

corn, cherry tomato & avocado salad with shrimp

2 large ears fresh corn, shucked and kernels cut off the cob, to yield about 2 cups

1 clove garlic, pounded to a smooth paste with a pinch of salt

1 teaspoon cumin seed, toasted and ground

1 teaspoon paprika

1 teaspoon piment d'Espelette or cayenne; more as needed

3½ tablespoons freshly squeezed lime juice; more as needed

½ cup plus 2 tablespoons mild extra-virgin olive oil; more as needed

Kosher salt

1 pint cherry tomatoes, such as Sweet 100s or Sun Golds, halved

½ cup thinly sliced scallions (white and pale green parts only)

1½ pounds fresh shrimp, peeled, deveined, and halved lengthwise

2 large firm but ripe avocados, cut into ¼-inch-thick slices (see p. 56)

½ cup roughly chopped fresh cilantro, plus a few leafy sprigs for garnish

I grew up eating fresh corn from the field behind our house. My dad, a dairyman, grew corn for the cows and a small amount of what we called “people corn.” Fresh corn, cooked just after it’s picked, is truly delicious. Short of a field nearby, look for plump, green ears of corn that has been recently cut—the stems should look almost dewy and the silk should be silky and slightly sticky. Peel back the husk and inspect the kernels—they should be shiny and taut. Overlook the occasional worm, especially if the corn is fresh and sweet. I call to cook the corn just briefly in unsalted boiling water (salt toughens the kernels), but it’s often unnecessary to cook perfectly fresh corn. Taste it and see what you think.

Piment d’Espelette is a dried red chile from the village of Espelette in Spain’s Basque region. Its flavor is more fruity and less hot than cayenne. You can use Aleppo pepper in place of the piment d’Espelette—it looks beautiful sprinkled over the finished salad as well. Keep in mind that Aleppo pepper is mild, so if you want a little heat, add a pinch of cayenne to the vinaigrette and sautéed shrimp.

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Bring a small pot of water to a boil. Add the corn kernels and cook for 20 to 30 seconds. (The fresher the corn, the less you need to cook it.) Drain and spread on a baking sheet to cool.

To make the vinaigrette, combine the garlic, cumin, paprika, piment d’Espelette, and 2½ tablespoons of the lime juice in a small bowl. Let sit for 5 to 10 minutes. Whisk in ¼ cup of the olive oil. Taste and add a little more salt, lime juice, and/or piment d’Espelette if necessary.

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Combine the corn, cherry tomatoes, and scallions in a medium bowl and season with salt. Gently toss with just enough vinaigrette to lightly coat the vegetables. Taste and add more salt or lime juice if necessary. Set aside.

Warm a large sauté pan over high heat. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil and put the shrimp in the pan in an even layer. Season with salt and sauté hot and fast, stirring or tossing occasionally, just until the shrimp turns pink and is lightly caramelized, about 3 minutes. Transfer to a bowl, season with a pinch of *í* and about a tablespoon of lime juice, and toss to combine. Taste and add more salt or lime juice if needed.

Just before serving, arrange the sliced avocado on 4 serving plates and season with salt. Toss the corn mixture and taste once more for salt and lime juice. Add the cilantro and toss again. Spoon the corn salad on and around the avocado, and tuck the shrimp here and there. Drizzle any remaining vinaigrette on and around the salad, focusing on the avocado. Garnish with cilantro sprigs and serve immediately.

TIP If you can't bear to be in the kitchen on a warm summer night, brush the shrimp lightly with olive oil and grill it over a medium-hot fire.