

PICNIC

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In this case, the other ingredients of note are red onion, Dijon mustard and minced sweet pickles. It's subtle, but there is a bit of a sweet-and-sour vibe going on in this dish.

More important, though, is the vinegar. Potatoes by themselves are bland, but these are greatly enlivened by being tossed in red wine vinegar with salt and pepper while they are still warm. The potatoes absorb the seasoned vinegar to become bright, lively and delightfully invigorating.

A Classic Chicken Salad is similarly easy to make. I begin by poaching boneless, skinless chicken breasts and chopping them up with celery, green onions, parsley, mayonnaise and, for a little sprightly pep, a couple of splashes of lemon juice.

So far so good. But I like my Classic Chicken Salad with a classic twist, a sprinkling of fresh tarragon that really wakes up the flavors. Fresh basil will do the same. But if you don't want the trouble, the dish is absolutely wonderful without the fresh herbs, too.

Curried Chicken Salad takes the same basic idea and builds on it. It begins with curry powder, obviously, though not very much of it—the curry is more a hint than an assault. Halved grapes deliver a hit of contrapuntal sweetness, and toasted sliced almonds add a little burst of enjoyment in nearly every bite.

I add chopped apples to mine. I like the way they add a bit of crunch to the salad and some sweetness to help tame the curry.

The Classic Egg Salad is, as its name implies, classic. It is not encumbered by pickle relish, green onion, sweet onion, cream cheese (cream cheese?), paprika or any of that extraneous stuff. It's simple, clean and basic: chopped eggs with mayonnaise, red onion, Dijon mustard, lemon juice and parsley.

It's pure egg salad.

I happen to prefer creamy coleslaw, which is to say coleslaw with mayonnaise, to sweet and sour coleslaw, which has vinegar and sugar. But the kind I like to make is surprisingly complex precisely because it is made with, yes, vinegar and sugar.

It just has less vinegar and sugar than the sweet-and-sour version. Plus mayo, of course.

It also benefits from a clever trick, courtesy of the folks at America's Test Kitchen. Before making the slaw, you toss the shredded cabbage with a little salt and let it sit for an hour or more. Cabbage has a lot of water in it, and this method draws some of that water out, leaving more good, undiluted cabbage flavor behind.

And what is a picnic without pasta salad?

I like to make mine with fresh ingredients: tomatoes, cucumbers, red onion and



Pasta Salad with Black Olives and Feta.

Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS



Classic Egg Salad.

Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

chopped oregano for just the right amount of spice. But to be honest, what makes this pasta salad stand out from others are a couple of other ingredients, kalamata olives and crumbled feta cheese.

It's a pasta salad with a decidedly Greek sensibility, the strong flavors mixing with pasta to please everyone at your picnic or potluck and make you the star.

AMERICAN POTATO SALAD

Yield: 6 to 8 servings

3 pounds red potatoes (10 medium), scrubbed and cut into 3/4-inch chunks
1/2 cup red wine vinegar
Salt and pepper
3/4 cup mayonnaise
1/2 cup minced sweet pickles
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
2 ribs celery, chopped fine
4 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and chopped coarse
3 tablespoons minced red onion
3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

1. Bring the potatoes and 4 quarts water to a simmer in a large pot and cook until tender, about 10 minutes. Drain. Gently toss the warm potatoes with the vinegar, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper, and refrigerate for 20 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, mix together the mayonnaise, pickles and mustard. Toss the chilled potatoes with the mayonnaise mixture, celery, eggs, onion and parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Per serving (based on 6): 434 calories; 24 g fat; 4 g saturated fat; 136 mg cholesterol; 9 g protein; 45 g carbohydrate; 10 g sugar; 5 g fiber; 136 mg sodium; 63 mg calcium

— Recipe from "The America's Test Kitchen Family Cookbook"

CLASSIC EGG SALAD

Yield: 6 servings

1 rib celery, chopped fine
1/2 cup mayonnaise
3 tablespoons minced red onion
2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
1 tablespoon Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
Salt and pepper
12 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and chopped coarse, see note

Note: Do not chop the eggs too fine or they will disintegrate in the salad.

1. Mix the celery, mayonnaise, onion, parsley, mustard, lemon juice, 1/2 teaspoon salt and a pinch of pepper together in a large bowl. Gently fold in the eggs and season with salt and pepper to taste.

2. Can be prepared up to 1 day in advance and freshened with a spoonful of mayonnaise and a squeeze of lemon juice.

Per serving: 276 calories; 23 g fat; 5 g saturated fat; 380 mg cholesterol; 13 g protein; 2 g carbohydrate; 1 g sugar; no fiber; 723 mg sodium; 63 mg calcium

— Recipe from "The America's Test Kitchen Cookbook"

CREAMY NEW YORK DELI COLESLAW

Yield: 6 to 8 servings

1 head red or green cabbage (2 pounds), cored and shredded (12 to 14 cups)
Salt
1/2 teaspoon caraway seeds
1/2 cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons white vinegar
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon granulated sugar
Pepper
2 carrots, peeled, seeded and grated
1 small onion, minced

1. Toss the cabbage with 1 teaspoon salt and allow to sit in a colander for at least 1 hour and up to 4 hours. Meanwhile, toast caraway seeds in a small skillet over medium heat until fragrant, about 3 minutes.

