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Cucumbers, cumin and coriander create wonderful twist on tzatziki

By Susie Iventosch



Spicy Tzatziki Photo Susie Iventosch

My brother served this dish that was published in the New York Times when I last visited and I have absolutely fallen in love with it! It's a wonderful twist on tzatziki made with cucumbers tossed in a cumin and coriander infused olive oil, cider vinegar and finely diced green onions, served on a base of plain yogurt blended with lots of fresh herbs - dill, parsley and mint. The flavors are bright, warm and zesty all at the same time. My family loves cumin, and as the cumin is cooking in the olive oil, it smells so good. If you've ever toasted cumin seeds, it's that same kind of delightfully warm and toasty aroma.

We follow the recipe closely with just a few exceptions. We like to use olive oil for this recipe instead of grape seed oil called for, and we also like to cut the cucumbers into bite-sized chunks to make it easier to serve and to eat. We cut the amount of mint in half, and finally, we toast the pine nuts before tossing them on

top. Other than that, the recipe is perfection and it's a great side to almost any Mediterranean dish you might want to serve, from lamb, chicken, or fish to roasted veggies - especially eggplant, tomatoes, and peppers. It's also great as zesty dip for pita bread.

You can prepare the spiced oil ahead of time and snip the herbs and cucumber in advance, too, but don't assemble the dish until you're ready to serve it, because the cucumbers will get a little bit soggy which will make the yogurt runny if made too far ahead of time.

I like to make the cucumbers look fancy, so I peel stripes of the skin off with a potato peeler, leaving some green and some white vertical strips. Then I run a fork down the length of the peeled stripes before cutting the whole cucumber into bite-sized pieces.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 1/2 pounds Persian or English cucumbers, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 1 tsp. powdered coriander
- 1 tsp. powdered cumin
- 1 tsp. red pepper flakes
- 2 tsp. cider vinegar
- 2 green onions, finely diced
- 1 cup nonfat plain Greek yogurt (can use full or partial fat if you prefer)
- 1/4 cup mint leaves, thinly sliced
- 1/4 cup fresh dill, finely snipped
- 1/4 cup parsley leaves, finely chopped
- 1 lemon (use both zest and juice)
- 2 tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1/2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup pine nuts, toasted
- Lemon wedges for garnish

DIRECTIONS

Toss the cucumber pieces with the salt and set in a colander to drain. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a small pot and stir in the coriander and cumin. Cook over medium-low heat for about five minutes, or until the spices become very fragrant. Stir with a wire whisk as needed. Remove from heat, add red pepper flakes and cool completely.

In a bowl, toss the drained cucumbers with the infused olive oil, cider vinegar and diced green onions. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

Combine yogurt and half of the herbs, lemon zest, lemon juice and olive oil. Stir well. Season to taste with salt and freshly cracked pepper. Refrigerate until ready to serve.

To serve, spread the yogurt in the bottom of a shallow serving bowl. Using a slotted spoon to drain the cucumbers of excess liquid, lay the cucumber mixture evenly on top of the yogurt.

Garnish with remaining herbs and toasted pine nuts. Serve as a side or with pita.





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