

sugar, lime juice, lime zest, red pepper flakes, and a pinch of salt to form a tangy-sweet syrup infused with just a touch of spicy heat. The mild sweetness and supercrisp texture of jícama, softened slightly in the hot syrup, contributed just enough crunch to finish off the salad.

Mango, Orange, and Jícama Salad

SERVES 4 TO 6

Make sure that the syrup has cooled before pouring it over the fruit.

- 3 tablespoons sugar
- ¼ teaspoon grated lime zest plus 3 tablespoons juice (2 limes)
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- Pinch salt
- 12 ounces jícama, peeled and cut into ¼-inch dice (1½ cups)
- 2 oranges
- 2 mangos, peeled, pitted, and cut into ½-inch dice

1. Bring sugar, lime zest and juice, pepper flakes, and salt to simmer in small saucepan over medium heat, stirring constantly, until sugar is dissolved, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove pan from heat, stir in jícama, and let syrup cool for 20 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, cut away peel and pith from oranges. Slice into ½-inch-thick rounds, then cut rounds into ½-inch pieces. Place oranges and mangos in large bowl.

3. When syrup is cool, pour over oranges and mangos and toss to combine. Refrigerate for 15 minutes before serving.

Papaya, Clementine, and Chayote Salad

Chayote, also called mirliton, is often sold with other tropical fruits and vegetables. If you can't find chayote, substitute an equal amount of jícama.

Substitute 2 teaspoons grated fresh ginger for red pepper flakes; 1 chayote, peeled, halved, pitted, and cut into ¼-inch dice, for jícama; 3 clementines, peeled and each segment cut into 3 pieces, for oranges; and 2 large papayas, peeled, seeded, and cut into ½-inch dice, for mangos.

Pineapple, Grapefruit, and Cucumber Salad

Substitute ground cardamom for red pepper flakes; 1 cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and cut into ¼-inch dice, for jícama; 1 grapefruit for oranges; and 1 pineapple, peeled, cored, and cut into ½-inch dice, for mangos.

CHERRY TOMATO SALAD

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Cherry tomatoes are sweet, juicy, and available year-round—and especially tempting during those cold winter months when summer seems eons away. We wanted an easy recipe that would make the most of their sweetness so we could enjoy fresh tomatoes anytime we wanted. Simply slicing cherry tomatoes in half and sprucing them up with vinaigrette resulted in a waterlogged salad



with no flavor at all. To prevent this soggy, watery outcome, we quartered and salted them, and then took them for a spin in a salad spinner to remove as much of the jelly and seeds as possible. Reducing the jelly with red wine vinegar concentrated its flavor, and adding olive oil made for a dressing that brought the tomato flavor to the forefront. Cucumber contributed welcome crunch, while chopped olives and crumbled feta added a briny touch that brought the whole dish together.

Cherry Tomato Salad with Feta and Olives

SERVES 4 TO 6

If in-season cherry tomatoes are unavailable, substitute vine-ripened cherry tomatoes or grape tomatoes from the supermarket. Cut grape tomatoes in half along the equator (rather than quartering them). If you don't have a salad spinner, after the salted tomatoes have stood for 30 minutes, wrap the bowl tightly with plastic wrap and gently shake to remove seeds and excess liquid. Strain the liquid and proceed with the recipe as directed. The amount of liquid given off by the tomatoes will depend on their ripeness. If you have less than ½ cup juice after spinning, proceed with the recipe using the entire amount of juice and reduce it to 3 tablespoons as directed (the cooking time will be shorter).