2. Rinse the cabbage, then thoroughly pat dry with paper towels. Whisk the toasted caraway seeds, mayonnaise, vinegar, mustard, sugar and 1/4 teaspoon pepper together in a bowl large enough to hold the salad.

3. Add the cabbage, carrots and onions, and toss. Chill at least 1 hour before serving. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

4. Can be prepared up to 1 day in advance and freshened with a spoonful of mayonnaise and a dash of vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Per serving (based on 6): 196 calories; 14 g fat; 2 g saturated fat; 7 mg cholesterol; 3 g protein; 16 g carbohydrate; 9 g sugar; 6 g fiber; 578 mg sodium; 98 mg calcium

— Recipe from "The America's Test Kitchen Family Cookbook"

PASTA SALAD WITH BLACK OLIVES AND FETA

Yield: 8 servings

1 tablespoon plus 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil, divided
2 tablespoons salt
1 pound pasta, small tubes or shells
1 cup crumbled feta cheese
3/4 cup kalamata olives
2 medium tomatoes, peeled, seeded and diced
1 large red onion, diced
3 small (pickling) cucumbers or 1 regular cucumber, peeled, seeded and diced
2 bunches oregano, leaves only, chopped
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Fill a large bowl with ice and water, and set aside.
 2. Bring 1 gallon water to a rolling boil in a large stockpot. Add 1 tablespoon olive oil, the 2 tablespoons of salt and pasta and cook until al dente, according to the directions on the package. Drain in a colander and immediately transfer to bowl of ice water to cool. Drain well and transfer to another bowl, and toss with the remaining 1/4 cup of extra-virgin olive oil.
 3. Mix all the remaining ingredients in a bowl. Toss with pasta, adjust seasonings and serve.

Per serving: 361 calories; 14 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 17 mg cholesterol; 11 g protein; 49 g carbohydrate; 5 g sugar; 3 g fiber; 493 mg sodium; 132 mg calcium

— Adapted from "City Cuisine" by Susan Feniger and Mary Sue Milliken

CLASSIC CHICKEN SALAD

Yield: 6 servings

1 3/4 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts
Salt and pepper
2 ribs celery, chopped fine
3/4 cup mayonnaise
2 green onions, minced
2 tablespoons lemon juice
2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
1/2 tablespoon chopped fresh tarragon or 1 tablespoon chopped basil, optional

1. Put enough water in a frying pan to just cover the chicken and heat on high until it simmers. Add chicken and gently simmer until done, 10 to 15 minutes depending on the size of the breasts. Cut into thickest part of the chicken to determine doneness.
 2. Season with salt and pepper, and refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, mix together remaining ingredients in a medium bowl.

3. Cut the chicken into 1/4-inch pieces and toss with mayonnaise mixture. Can be made 1 day in advance; to freshen, add 1 tablespoon of mayonnaise and a squeeze of lemon juice.

Per serving: 350 calories; 24 g fat; 4 g saturated fat; 108 mg cholesterol; 30 g protein; 1 g carbohydrate; 1 g sugar; 1 g fiber; 639 mg sodium; 17 mg calcium

— Adapted from "The America's Test Kitchen Family Cookbook"

CURRIED CHICKEN SALAD

Yield: 6 servings

1 1/2 pounds boneless, skinless chicken breast
Salt and pepper
1/2 cup sliced almonds
1/2 cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1 teaspoon curry powder
2 ribs celery, chopped fine
1 cup seedless red or green grapes, halved
1 cup apple, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
4 green onions, sliced thin
2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

1. Put enough water in a frying pan to just cover the chicken and heat on high until it simmers. Add chicken and cook at a gentle simmer until done, 10 to 15 minutes depending on the size of the breasts. Cut into thickest part of chicken to determine doneness.

2. Season with salt and pepper, and refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, toast the almonds in a skillet over medium heat until golden and fragrant, about 4 minutes; set aside. Mix together the mayonnaise, lemon juice, mustard, curry powder, 1/2 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper, and refrigerate until needed.

4. Cut the chilled chicken into 1/4-inch pieces and toss with the mayonnaise mixture, celery, grapes, apples, green onions and parsley. If serving within 2 hours, stir in almonds now; otherwise stir in almonds just before serving.

5. Can be prepared up to 1 day in advance and freshened with a spoonful of mayonnaise and a squeeze of lemon juice.

Per serving: 370 calories; 23 g fat; 3 g saturated fat; 90 mg cholesterol; 29 g protein; 12 g carbohydrate; 7 g sugar; 3 g fiber; 633 mg sodium; 62 mg calcium

— Adapted from "The America's Test Kitchen Family Cookbook"

GARDEN

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- Summer-fruiting raspberries are ripening now.
- Spray trunks of peach trees and other stone fruits for peach tree borers.
- Tired of the same foundation plantings? Find fresh ideas among the dwarf evergreens in your local nursery.
- Trees and shrubs may still be fertilized before July 4.
- Softwood cuttings can be taken from trees and shrubs as the spring flush of growth is beginning to mature.
- Pruning of spring flowering trees and shrubs should be completed before month's end.

If you have garden comments and questions, please write to greengardencolumn@yahoo.com. Thanks for reading!

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