

Get All Dressed Up For The Season’s Salad Days

BY LISA ABRAHAM
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With spring lettuce and all variety of greens enjoying their salad days now, it’s a good time to think about how to dress them up right.

And that doesn’t have to mean reaching for the nearest bottle.

Making a homemade salad dressing is not difficult, and the fresh taste is always worth the small effort required.

From now until early summer, lettuces at farmers markets will be at their peak, so there’s no better time to enjoy fresh, healthful salads.

Chef Mark Kent, an instructor at the University of Akron’s School of Hospitality Management, said making salad dressing from scratch is one of the first techniques budding chefs learn when they begin their classes.

“It’s an extremely simple process,” he said, noting that a basic vinaigrette is simply two parts oil whisked into one part vinegar, with the seasonings of your choice added.

Kent said most students are surprised at how easy it is, and most have never made it before.

“Most just grabbed the bottle; that’s how they grew up,” he said.

In addition to freshness, Kent said it’s more economical to make your own salad dressing.

“You can control what goes in it and make it as healthy as you want. From a health standpoint and also a cost standpoint, it’s worth it for two to three minutes of work at the most,” he said.

But perhaps even more than cost savings or healthful eating, flavor is the biggest boost that comes from making a dressing from scratch. Bottled dressings can have chemical preservatives that affect their taste, something that isn’t a concern with a fresh dressing.

Making a dressing from scratch encourages a cook to be creative and to work with the flavors of the current season. Change the herbs and spices added to a dressing, and you can change its flavor profile from Italian to French to Asian or Middle Eastern, depending on the type of salad being dressed.

As Kent points out, beyond the basics of oil and vinegar in a vinaigrette, “you are wide open to what you can do with it.”

Here are a variety of recipes for made-from-scratch salad dressings, from an easy red wine vinaigrette to a rich and decadent creamy Gorgonzola, which can also substitute as a great dip for raw vegetables.

RED WINE VINAIGRETTE

- 1 clove garlic, pressed
 - 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
 - 3 oz. red wine vinegar
 - 1/2 tsp. salt
 - 1 tsp. sugar
 - Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
 - 2 tbsp. chopped fresh parsley or other fresh herbs
 - 6 oz. olive oil
- Add garlic and mustard to bowl. Measure in vinegar. Add salt, sugar and pepper. Whisk ingredients together until salt and sugar dissolve. Stir in fresh herbs.

Whisk in oil in a steady stream until well blended. Adjust seasoning to taste for salt and pepper.

Makes about 1 1/4 cups.
—Lisa Abraham

TAHINI DRESSING

- 1/3 cup tahini sauce, well stirred (sesame paste)
 - 1/3 cup water
 - 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
 - 2 garlic cloves, minced
 - 3/4 tsp. salt
- Whisk together all ingredients until smooth or blend together in a blender.

Makes about 1 cup.
—Adapted from
www.epicurious.com

CREAMY TARRAGON DRESSING

- 1/4 cup buttermilk
- 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- 3/4 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. coarsely ground black pepper
- 1/2 cup olive oil
- 2 tbsp. finely chopped green onion
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh tarragon

Whisk together first six ingredients in a small bowl until well combined. Gradually whisk in oil in a slow steady stream, whisking constantly until smooth. Whisk in green onion and tarragon.

Use immediately, or store in an airtight container in refrigerator up to 2 days. Let chilled dressing stand 30 minutes before using.

Makes about 3/4 cup.
—www.myrecipes.com

CREAMY GORGONZOLA DRESSING

- 3/4 cup mayonnaise (not salad dressing like Miracle Whip)
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- 1 clove garlic, pressed
- 1 tbsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh chives
- 3/4 cup crumbled Gorgonzola cheese
- Freshly ground black pepper

With a rubber spatula, blend mayonnaise and sour cream together well. Add garlic and lemon juice and stir to combine. Lemon juice will thin mixture.

Add parsley, chives and cheese and stir well to combine, but making sure that cheese stays chunky. Season with freshly ground black pepper.

Makes about 2 cups.

Note: To thin dressing further, add additional lemon juice, up to 1 tablespoon more.

—Lisa Abraham



Salad dressings made at home are fresher and do not contain as many processed ingredients. (Ed Suba Jr./Akron Beacon Journal/MCT)

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