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Summer Salad Days & Roasted Beets with Goat Cheese Salad

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August has to be a favorite month for anyone who likes to eat local. And by local, I don't mean your neighborhood diner or at home in your own kitchen. More people are discovering, or re-discovering, how utterly delicious food can be when it's grown close to home and harvested at its peak. Is there anything as wonderful as fresh fruits and vegetables enjoyed within a few hours, or even minutes, of picking? Why even people who don't like vegetables like them when they are fresh.



Our New England growing season is tragically short. Late frosts delay planting in the spring. Early frosts and even snow, cut the season short. But for at least the next month or so, many of our all-time favorites are at their peak. The beans are fantastic, the corn sublime and the tomatoes to die for. But don't stop there. The vegetable bins are filled with beautiful broccoli and beets, zucchini, peppers and more. And don't forget the local raspberries, blackberries and blueberries.

Where you find these delicious delicacies is up to you. Perhaps your inner farmer is calling you to pick-your-own. If you'd like a chance to visit with your neighbors while you shop, a farmers' market is just the thing. And for the day to day, nothing beats the convenience of a nearby farm stand.

Local farms are bursting with gorgeous, local produce. What could be better than putting them to good use in a colorful summer salad? And if you've got a few leftovers from last night's cookout? So much the better; add a few slices of grilled chicken, steak or fish to your salad and you have an easy one-dish meal. Relax and enjoy your simple supper on the deck or on the beach. Sounds like a perfect end to a busy day.

Planning a special, summer celebration? No problem. Take some of those wonderful local ingredients, dress them up and take them out! First course or main course, bountiful salads are a great solution when you are entertaining a crowd. Following a favorite foodie adage, we eat with our eyes first and then with our stomachs. An artfully arranged plate of fresh, colorful vegetables will be as dazzling as it is delicious.

Whether you are tossing together a last minute supper or want to add a salad to a fabulous feast, here are a few tips for creating the perfect summer salad:

Be bold and combine different colors, textures and flavors. A sprinkle of goat cheese or gorgonzola will add creaminess and a salty bite. A few nuts or seeds provide a nice crunch. For more crunch, add lots of crispy vegetables. Then again, the caramelization from roasting or grilling vegetables will give your salad a subtle sweetness.

The French are famous for their salade composée or composed salad. Instead of tossing all of the ingredients in a bowl, try arranging the different elements of your salad on individual plates or a large platter. A stunning feast for the eyes, a composed salad is definitely worth the little bit of extra effort.

Make your own vinaigrettes. You'll love the bright, fresh taste so make plenty and store any extra in a jar in the refrigerator. Use vinaigrette sparingly and the wonderful taste of your fresh, local greens and veggies will shine.

Enjoy the salad days and nights of summer and bon appétit!

Roasted Beets with Goat Cheese Salad

Peppery greens, creamy goat cheese and crunchy nuts are the perfect complements for roasted beets. Enjoy!
Serves 8

About 1 1/2 pounds beets, red or gold or a mix, peeled and cut into wedges
1 medium red onion, cut in half and then in thin wedges
Extra virgin olive oil
Balsamic vinegar
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
About 8 ounces arugula
Tarragon Vinaigrette (recipe follows)
3-4 ounces crumbled goat cheese
1/2 cup chopped and toasted walnuts

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

Put the beets and onions on separate sheet pans. Drizzle each with just enough equal parts olive oil and vinegar to lightly coat, season with salt and pepper and toss to combine.



Tossing once or twice, roast the beets for about 30 minutes and onions for about 15 minutes or until lightly caramelized and tender. Let cool to room temperature.

To serve: Toss the arugula with enough vinaigrette to lightly coat. Put the greens on individual plates or a large platter. Arrange the beets and onion on top of the greens, top with crumbled goat cheese and sprinkle with walnuts.

Tarragon Vinaigrette

Store extra vinaigrette in the refrigerator.

Makes about 1 cup

2 tablespoons chopped tarragon
2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
2 tablespoons chopped shallot
2 cloves garlic
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
About 3/4 cup or to taste extra virgin olive oil

Put the tarragon, vinegars, shallot, mustard and garlic in a blender, season with salt and pepper and process until smooth. With the motor running, slowly add the olive oil until well combined.

Transfer the vinaigrette to a storage container with a tight fitting lid and let sit for 30 minutes to combine the flavors. Give the vinaigrette a vigorous shake before using.