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Scrumptious salad offers perfect combination of sweet and savory

By Susie Iventosch



This salad features fresh and dried fruits, as well as spiced nuts and blue cheese. Photo Susie Iventosch

crunchy, which means they are almost always perfectly ripe. You can usually identify them in the produce section because they are often protected in white cushion mesh netting to prevent bruising.

This is a really fun salad to serve because people love the surprise combination of fresh and dried fruits along with avocado, spiced nuts and blue cheese. Butter lettuce is a great foil for these ingredients, because it's very light and tender, while the rest of the ingredients are rich and robust. The fresh raspberries in the dressing add the extra zing of sweet and tangy to make the salad pop. It goes especially well with short ribs or barbecued meats such as lamb or steak, but if you add bite-sized pieces of chicken or honey-roasted turkey, it makes a terrific luncheon salad.

I used to make it with d'Anjou pears, but they are so difficult to find at just the perfect ripeness. Recently, I learned a great tip from my niece's husband, Noah Jacob, who owns Comestible Catering, a Bay Area catering company. (He also makes amazing short ribs and rack of lamb . perhaps a future column.) He includes Asian pears in some of his salads, and they are so easy to use because they're supposed to be served slightly

RECIPE

Butter Lettuce Salad with Asian Pear, Dried Cranberries, Candied Pecans, Avocado, Blue Cheese and Raspberry Vinaigrette

(Serves 6-8 as a side salad)

INGREDIENTS

2 heads butter lettuce, washed and torn into pieces

1 Asian pear, cored and cut into bite-sized pieces or thinly sliced (keep skin on)

1/2 cup dried cranberries

1 avocado, cut into bite-sized pieces

1/2 cup candied pecans or walnuts (recipe below)

1/2 cup crumbled blue cheese

1 recipe raspberry vinaigrette (recipe below)

Toss all together gently and serve.

Spiced Nuts

(Makes 1 cup)

1 cup pecan and/or walnut halves

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon cardamom

1/4 teaspoon cumin powder

1/2 teaspoon sea salt

Heat oil over medium-high heat in a large skillet. Add nuts and cook until beginning to brown, tossing all the while to prevent them from burning. (Do not walk away from the stove, or you will burn the nuts! I've done it too many times to count.) Reduce heat and sprinkle sugar over the nuts and toss until sugar is melted. Remove from heat and sprinkle spices and salt evenly over the nuts. Toss with a spoon to ensure distribution. Cool and store in an airtight container until ready to use.

*You may want to double or triple this recipe, as they are wonderful for snacking or sprinkling over cheese spreads to go with crackers for an hors d'oeuvre.

Raspberry Vinaigrette

(Makes 1 1/2 cups)

8 large raspberries, smashed with a fork (approximately 3 tablespoons)

1/4 cup red wine vinegar

1/4 cup rice vinegar

1 cup olive oil

1/8 tsp. garlic powder

1/2 tsp. dried thyme

1/2 tsp dried oregano

Salt and pepper to taste

Place all ingredients in a jar with a tight-fitting lid. Shake well. Refrigerate until ready to use.



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