

Caesar-Style Kale Salad with Roasted Onions and Ricotta Salata

By cookinginvictoria

Food52 Editors' Comments: This is an amazingly flavorful spin on kale! I love the contrast of the salty anchovies with the tangy lemon juice in the dressing; the flavors are balanced, and they soften the kale nicely. The herb-infused onions add a different texture and slight sweetness to the mix; when juxtaposed with the umami flavor of the bacon, they round out the salad perfectly. The crunch of the croutons and softness of the cheese made the texture interesting, ensuring that each bite is different.

I came relatively late to kale salads, but now they're my favorite way to eat kale. At Spinnaker's, a gastropub in Victoria, my favorite dish on their menu is their kale salad. They do a Caesar spin on it and garnish it with bacon and focaccia croutons. I wanted to recreate the salad at home, but along the way I deviated a bit from the Spinnaker's salad. Some people I have served kale salads to do not like the raw texture, but I found that if some hot ingredients were added to the raw kale, it wilts just enough to tone down the grassy chewiness. I kept the capers in the dressing, but upped the umami quotient with a good dose of lemon and anchovy. I have been a fan of roasted onions ever since Merrill posted her recipe for Tomato Salad with Corn, Summer Squash and Roasted Onions. Now I am never without them in my refrigerator. I have adapted her recipe slightly, lowering the heat to prevent burning and adding a flavor boost from fresh thyme and rosemary. Despite a few steps (making croutons, and roasting onions), this dish comes together fairly quickly.

Serves 2 to 3 as a dinner side or lunch main Salad Dressing:

- 1 1/2 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1/2 tablespoon rice wine vinegar
- 12 capers, roughly chopped (if salt-packed, rinse before chopping)
- 1 to 2 large anchovies, roughly chopped (if salt-packed, remove tail, fins, and bones before chopping)
- 1/2 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

The rest of the salad:

- 2 sweet onions, preferably Vidalia or Walla-Walla
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary, about 1 inch long
- 3 1/2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 to 3 slices day-old, best-quality bread (I like ciabatta or sourdough boule)
- 1 small bunch Lacinato kale
- 2 slices thick cut bacon
- 1/2 cup grated ricotta salata cheese (or you can substitute feta)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

1. **MAKE SALAD DRESSING:** Add lemon juice, rice wine vinegar, capers, anchovy, mustard, and Worcestershire sauce to bowl of blender and whirl until thoroughly mixed and smooth. (If you'd rather not deal with the hassle getting your blender out, you can make this dressing with a hand blender.) With motor of blender or hand blender running, add olive oil in a thin stream until thoroughly emulsified. Taste -- the dressing should taste vibrant and lemony. Add a pinch or two of salt, a grind of pepper, and more lemon if needed. Put dressing aside until needed. (Note: Dressing can be made a few days ahead. Keep in a glass jar in the refrigerator and let sit out for about 15 minutes before dressing the salad.)
2. **ROAST ONIONS:** Heat oven to 350° F. Cut onions in half, then slice in half moons about 1/4-inch thick. Place onions, thyme, and rosemary on rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons olive oil and mix with your hands until herbs and onion slices are coated. Add 1/4 teaspoon salt and a grind or two of black pepper. Mix with your hands again. Place pan in oven and roast for about 60 to 75 minutes or until onion slices have turned golden and soft and are caramelized. Start checking after about 60 minutes and remove onions before they begin to char. Burnt onions are not delicious!
3. **MAKE CROUTONS:** Cut bread into large bite-sized cubes. Keep crusts on for more rustic croutons. Heat 1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil in large heavy pan. (I use a cast iron pan.) Add bread cubes and cook over low heat, turning occasionally, until all surfaces of bread cubes are toasted and golden. Remove and set on a paper towel-lined plate. Sprinkle with salt while still warm and set aside. (Croutons can be made a few days ahead. Store in airtight container at room temperature.)
4. **PREPARE KALE:** Wash kale in cold water. Several rinses may be needed to remove dirt and grit. Dry kale with a few layers of kitchen towels. Working carefully, remove thick stems from kale and roll kale leaves into long cigarette-style rolls. Cut kale into very thin strips. Add kale to salad bowl or serving plate. Pour 3/4 of the salad dressing over kale and toss with tongs or your hands until all leaves are coated.
5. **COOK BACON:** When onions are just starting to turn golden at the tips, slice bacon lengthwise and then cut into 1-inch pieces. Sauté bacon in small skillet over medium low heat until cooked and crunchy. Pour bacon onto kale. If there is any rendered bacon fat in the skillet, add a spoonful of this to the kale, if you like. Remove onions from the oven and add half of them and any juices to kale. (Save rest of onions for another use -- as a salad ingredient, sandwich topping, or to fill omelets or burritos.) Mix thoroughly with your hands or tongs -- the hot onions and bacon will slightly wilt the kale.
6. **FINISHING THE SALAD:** Add croutons and ricotta salata to salad. Pour in reserved salad dressing if salad looks a little dry. Toss again. Taste and adjust seasonings if needed, adding a pinch or two of salt, a grind of pepper, or additional lemon. We enjoy this salad for dinner with a hearty vegetarian soup or fresh fish, simply prepared. Enjoy!