Italian dressing is de rigueur for a classic Italian-American antipasti salad. Tangy buttermilk ranch dressing is great as a dipping sauce on a vegetable platter, but it's also the dressing of choice for a ranch-style Cobb salad.

CHOPPED GREEK SALAD

While your corner pizza shop or deli might sell an iceberg lettuce salad topped with olives, tomatoes, cucumber, and feta cheese as “Greek,” a true Greek salad is a lettuce-free chopped salad lightly dressed in a lemony vinaigrette. This is one of my favorite late-summer side dishes, when tomatoes are at the height of awesomeness.



SERVES 4

- 8 ounces grape tomatoes, cut in half (about 2 cups)
- 1 large cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise-seeded, and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice (about 2 cups)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 medium red onion, finely sliced (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
1 large green or red bell pepper, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch cubes
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pitted kalamata olives, split in half
3 ounces feta cheese, crumbled
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup loosely packed fresh parsley leaves, roughly chopped
2 teaspoons chopped fresh oregano
 **$\frac{1}{3}$ cup Mild Lemon- or Red Wine–Olive Oil Vinaigrette
([here](#))**

1. Toss the tomatoes and cucumbers with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt and a few grinds of black pepper. Transfer to a colander set in the sink and let drain for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, place the red onion in a small bowl cover with cold water, and let stand for 30 minutes. Then rinse and drain.
2. Carefully dry all the vegetables with paper towels. Combine the tomatoes and cucumbers, red onions, bell pepper, olives, feta, parsley, and oregano in a large bowl. Drizzle with the dressing and season to taste with salt and pepper. Toss thoroughly and serve.

HOW TO BUY AND PREPARE CUCUMBERS

Cucumbers are one of the oldest cultivated vegetables, and one of my favorites. Peeled, cut, and

sprinkled with a little salt, they are simultaneously savory and refreshing. They're fantastic marinated overnight in a little soy sauce, sesame oil, and red pepper flakes; the salt in the soy sauce will draw out some of their liquid, so they get a superconcentrated flavor.

As a stir-fry ingredient, cucumbers are one of the most underused.

Oddly enough, cucumbers are one of the two foods my wife can't stand (the other is tomatoes), so chicken stir-fried with cucumbers, fermented bean paste, and Sichuan peppercorns is one of my quick, easy, and delicious go-to staples when she's out on a girls' night.

While you can certainly simply slice whole cukes into salads, peeling and seeding them helps you make the most of their flavor and texture.

Shopping and Storage

In the supermarket, you're usually faced with three choices:

- American cucumbers are dense fleshed and flavorful. They have thicker skins than most other cucumbers, so I recommend removing it. In any case, definitely give them a good scrub under cool running water to remove some of the food-grade wax that they usually come coated in. They also have lots of watery seeds that

should be scraped out before use.

- English cucumbers usually come individually shrink-wrapped, which means that there's no need to scrub them before eating (they are not waxed). The skins are thinner than those of American cucumbers and so can be consumed with no problem. Although English cucumbers are usually relatively seedless, they are also much more watery than their American counterparts. They are more convenient to prepare but less flavorful.
- Kirby cucumbers are like small versions of American cucumbers. Thick-skinned and relatively seedless, they have the strongest flavor of the three types and a texture that can sometimes border on tough. They are best pickled.

Fresh whole cucumbers can be stored in the vegetable crisper drawer for at least a week and often much longer. Cut cucumber pieces should be stored wrapped in a moist paper towel inside an airtight plastic bag or container to prevent moisture loss. Eat cut cucumbers within 3 days.

KNIFE SKILLS: How to Cut Cucumbers



STEP 1: SPLIT THE CUCUMBER IN HALF Split the cucumber lengthwise in half.



STEP 2: REMOVE THE SEEDS AND SPLIT FURTHER

Cucumber seeds can be watery and bland, so they should be scraped out with a spoon; then cut the halves lengthwise into spears of the desired width.



STEP 3: CUT CROSSWISE Rotate the cucumber 90 degrees and cut the strips into cubes.

WHITE BEAN AND MANCHEGO CHEESE SALAD

Crunchy celery and red onion contrast beautifully with the creamy white beans in this simple salad. Chopped parsley and cubes of salty Manchego cheese (you can substitute another semi-firm cheese if you'd prefer; see "Cheese Chart," [here](#)–[here](#)) round out the flavors. Of course, you can use whatever canned beans you'd like (see [here](#)), or cook them yourself (see [here](#)). It's essential that your beans are fully dried before you put the salad together, to avoid a watery salad.

SERVES 4 TO 6

Two 14½-ounce cans white beans (or 4 cups cooked white beans), drained, rinsed, and dried with paper towels or a clean kitchen towel

2 large stalks celery, peeled and cut into ½-inch cubes (about 1½ cups)

1 medium red onion, thinly sliced (about ¾ cup)

½ cup roughly chopped fresh parsley

8 ounces Manchego cheese, cut into ½-inch cubes

½ cup Mild Lemon- or Red Wine–Olive Oil Vinaigrette ([here](#))

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Combine the beans, celery, red onion, parsley, and cheese in a large bowl. Add the vinaigrette, season to taste with salt and pepper, and toss to combine. Serve immediately.

