

California Gazpacho

By Melina Hammer

Eaten like a soup, looks like a salsa, tastes like a salad. Perfect summer refreshment: brightly-colored, crunchy and juicy vegetable confetti, served by the ladleful.

Serves 6 to 8

- 6 tomatoes (preferably heirlooms)
 - 3 to 4 small kirby cucumbers (preferably organic)
 - 1 medium sweet onion
 - 1 green pepper
 - 2 cloves garlic, minced
 - 1/3 cup good olive oil
 - 1/4 cup good red wine vinegar
 - 1 1/2 cup tomato passata
 - your favorite hot pepper sauce
 - sea salt
 - freshly cracked black pepper
 - sour cream
1. Place the minced garlic into a dish and pour the olive oil and vinegar over. Let it sit while you chop the vegetables.
 2. Slice tomatoes into 1/2-inch thick disks, stack them on top of one another, and chop them into 1/2-inch thick dice. When you empty them into a serving bowl, be sure to include all their juices.
 3. Slice kirbys in half lengthwise, then into 1/4-inch thick layers. Stack and slice them into 1/4-inch wide rows, and then chop the lot into fine dice. I love the juicy crunch of cucumbers as an accent, so I chop them a little smaller than the tomatoes, who are the (unofficial) star in this recipe. Add the cucumbers to the tomatoes.
 4. Finely chop the green pepper. It should be just-shy of a mince, as its bright and crunchy presence can easily compete with the other two, and we don't want that. Add the peppers into the bowl.
 5. Mince the sweet onion. Add it in with the rest, and give it a gentle stir to combine.
 6. Pour in the passata and the garlic mixture, and add a few pinches of sea salt. Add some freshly cracked pepper and a teaspoon or two of hot sauce. Stir everything together and taste. Feel free to add more hot sauce, sea salt, or cracked pepper, to your taste. The end experience should feel refreshing and a bit spicy, so that the addition of that sour cream dollop makes its soothing pleasure felt.
 7. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Serve chilled in shallow bowls topped with sour cream - gazpacho!