



# Simple Salads

## For Hot Summer Days

By Wendy Warren







## *Eat Your Veggies!* -Mom

**A**s we head into the hottest months of the year here in Louisiana, eating a heavy meal, particularly in the middle of the day, is the last thing most of us want to do. This is especially true for those who aren't holed up in an air-conditioned space all day, every day.

Mother Nature gets it. This time of year the farmers' markets are brimming with wildly colorful produce — Creole and assorted cherry tomatoes, melons, berries, and an assortment of herbs. What's more refreshing on a hot summer's day than a cold, crunchy salad with a zesty dressing and a big glass of sweet iced tea? Add local free-range chicken, grass-fed beef, or some succulent Gulf shrimp to top it off if you'd like.

### **Make Your Own Dressing**

Store-bought dressings have their place in the world, but tend to be calorie-heavy and full of preservatives. Whipping up your own homemade concoction allows you to control the calories, eliminate the preservatives, and, with practice, fine-tune combinations to suit your personal palate. With the right ingredients on hand, you can masterfully create lovely vinaigrettes, and rich, cream based dressings in five minutes or less.

A starter salad dressing shopping list would have olive oil, salad oil, and white, red, and rice wine vinegars plus citrus such as lemons, limes, and oranges, to round out the 3 to 4 parts oil to 1 part acid ratio that strikes a delicious balance on the palate. Fresh herbs from your garden, especially basil and cilantro this time of year, add flavor without calories. If you lack a green thumb, you can pick up fresh herbs at the grocery or market, or in a pinch, you can use dried herbs from your pantry. A tablespoon of mayonnaise, buttermilk, sour cream, Greek yogurt, or even ripe avocado boosts the richness quotient.

Here I present a few of my family's favorites. Mix and taste to come up with your own favorite combinations.

### **Add Some Protein**

Several of these make a more substantial meal with the addition of some protein. I sprinkle shrimp or chicken with a little Creole seasoning and pan-sear or grill to add to the Pesto Salad and Middle Eastern-Inspired Salad; I season shrimp, chicken, ground beef, or steak with taco seasoning, and pan-sear or grill to add to the Taco Salad with Black Bean and Corn Salsa. ♦



## Carrot-Ginger Salad

- 1 cup baby carrots
- 2 tablespoons chopped ginger
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped shallots
- 1 garlic clove
- salt and pepper to taste
- 2 generous handfuls of mixed greens
- cucumbers and tomato wedges, for garnish

Place carrots, ginger, soy sauce, rice wine vinegar, sesame oil, shallots, and garlic in a blender or food processor; process into a fine purée. Taste and add salt and pepper as desired.

Divide mixed greens among salad plates, top with quartered cucumbers and tomato wedges. Divide carrot/ginger purée among salads.

**Makes 4 side salads.**



## Pesto Salad

- 2 tablespoons pesto (recipe follows)
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar

- 1/2 salt and pepper to taste
- 1/2 avocado
- 1/2 diced tomatoes
- 1/2 pistachios (or other nuts), Parmesan, for garnish
- 1/2 salt and pepper
- 1/2 protein of choice, if desired

Whisk pesto, oil, and vinegar to emulsify; fold in romaine lettuce. Divide among salad plates and top with avocado, tomatoes, nuts, and Parmesan cheese as desired. Top with protein of choice, if desired. Add salt and pepper to taste.

**Makes 2 entrée salads or 4 side salads.**



## Basil Pesto

- 1 cup loosely packed fresh basil
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped toasted pecans, pine nuts, or pistachios
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1/4 cup finely grated Parmesan cheese
- olive oil
- salt to taste

Place basil, garlic, nuts, lemon juice, and cheese in the bowl of a food processor. Process, scraping down the sides occasionally, until ingredients are finely chopped. Slowly drizzle in enough olive oil to make a soft but not runny purée. Taste and add salt if desired.

**Makes a generous cup.**



## Blueberry Spinach Salad

- 2 generous handfuls of baby spinach
- Blueberry Dressing (recipe follows)
- chèvre, as desired
- chopped pecans, as desired

Fold together spinach and Blueberry Dressing; divide among salad plates. Top as desired with chèvre and chopped pecans.

Makes 4 side salads.

## Blueberry Vinaigrette

- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup fresh blueberries
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- $2\frac{1}{3}$  tablespoons balsamic vinegar, in all
- 1 teaspoon minced shallots
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon minced rosemary
- salt and pepper to taste

Muddle together blueberries, sugar, and 1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar; allow to sit for a few minutes. Whisk in remaining vinegar, shallots, lemon zest, lemon juice, and rosemary; taste and add salt and pepper as desired.

Makes about  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup.

**Note:** Feel free to substitute strawberries, raspberries, peaches, ripe pears, etc. for the blueberries.



## Middle Eastern-Inspired Salad

- 2 tablespoons zatar spice mixture
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 2 generous handfuls of romaine lettuce
- salt and pepper to taste
- black olives
- cucumber slices
- feta cheese
- halved cherry tomatoes
- protein of choice, if desired

Whisk zatar, oil, and vinegar in a bowl to emulsify; fold in lettuce. Plate salad and top with halved black olives, cucumber, diced feta cheese, and halved cherry tomatoes. Top with protein of choice, if desired.

Makes 2 entrée salads or 4 side salads.

**Note:** For a creamy dressing, mix a tablespoon of Greek yogurt into the emulsion. Find zatar at well-stocked grocery stores, Middle Eastern markets, and other international markets.





## Taco Salad

- 2 12-inch corn or flour tortillas
- 2 generous handfuls salad greens
- Creamy Cilantro Dressing (recipe this page)
- Black Bean and Corn Salsa (recipe this page)
- protein of choice, if desired

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Make a taco bowl: invert 2 oven-proof bowls on a baking sheet; drape tortillas over and bake until evenly browned and crisped, about 15 minutes. Remove from oven and cool.

Toss salad greens with Creamy Cilantro Dressing; divide among taco bowls and top with Black Bean and Corn Salsa as desired. Top with protein of choice, if desired.

**Makes 2 entrée salads.**

## Black Bean and Corn Salsa

- 1 14-ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 14-ounce can corn kernels (or corn from 2 fresh cobs)
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- juice of 2 limes
- 3 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- salt and pepper to taste

Mix black beans, corn, onion, garlic, cherry tomatoes, lime juice, and white wine vinegar; taste and add salt and pepper as desired.

**Makes about 1 quart.**

**Note:** Salsa will keep, refrigerated, for about 1 week. It makes a great side dish to grilled chicken, steak, shrimp, and fish.

## Creamy Cilantro Dressing

- 1 cup cilantro, washed, stems removed, and roughly chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup sour cream
- 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup olive oil
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon kosher salt
- freshly ground black pepper

Place cilantro, sour cream, lime juice, garlic, olive oil, and white wine vinegar in the bowl of a blender or food processor; pulse to finely chop cilantro. Add salt and pepper to taste.

**Makes 1 cu 1.**



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