RESTAURANT-STYLE CHOPPED ANTIPASTI SALAD



SERVES 4 AS A LIGHT MEAL

- 8 ounces grape tomatoes, cut in half (about 2 cups)**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 medium red onion, finely sliced (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)**
- One 14-ounce can chickpeas, drained and rinsed**
- One 6-ounce jar peperoncini, drained and coarsely chopped**
- One 6-ounce jar roasted red peppers, drained, rinsed, and chopped into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch pieces**

- 3 stalks celery, peeled and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch dice (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups)**
 - 8 ounces Genoa salami, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch cubes (about 2 cups)**
 - 6 ounces sharp provolone cheese, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch cubes (about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups)**
 - 1 head Romaine lettuce, trimmed and chopped into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces (about 3 cups)**
 - 1 recipe Creamy Italian Dressing (recipe follows)**
1. Toss the tomatoes with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt and a few grinds of pepper. Transfer to a colander set in the sink and let drain for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, place the red onion in a small bowl, cover with cold water, and let stand for 30 minutes, then rinse and drain.
 2. Carefully dry the drained tomatoes, onions, chickpeas, peperoncini, and red peppers with paper towels. Transfer to a large bowl, add the celery, salami, provolone, Romaine, and dressing, season to taste with salt and pepper, and toss thoroughly to combine. Serve immediately.

1



2



3



Creamy Italian Dressing

If you've only ever used store-bought Italian dressing, this one's for you. It straddles the line between a vinaigrette and a mayonnaise. Mix it up properly, and it'll stay nice and creamy for several hours, though, unlike a mayonnaise, it'll eventually break and separate again.

NOTE: Use on crisp, watery greens like iceberg or Romaine.

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

½ cup mayonnaise, preferably homemade ([here](#))
2 tablespoons lemon juice (from 1 lemon)
1 small shallot, finely minced (about 1 tablespoon)
**1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane
(about 1 teaspoon)**
2 tablespoons minced fresh basil
2 teaspoons minced fresh oregano
½ teaspoon red pepper flakes
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

Combine all the ingredients in a squeeze bottle or container with a tight-fitting lid. Shake vigorously to emulsify. The dressing will keep in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week; shake vigorously before using.

CHOPPED RANCH COBB SALAD

The classic Cobb salad is one of those more-calories-than-any-entrée-on-the-menu dishes that lets you feel somewhat virtuous all the while knowing that really you just want to stuff your face with bacon, avocado, and blue cheese. There ain't nothing wrong with that. If a Cobb salad feels a little uncomposed, that's because it is: it's nothing more than a handful of ingredients all thrown together on the same plate. The key to a great Cobb salad is to make sure that each one of those components is perfect.

The chicken in a Cobb should be supremely moist and tender. You can accomplish this by poaching the chicken in not-too-hot water until it registers exactly 150°F on an instant-read thermometer. At this stage, it's cooked through but still retains most of its moisture, without any stringiness to speak of.

The remainder of the ingredients—the bacon, the eggs, the dressing—are pretty straightforward, and luckily we already have great techniques that'll take care of them. If you are planning this salad for a party or a picnic, all the ingredients can be prepped in advance to be plated at the last moment, though for best results, you should cook the bacon and dice the avocado just before serving.

NOTE: Leftover roast chicken can be used in place of the poached chicken.

SERVES 4 AS A MAIN COURSE

2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, about 8 ounces each
Kosher salt
2 heads Romaine lettuce, roughly chopped into 1-inch pieces (about 3 quarts)
1 recipe Buttermilk Ranch Dressing (recipe follows)
Freshly ground black pepper
8 strips bacon, cooked and crumbled
4 hard-boiled eggs (see [here](#)), roughly chopped
1 avocado, halved, pitted, peeled, and diced into ½-inch cubes
1 large tomato, diced into ½-inch cubes
6 ounces Roquefort cheese, crumbled
2 tablespoons finely minced fresh chives

1. Place the chicken breasts in a large saucepan and cover with 2 quarts cold water and season with 2 tablespoons salt. Bring to a boil over high heat, reduce to a bare simmer, and cook until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of a breast registers 150°F, about 10 minutes. Drain the chicken and run under cold water until cool enough to handle. Pat dry and dice into ½-inch chunks.
2. Toss the lettuce with half of the dressing in a bowl. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Divide the lettuce among four serving plates and top with the chicken, bacon, eggs, avocado, tomato, and cheese, keeping each ingredient separate. Season to taste with salt and pepper and sprinkle with the chives. Serve immediately, passing

the remaining dressing at the table.

Buttermilk Ranch Dressing

MAKES ABOUT 1 CUP

½ cup low-fat or skim cultured buttermilk

½ cup sour cream

2 teaspoons lemon juice (from 1 lemon)

**1 medium clove garlic, minced or grated on a Microplane
(about 1 teaspoon)**

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

2 tablespoons minced fresh chives

2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro

1 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Pinch of cayenne pepper

Kosher salt

Whisk together the buttermilk, sour cream, lemon juice, garlic, mustard, chives, cilantro, black pepper, and cayenne, in a small bowl. Season to taste with salt. The dressing will keep in a sealed container in the refrigerator for up to 1 week; whisk or shake before using.

* Note that retaining temperature better is not the same as saying that it returns to a boil faster. As we found in Chapter 7 ([here](#)), a larger pot of water will actually return to a boil more slowly than a small pot, though it will not drop as much in temperature

† Yes, this is really a word. Or it should be.

‡ OK, you win, I confess: these were all pivotal moments in my own life.