- 2 pints ripe cherry tomatoes, quartered (about 4 cups; see note)
- ½ teaspoon sugar
- Table salt
- 1 medium shallot, minced (about 3 tablespoons)
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 2 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 2 teaspoons)
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Ground black pepper
- 1 small cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and cut into ½-inch pieces (see page 47)

- ½ cup chopped pitted kalamata olives
- 4 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (about 1 cup)
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley leaves

1. Toss the tomatoes, sugar, and ¼ teaspoon salt in a medium bowl; let stand for 30 minutes. Transfer the tomatoes to a salad spinner and spin until the seeds and excess liquid have been removed, 45 to 60 seconds, stirring to redistribute the tomatoes several times during spinning. Return the tomatoes to the bowl and set aside. Strain the tomato liquid through a fine-mesh strainer into a liquid measuring cup, pressing on the solids to extract as much liquid as possible.

2. Bring ½ cup of the tomato liquid (discard any extra), the shallot, vinegar, garlic, and oregano to a simmer in a small saucepan over medium heat. Simmer until reduced to 3 tablespoons, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a small bowl and cool to room temperature, about 5 minutes. Whisk in the oil until combined and season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Add the cucumber, olives, feta, parsley, and dressing to the bowl with the tomatoes; toss gently and serve.

ITALIAN BREAD SALAD

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: When the rustic Italian bread salad panzanella is done well, the sweet juice of the tomatoes mixes with a bright-tasting vinaigrette, moistening chunks of thick-crust bread until they're soft and just a little chewy—but the line between lightly moistened and unpleasantly soggy is very thin. Toasting fresh bread in the oven, rather than using the traditional day-old bread, was a good start. With this method, the bread lost enough moisture in the oven to absorb the dressing without getting waterlogged. A 10-minute soak in the flavorful dressing yielded perfectly moistened, nutty-tasting bread ready to be tossed with the tomatoes, which we salted to intensify their flavor. A thinly sliced cucumber and shallot for crunch and bite plus a handful of chopped fresh basil perfected our salad.

Italian Bread Salad (Panzanella)

SERVES 4

The success of this recipe depends on high-quality ingredients, including ripe, in-season tomatoes and fruity olive oil. Fresh basil is also a must. Your bread may vary in density, so you may not need the entire loaf for this recipe.

- 1 (1-pound) loaf rustic Italian or French bread, cut or torn into 1-inch pieces (about 6 cups)
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Table salt and ground black pepper
- 1½ pounds tomatoes, cored, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 3 tablespoons red wine vinegar
- 1 medium cucumber, peeled, halved lengthwise, seeded, and sliced thin (see page 47)
- 1 medium shallot, sliced thin
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil leaves

1. Adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 400 degrees. Toss the bread pieces with 2 tablespoons of the oil and ¼ teaspoon salt; arrange the bread in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet. Toast the bread pieces until just starting to turn light golden, 15 to 20 minutes, stirring halfway through baking. Set aside and let cool to room temperature.

2. Gently toss the tomatoes and ½ teaspoon salt in a large bowl. Transfer to a colander set over a bowl; set aside to drain for 15 minutes, tossing occasionally.

3. Whisk the remaining 6 tablespoons oil, the vinegar, and ¼ teaspoon pepper into the tomato juices. Add the bread pieces, toss to coat, and let stand for 10 minutes, tossing occasionally.

4. Add the tomatoes, cucumber, shallot, and basil to the bowl with the bread pieces and toss to coat. Season with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately.

PITA BREAD SALAD WITH TOMATOES AND CUCUMBER

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: This Middle Eastern salad is at its best when it combines fresh, flavorful produce with crisp pita and bright herbs. Many recipes eliminate excess moisture from the salad by taking the time-consuming step of seeding and salting the cucumbers and tomatoes. We skipped that process, favoring the crisp texture of the cucumber (the English variety, which has fewer seeds) and the flavorful seeds and jelly of the tomato. We fended off soggy bread by making the pita moisture-repellent, brushing its craggy sides with plenty of olive oil before baking. The oil soaked into the bread and prevented the pita chips from absorbing the salad's moisture while still allowing them to take on some of its flavor. A fresh, summery blend of mint, cilantro, and peppery arugula comprised the salad's greenery and a vinaigrette of lemon juice, garlic, salt, and olive oil lent it an uncomplicated, bright finish.

